

Connecticut State Colleges and Universities Focus Group Research Final Report - DRAFT

February 8, 2017

Submitted by: Spectrum Associates Market Research

35 Leigus Road, Wallingford, CT 06492 ▲ (860) 677-4100 ▲ www.SpectrumAssociatesCT.com

Table of Contents

Management Summary_____	3
Background_____	4
Methodology_____	5
Summary of Findings_____	8
Implications_____	16
Detailed Findings_____	18
Influencers and Information Gathering_____	19
Key Factors in Selecting a College_____	25
Perception of CSCU Community Colleges_____	32
Perception of Central_____	37
Perception of Eastern_____	41
Perception of Southern_____	45
Perception of Western_____	49
Student and Parent Overall Perception of CSCU Universities_____	53
Desired Communications Approach_____	56
Suggestions to CSCU_____	58

Management Summary

Background

4

Spectrum Associates Market Research Incorporated (Spectrum Associates) was retained by Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) to design and implement a focus group research project to gather information that will be used to assist CSCU and its communications agency in developing effective communications strategies to reach and attract key constituencies (e.g., traditional students, parents of traditional students, non-traditional students, and high school teachers and school counselors).

This document presents findings from the focus group research project.

Methodology

Research Approach

The project was conducted via focus groups. Focus groups were selected because of: (a) the dynamic process inherent in this research approach, where participants' comments and questions provoke ideas and input from other participants; (b) the opportunity focus groups provide the moderator for clarifying participant responses and developing new questions based on participant discussion; and (c) the opportunity that focus groups offer the client to observe participants discussing issues of critical importance and request that additional probes be asked by the moderator based on what they hear.

Focus Groups Conducted

Spectrum Associates conducted four focus groups in Farmington, Connecticut January 16-17, 2017; one each with four key target markets:

- High school seniors who plan to continue their education following graduation (***Traditional Students***)
- Parents of high school juniors and seniors who plan to continue their education following graduation (***Parents of Traditional Students***)
- Younger adults who were not enrolled in a college or university but who plan to return to school (e.g., vocational school, community college, or 4-year college or university in the next year) (***Non-Traditional Students***)
- High school teachers and counselors who frequently assist students with planning their post high school graduation education and who are knowledgeable about colleges and universities (***Teachers/School Counselors***)

Methodology (continued)

Recruitment

Spectrum Associates prepared recruitment screeners and field supervisor guidelines that were used by staff at the focus group facility (Connecticut Connections) in recruiting study participants. The screeners asked a series of question to ensure participants met specified criteria for each focus group, and enabled Connecticut Connections to achieve focus group quotas requested by CSCU and Spectrum Associates. Thirteen individuals were recruited (for 8 to 10 to show) for each focus group. Key qualifiers for each focus group are listed below.

- **Traditional Students:** All participants were: < 21 years of age, a high school senior, and interested in continuing their education after high school. In addition, those interested in 4-year colleges must have started the process of thinking about where they will go and expressed interest in applying to at least one of 11 public/private colleges and universities located in the state. Quotas were established to ensure a mix of those considering 2-year and/or 4-year education institutions, and minority representation.
- **Parents of Traditional Students:** All participants had a high school senior or junior who was interested in continuing his/her education after high school. In addition, all parents were screened to ensure they were involved with the student in looking into post high school education options and had started the process of thinking about where their high school student would continue his/her education. Those parents with students interested in 4-year colleges must have expressed interest in applying to at least one of 11 public/private colleges and universities located in the state. Quotas were established to ensure a mix of those considering 2-year and/or 4-year education institutions, and minority representation.
- **Non-Traditional Students:** All participants were: 25 – 40 years of age, high school graduates without a 2-year or 4-year college degree, not taking college classes currently, reasonably likely to continue their education in the next 12 months, and had given some thought about their educational options. In addition, those individuals interested in 4-year colleges must have expressed interest in applying to at least one of 11 public/private colleges and universities located in the state. Quotas were established to ensure a mix of those considering 2-year and/or 4-year education institutions, and minority representation.
- **High School Teachers and Counselors:** All participants said they advise students daily or often about post high school education options they should consider and said they were very or reasonably knowledgeable about the various public and private colleges and universities located in Connecticut. Quotas were set to recruit four school counselors.

Methodology (continued)

Moderator's Discussion Guide and Data Collection

Based on a meeting with CSCU on the project's research objectives, Spectrum Associates drafted the discussion guide and submitted it to CSCU for review. Using the feedback received, the discussion guide was revised and submitted it CSCU for final approval.

All four focus groups were moderated by Dr. Eliot Hartstone, founder of Spectrum Associates. Each group lasted about two hours and had 10 participants.

Research Objectives

The specific research objectives for the focus groups were to explore:

- Who target markets speak to and what resources they use to gather information to assist them in determining which colleges/universities to consider for themselves or their students
- The role that parents and teachers/school counselors have with their high school students in considering post high school education options
- The most important factors impacting college and university selection and recommendations
- Target market impressions of CSCU community colleges (overall) and each of the four state universities (Central, Eastern, Southern and Western) (i.e., overall assessment and perceived specific strengths and weaknesses)
- How target markets want to be informed about college and university offerings
- Any suggestions focus group participants had for CSCU

Summary of Findings

Word of Caution

Spectrum Associates cautions the reader to keep in mind that this study was conducted using qualitative research methods and, as such, the findings cannot be statistically extrapolated from the sample to the target populations. Rather, the reader should use the findings in the spirit in which they are intended -- to provide indications of the attitudes and opinions of target market high school students, parents of high school students, teachers and schools counselors, and non-traditional students.

Summary of Findings (continued)

Influencers

1. The **traditional students** were most influenced by school counselors (experience and objectivity) and parents (pay the bills), and also mentioned teachers, friends attending college, and friends in high school. **Parents of traditional students** were most influenced by family members and other families in town (in same position as they are), and also mentioned co-workers, college recruiters, and school counselors. **Non-traditional students** were most influenced by family members (particularly siblings), co-workers/supervisors, and friends.
2. Many of the **parents** said their sons/daughters were doing most of the legwork in looking into different colleges and universities, and their role was mostly: (a) acting as a sounding board to react to the students' thoughts and ideas, (b) cautioning the students about taking on too much debt, (c) taking the student on college visits/tours, and (d) completing the FAFSA and helping as needed with the applications.
3. The **teacher's** role in helping students with post high school decisions varied greatly across the group participants with some limited to informal conversations, some working with students during their "advisory period," some providing advice at a meeting with students and parents (PBT), and others integrating it into their classes (e.g., personal finance class). Some teachers said they recommend specific colleges and universities to the students, while others refer students to counselors that assist those interested in college.
4. The **school counselors** typically have a formal structure where they look at the student's transcript, identify the student's goals (no college, 2-year school, 4-year school), and determine what schools seems to be a good fit for those pursuing higher education. The counselors provide school names early in the process and narrow down the list during the senior year. Counselors also mentioned that for those interested in college they have a college fair at the high school and go on local college tours with students (e.g., UConn, CCSU, UHart).

Summary of Findings (continued)

Information Gathering

5. The **traditional students** relied mostly on online sources (e.g., Naviance, Niche), college tours/open houses, and college websites. **Parents of traditional students** relied mostly on college tours and college websites, and some relied on independent websites comparing colleges. **Teachers/school counselors** relied mostly on websites (e.g., Google search, college websites, independent sources like Naviance and College Board) and information provided by their students about schools they visited. **Non-traditional students** relied mostly on independent websites followed by college websites and college mailings. Students and parents across groups said key information sources were the same for 2-year and 4-year colleges.

Key Factors in Selecting a College

6. The **traditional students** looking at 4-year colleges (N=8) were most concerned with academic programs (majors/minors) offered by the college (have a strong program in anticipated major) and cost (as education is comparable across colleges, don't want to create huge debt), followed by location (not too far away from home) and campus/social life (have things to do, other students share interests). The two traditional students most likely to pursue a 2-year college also rated cost and academic programs (majors/minors) as most important.
7. The **parents** rated cost/tuition as the most important factor in their college consideration for both 4- and 2-year colleges (minimize student debt and cost to parents). They also ranked financial aid (reduce bill, often insufficient), areas of study, and location (close to home) high on importance. For 4-year colleges, payback (income of job vs. cost of college) and overall reputation (brand name opens doors) were also rated high on importance by some parents.
8. For both 2-year and 4-year colleges, **teachers/school counselors** ranked programs offered as most important (must prepare student for future), followed by cost. Location/distance was ranked as highly important for both. Major differences in 4-year and 2-year importance rankings were that teachers/school counselors rated academic requirements as more important for 4-year colleges, and student support services and job preparation/placements higher in importance for 2-year colleges.
9. The **non-traditional students** ranking factors (2-year and 4-year colleges) were most concerned with: price, majors/programs, financial aid, flexibility, reputation, and location.

Summary of Findings (continued)

Perceptions of CSCU Community Colleges

10. Participants were familiar with CSCU community colleges, and virtually all participants had a “very” (10 of 28) or “somewhat” (17 of 28) positive impression of CSCU community colleges. Far and away, the **teachers/school counselors** had the most favorable impression of CSCU community colleges with 8 of the 10 teachers/school counselors saying “very positive.” Almost all of the participants in the student and parent focus groups offered a “somewhat positive” rating.
11. Focus group participants cited many strengths and weaknesses for those attending a CSCU community college, indicating they believe students receive many benefits at a community college but there are also a variety of drawbacks.
12. Strengths attributed to the community colleges most often across the groups were: cost, many locations, ability to transfer to a 4-year state university, broad range of majors, flexibility, and receive a 2-year degree.
13. The most frequently cited CSCU community college weaknesses were: lack of brand name awareness and less favorable overall impression, students not having the same life experience as one gets from attending a 4-year college and living away from home, lesser quality education than received at a 4-year college, and inconsistency in the specific programs offered across CSCU’s 12 community colleges. Many **teachers/school counselors** said they felt there is a stigma associated with community colleges and CSCU needs to rebrand the community colleges.
14. A participant in the teacher/school counselor focus group raised a concern pertinent to the city of Hartford and Capital Region Community College where students were being pushed to apply to Capital Region Community College (high acceptance rates at community colleges) to increase the acceptance rates of their high school students so that the high school would reach desired district or school improvement rates and, as a result, students who were not really prepared to go to college would enroll.

Summary of Findings (continued)

Perceptions of Central

15. Almost all participants were familiar with Central and, and 27 (90%) of 30 participants rating Central had a “very” (N=10) or “somewhat” (N=17) positive image of Central. Far and away, the **teachers/school counselors** had the most favorable impression of Central with 8 of the 10 teachers/school counselors saying “very positive.” **Traditional students** and **parents of traditional students** were typically “somewhat positive,” while **non-traditional students** seemed uninformed or divided in their overall image.
16. Focus group participants cited many strengths and some specific weaknesses for Central indicating they believed students receive many benefits but there are also some specific drawbacks.
17. Strengths attributed to Central most often across the groups were: cost, location close to home, and broad range of programs/majors. Other specific strengths cited across multiple focus groups were: specific programs offered (e.g., education, nursing, business, technology), the college experience/social life at Central, support services available, the CTfastrak stops there, and athletics.
18. The most frequently cited Central weaknesses were: New Britain location (not much happening outside the campus, depressed area), lacks community as students leave on the weekends, doesn’t offer some specific majors of interest, hard to graduate in 4 years (core classes not offered enough), and parking. **Traditional students** frequently expressed concern that Central was like a continuation of high school as they know so many people going there.

Perceptions of Eastern

19. Focus group participants were less likely to be able to rate Eastern than the community colleges or Central, as 20 (61%) of the 33 participants completing the handout had an impression. Six (30%) of the 20 focus group participants able to rate Eastern recorded “very positive” and 16 (80%) said “somewhat” or “very” positive. **Teachers/school counselors** had the most favorable impression of Eastern with 4 of the 8 teachers/school counselors offering a rating saying they were “very positive” and the other 4 recording “somewhat positive.” **Traditional students** offering a rating tended to be “somewhat positive,” whereas **parents** and **non-traditional students** were often unable to provide a rating or divided in their opinions.

Summary of Findings (continued)

Perceptions of Eastern (continued)

20. Focus group participants cited fewer strengths and weaknesses for Eastern reflecting the fact that many had no impressions and recorded no strengths or weaknesses. **Teachers/school counselors** were the most familiar and favorable.
21. Strengths mentioned most often across the groups were: cost, specific program offered (e.g., liberal arts, education, business) and campus living (improvements made to the campus, not a commuter school). Other specific strengths cited across multiple focus groups were: broad range of programs offered, athletic facilities, and its location being close to home. **Teachers/school counselors** praised Eastern for its faculty, president, and programs.
22. The most frequently cited weakness was its Willimantic location (high crime rate, dangerous, drug problem), followed by lack of brand awareness and not having some specific academic programs.

Perceptions of Southern

23. Like Eastern, participants were less likely to be able to rate Southern than the community colleges or Central, as 21 (64%) of 33 participants completing the handout had an overall impression of Southern. Just 3 (14%) of the 21 focus group participants able to rate Southern recorded “very positive,” but 18 (86%) were “somewhat” or “very” positive. **Teachers/school counselors** were again the most favorable, with 3 of the 9 teachers/school counselors offering a rating saying “very positive” and 5 others saying “somewhat positive.” **Traditional** and **non-traditional students** with an opinion said “somewhat positive,” **parents of traditional students** offering a rating were split between “somewhat positive” and “somewhat negative.”
24. As was the case for Eastern, focus group participants cited fewer strengths and weaknesses for Southern than the CSCU community colleges and Central reflecting the fact that many of the participants had no impressions of Southern and recorded no strengths or weaknesses.
25. Strengths mentioned most often across the groups for Southern were: cost, specific programs offered (e.g., nursing, education, library science), and offering a broad range of programs. The most frequently cited weaknesses were its location (near New Haven) and its being too far away from home. Participants in multiple groups said it was a party school and lacked some specific academic programs.

Summary of Findings (continued)

14

Perceptions of Western

26. Western had the fewest number of participants offering an overall impression of the university; just 12 (36%) of 33 participants completing the 4-year college rating forms recorded an overall rating of Western. **Non-traditional students** (4 of 4 rating 4-year colleges unable to rate) and **parents of traditional students** (8 of 10 unable to rate) were the least familiar with Western. Only 1 (8%) of the 12 study participants able to rate Western recorded “very positive.” However, 9 (75%) of the 12 offering a rating were at least “somewhat positive.”
27. Focus group participants cited the fewest strengths and weaknesses for Western as participants were much less familiar with Western than the other CSCU state universities.
28. The strength mentioned most often across the groups was its cost, and multiple focus groups mentioned its specific programs (art, chemistry, nursing) and location.
29. The most frequently cited weaknesses were it being far away and having two separate campuses. Also, many participants mentioned they have heard very little about Western.

Student and Parent Perception of CSCU Universities Overall

30. It is important to note that **traditional students** expressed a concern about CSCU universities overall that transcended the four individual universities. The high school students typically felt that CSCU universities were “average” or “generic” 4-year schools where nothing stands out or excites them. They felt these state universities lacked the appeal and community feel offered at UConn. Some **parents of traditional students** expressed a similar concern and felt CSCU universities lacked branding and a distinction from each other. **Non-traditional students** typically were most interested in the CSCU community colleges, but those interested in 4-year colleges felt the four CSCU universities were pretty much the same and the only difference was which one was closest to you.
31. Also of note, **non-traditional students** expressed a very cynical view about colleges/universities as they believe graduates do not get the same career/job opportunities they used to and that colleges/universities are more about getting their money than helping the student.

Summary of Findings (continued)

Desired Communications Approach

32. The **traditional students** were interested in face-to-face meetings (e.g., at the school, at Starbucks); disliked impersonal, mass mailings; preferred a personal touch and preferred a brochure to an email; disregarded testimonials on college websites as one-sided; and would not react favorably to a form letter from the president (even if signed).
33. The **parents of traditional students** were evenly divided on a preferred communications approach, with one-half preferring email (easy to delete, easy to save, do all communication via email) and one-half preferring regular mail (want it in my hand).
34. The **non-traditional students** were slightly more likely to prefer hardcopy (N=6) over electronic (N=4) communications.
35. The **teachers/school counselors** do not feel they need more information about CSCU rather they thought CSCU should focus their communications efforts on the students.

Suggestions to CSCU

36. The **traditional students** and **parents of traditional students** said CSCU needs to create an identity for the colleges and universities whether it be through something fun and social (e.g., UConn's Dairy Bar) or academic specializations so when people hear the name they associate something with school. They said the universities need to distinguish themselves from each other as well as from other competitors.
37. The **parents of traditional students** suggested that CSCU emphasize the opportunity to transfer to UConn and draw students that way.
38. The **teachers/school counselors** recommended that the different colleges and universities take a more active role in their communities and create brand awareness by doing so. They also suggested that community colleges look into offering housing as creating a community along with lower tuition cost would help make the community colleges a more attractive option to the higher cost colleges and universities.
39. The **non-traditional students** suggested open houses targeted at their age group as they do not want to visit with high school kids. They also emphasized the importance of friendly and helpful counselors that express a sincere interest in helping them make the college decision.

Implications

16

1. We believe the focus groups suggest an overarching need for branding both the CSCU community colleges (overall) and the four state universities (overall and individually).
 - For the CSCU community colleges it is important to develop a brand that plays to the community colleges' strengths (e.g., low cost, flexible scheduling, education that both enhances employment opportunities and provides an avenue to completing a 4-year degree less expensively) and serves to overcome the longstanding stigma attached to community colleges in general.
 - For the CSCU state universities it is important to create a brand that causes students and parents to see these universities as more than generic, indistinguishable state universities that differ only by region but rather as universities that offer common benefits as part of CSCU and, as importantly, also have recognizable, individual identities independent of CSCU.
2. Communications developed to reach students and key influencers (e.g., parents and teachers/school counselors) should pay attention to each target audience's: role in college selection, opinions, and communications preferences. For example, efforts to reach and attract:
 - Traditional students should be as personalized as possible
 - Non-traditional students should include addressing their desire to attend college visits/tours that are limited to non-traditional students and recognize their specific needs by having a separate area on the university website that address non-traditional students' needs
3. In general, communications should emphasize CSCU strengths that relate to the factors that most impact college/university selection and recommendation: (a) cost, (b) academic programs (majors/minors), (c) location/proximity to home, (d) job preparation/opportunities, (e) support services (especially for 2-year colleges), and (f) scheduling flexibility (especially for non-traditional students).

Implications (continued)

4. The focus groups suggest that CSCU should make a concerted effort to enrich the social/community life at the universities so that students will remain on campus during the weekends and eliminate the universities being viewed as commuter schools. It is also important to address the perception of safety issues in the local community surrounding Eastern and to a lesser extent Central and Southern; and address the dual campus concern expressed regarding Western.
5. The focus groups suggest that those who are most knowledgeable about CSCU (i.e., teachers and school counselors who advise high school students) are typically quite favorable about CSCU community colleges and universities and often see these schools as wonderful opportunities for many of their students. CSCU needs to more effectively convey its benefits to high school students and their parents.
6. The focus groups suggest it would behoove CSCU to engage in efforts that create more top-of-mind awareness of its colleges and universities by the general public as doing so could in turn generate more interest in learning about CSCU colleges and universities. Specifically, it was suggested by teachers/school counselors that the individual colleges and universities undertake activities and hold events that create a greater presence in their local communities.

Detailed Findings

Influencers and Information Gathering

Who Speak with for Advice

Traditional students, parents of traditional students and non-traditional students were asked who they spoke to for advice. They were then asked, of the various influencers named by the focus group participants, who had the most influence on them and why. Participant responses are displayed in Figure 1 (see page 20). As shown on the chart and revealed through focus group discussions:

- **Traditional students** were most influenced by school counselors and parents, and also mentioned teachers, friends attending college, and friends in high school.
 - Those saying school counselors said they were most influential because of the counselor’s experience and objective desire to help the students (“They see so many students each year, they can determine what school will be best for you.” “They just want to see the students succeed.”).
 - Students saying their parents had the most influence said it was because they are the paying the bills and they are the ones who really know them (“In my case they’re the ones paying for the college so it’s their decision where I end up going, ultimately.” “It’s because they know you best, because of that, they can help guide your decisions.”).
- **Parents of traditional students** were most influenced by family members and other families in town, and also mentioned co-workers, college recruiters, and school counselors.
 - Parents said family members and other families in town were most influential because they are in the same situation as them, objective, and available for advice (“They’re also in the same position as you are.” “They don’t have an agenda, they are trustworthy, just telling you what they experienced.” “They are accessible.”).
 - In contrast, parents did not trust those speaking for the colleges (“I think you have to discount your recruiters and your college folks, because they’re all working for the college.”).
- **Non-traditional students** were most influenced by family members (especially siblings), co-workers/supervisors, and friends.

Influencers and Information Gathering

Who Speak with for Advice (continued)

Figure 1
Who Talk to for Advice and Rely on the Most

Traditional Students (N=10)	
Who Talk To	Most Rely On
School Counselor	5
Parents	5
Teachers	-
Friends in College	-
Friends in High School	-

Parents of Traditional Students (N=10)	
Who Talk To	Most Rely On
Family Member	4
Families in Town	3
Co-workers	1
College Recruiters	1
School Counselor	1

Non-Traditional Students (N=9)	
Who Talk To	Most Rely On
Family Member	4
Co-workers/Supervisors	3
Friends	2

Influencers and Information Gathering

Parents Perceived Role

21

Parents were asked what role they play in the college selection process with their sons and daughters.

- Many of the parents said their sons/daughters were doing most of the legwork in looking into different colleges and universities, and their role was mostly: acting as a sounding board to react to the students' thoughts and ideas, cautioning the students about taking on too much debt, taking the student on college visits/tours, completing the FAFSA, and helping as needed with the applications. One parent hired a professional to help their student.

Representative verbatim responses are listed below.

- *"I would say (my role has) been somewhat limited so far. She's been doing a lot of the homework on her own as far as where she'd want to go, which 4-year schools might have a plan to lead you right into a medical degree. I'm trying to keep her mostly grounded in the idea of not ending undergraduate school in gigantic debt."*
- *"So my son, he's been very independent in this process. He's getting a lot of support from school, and so when I try to ask him, 'What's going on? Where are you? What are you doing? What schools are you applying to?' He's kind of like, 'I've got this. I already did my college applications.' Like I did some of the college application parts I had to fill out for him. I did the FAFSA for him, but for the most part he's really been very independent with this process."*
- *"I'd have to say the schools are lot more involved than they were when I went to high school in terms of helping the kids along in that process. For the most part she's been the one researching, and she's been coming back with what she's found and asked what are my thoughts on it."*
- *"One of the things we've been involved with is taking them to college visits."*
- *"There's a company in Rocky Hill that I used, and I actually hired them to help him through the whole application/resume process and all that there."*

Influencers and Information Gathering

Teachers/School Counselors Perceived Role

Teachers and school counselors were asked about their role in, and the process of, helping students identify options for continuing their education after high school graduation. We found the following.

Teachers

The teacher's role in helping students with post high school decisions varied greatly across the group participants with some limited to informal conversations, some working with students during their 'advisory period,' some providing advice at a meeting with students and parents (PBT), and others integrating it into their classes (e.g., personal finance class).

Representative verbatim responses are listed below.

- *"For me, just conversation with the kids. In high school at Abbot Tech its half trade, half academics. So its conversational. 'Hey, what are you doing next year? Are you going to a trade? Are you going to college? What do you want to do?'"*
- *"It's more through conversation; it's not explicitly (discussed) unless we have this period called 'advisory period' where we do use Naviance, and we work on college and career, running the scales, the social and emotional scales, to prepare them for that."*
- *"I deal with Special Ed, so at their annual PBTs we start talking to the student and parent about where they're going to go and whether they're going to go on to 2-year, 4-year, or if they want to go off to the workforce."*
- *"I teach personal finance, so my students will see it in an entire career-building unit. It's integrated into my course. I assist students with their job-shadowing opportunities, and we use a program called Naviance, which has a couple of different interesting inventories that they can complete."*

School Counselors

School counselors typically have a formal structure where they look at the student's transcript, identify the student's goals (no college, 2-year school, 4-year school), and determine what schools seems to be a good fit for those pursuing higher education. The counselors provide school names early in the process and narrow down the list during the senior year ("Oftentimes we'll give suggestions of good matches based on how they're performing.").

Counselors also mentioned that for those interested in college they have a college fair at the high school and go on local college tours with students (e.g., UConn, C SCU, UHart).

Influencers and Information Gathering

Information Sources

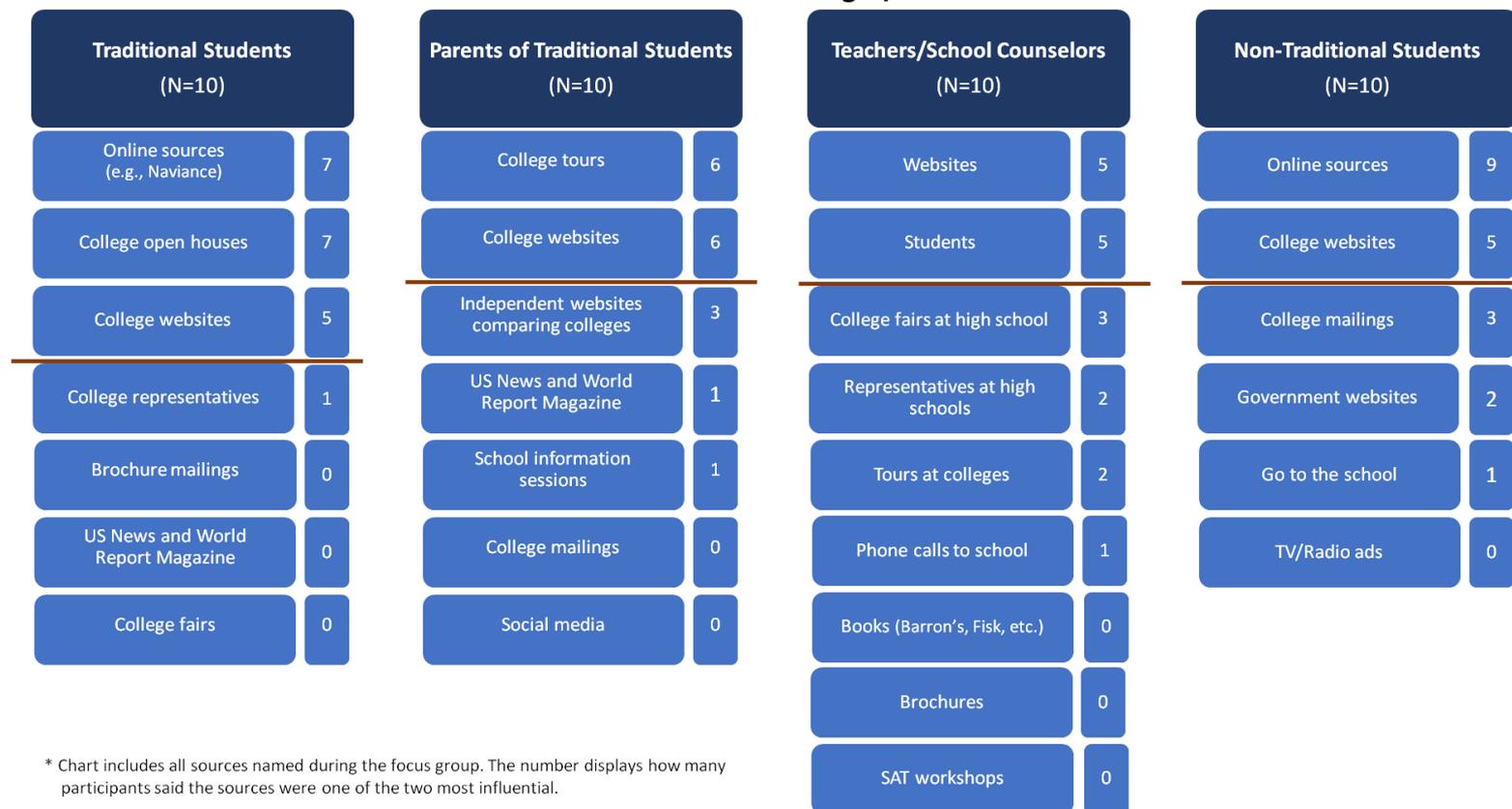
Participants in each group were asked how they gather information to help them with their selections or recommendations, and which two information sources were most influential. Participant responses are displayed in Figure 2 (see page 24). The focus group discussion revealed the following.

- **Traditional students** relied mostly on online sources (e.g., Naviance, Niche), college tours/open houses, and college websites.
 - Those saying college websites and independent websites said it was because they are very accessible, and they let them know about such things as: the types of majors and academics, the colleges' acceptance rates, and what was needed to get in (e.g., GPA and test scores).
 - The students who relied on college tours/open houses said it was because it provides firsthand information about what being at the college is like ("It's like a direct look at the college and what it's like. A sense of the environment, what it's like to live there." "See if it's comfortable.").
- **Parents of traditional students** relied mostly on college tours and college websites, and some relied on independent websites comparing colleges.
 - Those relying mostly on college tours acknowledged the colleges were trying to sell you on the school, but still felt they learned a lot about the college ("You really get a feel of the whole picture.").
 - Parents relying mostly on independent websites (e.g., comparison websites like College Battles and Money Magazine) mentioned the objectivity and type of information provided (payback rating, cost, statistics).
- **Teachers/school counselors** relied mostly on websites (e.g., Google search, go to college websites, use independent sources like Naviance and College Board) and information provided by their students about schools they visited.
- **Non-traditional students** relied mostly on independent websites, followed by college websites and college mailings.
- Students and parents across groups said key information sources were the same for 2-year and 4-year colleges.

Influencers and Information Gathering

Information Sources (continued)

Figure 2
Information Sources on Colleges/Universities *



* Chart includes all sources named during the focus group. The number displays how many participants said the sources were one of the two most influential.

Key Factors in Selecting a College

Students, parents, and teachers/school counselors were asked for the factors they look at when selecting a college for themselves or their students. The moderator recorded responses on a flip chart.

After the focus group participants completed the list of factors they consider, students and parents were asked to write down in rank order (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th) the four factors on the flip chart list that were most important to them for each type of college (2-year or 4-year) they (or their son/daughter) would most likely pursue.

High school teachers/school counselors were asked to rank order the most important factors separately for recommending 2-year and 4-year colleges.

Spectrum Associates prepared tables from the responses on the handouts that display for each focus group: the number of times the factor was ranked 1st, the number of times the factor was ranked in the top 4, and the total points for each factor using a rating system where a 1st place ranking = 4 points, a 2nd place ranking = 3 points, a 3rd place ranking = 2 points, and a 4th place ranking = 1 point.

The following pages display the prepared tables and include representative verbatims from focus group participants' discussion of the group's highest rated factors.

Key Factors in Selecting a College

Traditional Students

- Traditional students looking at 4-year colleges (N=8) were most concerned with the **academic programs** (majors/minors) offered by the college and **cost**, followed by **location** and **campus/social life**.
- The two traditional students most likely to pursue a 2-year college also rated **cost** and **academic programs** (majors/minors) as most important.

Academic Programs (Majors/Minors)

- “You don't want to go to a school that you don't like what they specialize in.”
- “I'd like them to have a strong program for the major that I'm looking for; engineering.”

Cost

- “Most schools have the same kind of curriculum so why not go to the cheapest school.”
- “Maybe the quality of education is a little better at schools who are like higher in price, but it's really the same thing anywhere.”
- “We don't want to be in debt; could effect all the other aspects (of life) like buying a house.”
- “I have 2 (teachers) who are 25; they complain they're still in debt with a lot to pay off.”

Location

- “In-state schools are like cheaper then out-of-state schools. Then if you commute.”
- “I'd like to maybe go somewhere new or interesting, maybe in like Boston or New York.”
- “My parents don't really want me to go anywhere too far away.”
- “I'll stay in the New England area. It's not really city or country for me, it's more just distance.”

Figure 3a

Importance of Factors in Selecting College*
(High School Students)

	4-Year Colleges (N=8)			2-Year Colleges (N=2)		
	Ranked 1st	Ranked in Top 4	Total Points**	Ranked 1st	Ranked in Top 4	Total Points**
Major/Minor Programs	4	8	26	1	2	6
Cost	4	7	25	1	2	7
Location	0	4	13	0	1	3
Campus/Social Life	0	3	7	0	1	1
Financial Aid	0	2	4	0	0	0
Sports	0	2	4	0	0	0
Career Placement	0	2	3	0	0	0
Time to Degree	0	1	1	0	1	1
Facilities	0	1	1	0	0	0
Reputation	0	1	1	0	0	0
Class Size	0	0	0	0	1	2
Internships	0	0	0	0	0	0
Study Abroad	0	0	0	0	0	0

*Table includes all factors named in the focus group as a factor in the decision even if no one ranked the factor in the top 4.

**Points calculated based on: 1st=4 points, 2nd=3 points, 3rd=2 points, 4th=1 point.

Campus/Social Life

- “Have events to go to.”
- “An open-type campus, where there's like a field.”
- “I don't want to go to college where like nobody shares the same hobbies or interests as I do.”

Key Factors in Selecting a College

Parents of Traditional Students

- Parents rated **cost/tuition** as the most important factor in their college consideration for both 4- and 2-year colleges (minimize student debt and cost to parents). They also ranked **financial aid**, **areas of study**, and **location** high on importance.
- For 4-year colleges, **payback** and **overall reputation** (brand name opens doors) were also rated high on importance by some parents.

Cost/Tuition

- “I have almost \$100,000 worth of student loans, and I don't want that for my child. (Large) loans and a job that's paying \$45,000 a year.”
- “(Large debt) is not how kids should start their lives. I want them to buy a house, I want them to be self-sufficient.”
- “(Kids) don't really understand what \$100,000 (debt) is. I think the high schools don't do these kids justice. Mindset is get into the best school at \$60,000 a year. What about the debt? Talk to them about that.”

Financial Aid

- “The more financial aid they get, the less of a bill for us.”
- “Falling short. Daughter applied to \$60,000 schools, and getting \$7,000.”

Areas of Study

- “My daughter basically has two things she's into. One is her pie-in-the-sky, and one is her fallback. She wants to find a school that offers both so that she can pursue her dream as well as being able to pay the bills.”

Location

- “(Key is) how long is it going to take them to get home.”
- “If you have to get on a plane, then that means you're not coming home that often.”
- “Two hours. That's reasonable.”

Payback

- “Most important thing for me is payback. A \$60,000 college not getting you a job that's very good isn't as good as a \$20,000 college with a great job. It's payback.”

Figure 3b
Importance of Factors in Selecting College*
 (Parents of Traditional Students)

	4-Year Colleges (N=8)			2-Year Colleges (N=2)		
	Ranked 1st	Ranked in Top 4	Total Points**	Ranked 1st	Ranked in Top 4	Total Points**
Cost/Tuition	5	7	25	2	2	8
Financial Aid	0	6	16	0	1	3
Areas of Study	1	4	9	0	2	4
Location/Distance from Home	1	4	8	0	1	3
Pay Back/Job After Graduation	0	3	7	0	0	0
Reputation	1	2	5	0	0	0
Safety	0	2	3	0	1	1
Opportunities to Further Education	0	2	3	0	0	0
Student Support Services	0	1	2	0	0	0
Faculty	0	1	2	0	0	0
Size	0	0	0	0	1	1
Class Size	0	0	0	0	0	0
Campus/Social life	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dorms	0	0	0	0	0	0
Time to Degree	0	0	0	0	0	0
Internships	0	0	0	0	0	0
Food	0	0	0	0	0	0

*Table includes all factors named in the focus group as a factor in the decision even if no one ranked the factor in the top 4.

**Points calculated based on: 1st=4 points, 2nd=3 points, 3rd=2 points, 4th=1 point.

Key Factors in Selecting a College

Teachers/School Counselors -- 2-Year Colleges

- Teachers/school counselors ranked **programs offered** as most important. **Cost** was viewed as the 2nd most important factor.
- The next most important factors were: **location/distance, support services, job preparation/placements**, and **academic requirements** (accept high school college credits).

Programs Offered

- “My thought process is, are the programs that are offered at whatever community college, going to prepare them ultimately for their future, whether they're going on to a 4-year degree or not.”
- “Community colleges differ in the programs that they do offer. (For) construction management, obviously the choice is Capital.”

Cost/Tuition

- “Got to be able to afford it. A lot of my kids don't have a lot of money. They usually don't know what they want to do, just want to get there and see what they like as long as it's cheap enough for them.”
- “A lot of our kids want to go four years, but can't financially afford it so they'd rather go to a community college and get their basic level done cheaper and transfer.”

Student Support Services

- “I think a lot of students who go to a community college are struggling and they may need that extra support to get through.”
- “An advisor, tutoring, counseling, mental health services.”
- “Writing centers, tutors, scribes to record the lecture.”

Job Preparation

- “You don't want to tell somebody to get involved in something when there is not a lot of employment opportunities out there.”
- “Community colleges are starting to look a little bit more at the market. Like Manchester just instituted a great manufacturing program.”

Figure 3c
Importance of Factors in Recommending College*
(Teachers/School Counselors)

	2-Year Colleges (N=10)		
	Ranked 1st	Ranked in Top 4	Total Points**
Programs Offered	8	10	36
Cost	1	7	17
Distance/Location	0	4	11
Student Support Services	1	4	10
Job Preparation/Placement	0	6	7
Academic Requirements	0	3	6
Size	0	2	3
Quality of Facilities	0	2	3
Retention Rate	0	1	2
Time to Graduation	0	1	2
Class Size	0	1	1
Social/Campus Life	0	0	0
Overall Reputation	0	0	0
Academic Competitiveness	0	0	0
Internships	0	0	0
Dorms	0	0	0
Study Abroad	0	0	0

*Table includes all factors named in the focus group as a factor in the decision even if no one ranked the factor in the top 4.

**Points calculated based on: 1st=4 points, 2nd=3 points, 3rd=2 points, 4th=1 point.

Key Factors in Selecting a College

Teachers/School Counselors -- 4-Year Colleges

- As was the case for 2-year colleges, teachers/school counselors ranked **programs offered** as the most important factor for 4-year colleges, followed by **cost**. The next most important factors were **academic requirements** and **location**.
- Major differences in 4-year and 2-year importance rankings were that teachers/school counselors rated academic requirements as more important for 4-year colleges, and student support services and job preparation/placement higher in importance for 2-year colleges.

Programs Offered

- *"I think that if a student has an idea of what they want to study, breadth and depth of programs is always going to drive it."*
- *"You want to make sure that they have that program that they want as opposed to just going to some school that somebody else is going to."*
- *"It's the range. You know, you want to go in and focus, but if you change your mind, you could take other avenues."*

Cost/Tuition

- *"It's a conversation I have with all families, before they apply, to make sure it's realistic ."*
- *"You could be in debt for a while."*
- *"Sometimes you make this assumption you'll be able to afford it, but then realize the tuition is higher and you can't take out loans or your parents aren't going to help you out, (and you can't) stay in the school."*
- *"A lot of my students are first-generation college students so it's like an unknown. It's different when you have parents that went to college and know what to expect."*
- *"I'm warning them about it. I know the parents are more concerned than the kids are about it."*
- *"Some kids are looking at UConn, but at the same time (I suggest) a state school, CSCU or Southern, because you may get a lot of money to go there and end up in less debt."*

Figure 3d
Importance of Factors in Recommending College*
(Teachers/School Counselors)

	4-Year Colleges (N=10)		
	Ranked 1st	Ranked in Top 4	Total Points**
Programs Offered	6	10	34
Cost	1	10	21
Academic Requirements	1	5	13
Distance/Location	1	3	9
Student Support Services	1	1	4
Job Preparation/Placement	0	3	4
Size	0	2	4
Retention Rate	0	1	3
Time to Graduation	0	1	2
Social/Campus Life	0	1	2
Overall Reputation	0	1	2
Quality of Facilities	0	1	1
Academic Competitiveness	0	1	1
Class Size	0	0	0
Internships	0	0	0
Dorms	0	0	0
Study Abroad	0	0	0

*Table includes all factors named in the focus group as a factor in the decision even if no one ranked the factor in the top 4.

**Points calculated based on: 1st=4 points, 2nd=3 points, 3rd=2 points, 4th=1 point.

Academic Requirements

- *"I never told a student they couldn't apply anywhere, but I always made sure they had a few schools on there that matched close to what their SAT score is and what their GPA was just so they had a few schools to kind of fall back on."*

Key Factors in Selecting a College

Non-Traditional Students -- 2-Year Colleges

- Non-traditional students ranking factors for 2-year colleges (N=6), ranked **majors/programs** and **price** highest, followed by **financial aid**, **flexibility**, **reputation**, and **location**.

Major/Program

- “If my major is available, what I want to do.”
- “I had it first because I'm specifically looking for a baking program, so it's very limiting. It's not like I can choose from any school out there.”
- “I want a broadcast communications degree. Not every college offers that.”

Price

- “Whether I'm going to be able to manage loans on top of the ones that I already have.”
- “When you get hired, it doesn't really matter if you went to Yale or if you went to UConn. I mean, you're still working the same job. You can still progress the same way.”

Financial Aid

- “What grants or financial aid is available.”

Flexibility

- “I have a full-time job, so I can't be in school all day. It would need to be an online course I could do on my own time, or at night.”
- “With some of the more specific courses, some schools don't offer them every term.”
- “Plus just the flexibility of when you have to do like the credit.”

Location

- “Because it saves time. It saves time when you work.”
- “Closer, easier to manage and be able to actually do it and manage your life.”

Figure 3e
Importance of Factors in Selecting College*
(Non-Traditional Students)

	2-Year Colleges (N=10)		
	Ranked 1st	Ranked in Top 4	Total Points**
Major/Programs	1	5	14
Price	1	4	12
Financial Aid	2	3	9
Flexibility	0	4	8
Reputation	1	2	6
Location	0	4	5
Sports	1	1	4
Accept Transfer Credit	0	1	1
Credits Required to Complete	0	0	0
School's Credibility	0	0	0
Job Placements/Services	0	0	0
Internships	0	0	0
Student Support Services	0	0	0
Prerequisites	0	0	0

*Table includes all factors named in the focus group as a factor in the decision even if no one ranked the factor in the top 4.

**Points calculated based on: 1st=4 points, 2nd=3 points, 3rd=2 points, 4th=1 point.

Key Factors in Selecting a College

Non-Traditional Students -- 4-Year Colleges

31

- Non-traditional students looking primarily at 4-year colleges (N=4) ranked **price** highest.
- Price was followed by **flexibility, majors/programs, financial aid, and location.**

Price

- *"I think price is super important. Personally, I went to Central for three years. I was trying to finish up my degree, and I spent \$60,000 and have nothing to show for it."*
- *"You don't want to have loans and all for the rest of your life, pretty much."*
- *"I wish someone had told me when I got out of high school, 'Don't go to Central. Go to a community college.'"*
- *"(Employer) tuition reimbursement was just \$3,000. It's nothing, right? It'll get me through seven weeks of classes, so it's basically pointless."*
- *"College stopped being a service. It's not about like, 'We're here to help you,' anymore. It's like 'Give us your money.'"*

Flexibility

- *"I have a full-time job, it's hard. It would have to be at night or it would have to be online."*
- *"Same. Full-time job, so it has to be at night, or online, or on the weekends. That's the only time that I have available."*

Location

- *"I live in Newington, so Stamford or even Southern, it's too far. It's not feasible to my life to have an hour commute both ways."*

Figure 3f
Importance of Factors in Selecting College*
(Non-Traditional Students)

	4-Year Colleges (N=10)		
	Ranked 1st	Ranked in Top 4	Total Points**
Price	4	4	16
Flexibility	0	3	8
Major/Programs	0	3	5
Financial Aid	0	2	5
Location	0	2	3
Credits Required to Complete	0	1	2
Accept Transfer Credit	0	1	1
Reputation	0	0	0
Sports	0	0	0
School's Credibility	0	0	0
Job Placements/Services	0	0	0
Internships	0	0	0
Student Support Services	0	0	0
Prerequisites	0	0	0

*Table includes all factors named in the focus group as a factor in the decision even if no one ranked the factor in the top 4.
 3rd=2 points, 4th=1 point.

Perception of CSCU Community Colleges

Overall Ratings

Figure 4a provides focus group participants’ overall ratings of CSCU community colleges. As shown in Figure 4a:

- 28 of the 29 focus group participants asked to rate the community colleges had an overall impression.
- 10 (36%) of the 28 focus group participants able to rate the community colleges were “very positive” and 27 (96%) of 28 were “somewhat” or “very” positive.
- Far and away, the **teachers/school counselors** had the most favorable impression of CSCU community colleges with 8 of the 10 teachers/school counselors saying they were “very positive” and almost all of the participants in the **student** and **parent** focus groups offering a “somewhat positive” rating.

Figure 4a
Ratings of Community Colleges

	<i>Very Positive</i>	<i>Somewhat Positive</i>	<i>Somewhat Negative</i>	<i>Very Negative</i>	<i>No Impression</i>
Traditional Students (N=4)	1	3	0	0	0
Parents of Traditional Students (N=7)	1	5	1	0	0
Teachers/School Counselors (N=10)	8	2	0	0	0
Non-Traditional Students (N=8)	0	7	0	0	1
Total (N=29)	10	17	1	0	1

Perception of CSCU Community Colleges

Strengths and Weaknesses

Spectrum Associates reviewed all of the strengths and weakness recorded individually by focus group participants on the handouts provided during the focus group sessions. Figure 4b (see page 34) displays whether any participant in the traditional students (**T**), parents of traditional students (**P**), teachers/school counselors (**T/SC**), or non-traditional students (**NT**) recorded a specific strength or weakness on the handout. As shown in Figure 4b:

- Focus group participants cited many strengths and many weaknesses for those attending a CSCU community college, indicating they believe students receive many benefits at a community college but there are also a variety of drawbacks.
- Strengths attributed to the community colleges most often across the groups were:
 - Cost (less expensive, need less financial aid, cheaper way to get 4-year degree)
 - Many locations so students can be close to home
 - Ability to transfer to 4-year state university after 2 years
 - Offering a broad range of programs/majors to choose from
 - Flexibility (scheduling classes, completing degree)
 - Receive a 2-year degree
- The most frequently cited community college weaknesses were:
 - Lack of brand name awareness and a less favorable reputation
 - Students not having the same life experience as one gets from attending a 4-year college and living away from home
 - Lesser quality education than received at a 4-year college
 - Inconsistency in the specific programs offered across CSCU's 12 community colleges
- Many **teachers/school counselors** said they felt there is a stigma associated with community colleges and CSCU needs to rebrand the community colleges.
- A participant in the **teacher/school counselor** focus group raised a concern pertinent to the city of Hartford and Capital Region Community College where students were being pushed to apply to Capital Region Community College (high acceptance rates at community colleges) to increase the acceptance rates of their high school students so that the high school would reach desired district or school improvement rates and, as a result, students who were not really prepared to go to college would enroll.

Perception of CSCU Community Colleges

Strengths and Weaknesses (continued)

Figure 4b
Community Colleges

<i>Strengths</i>		<i>Weaknesses</i>	
Cost/Inexpensive	(T, P, T/SC, NT)	Reputation, lack of brand awareness	(P, T/SC, NT)
Many locations/Close to home/Easy commute	(T, P, T/SC, NT)	Not same experience as 4-year college (No dorms, no campus life)	(T, P, T/SC)
Can transfer to 4-year college	(T, P, T/SC, NT)	Education not the same as 4-year college (Only 2 years, less challenging, not as good)	(T, P, NT)
Broad range of programs/majors	(T, P, T/SC, NT)	Inconsistent programs offered across the colleges	(T, T/SC, NT)
Flexibility of schedule	(P, T/SC, NT)	Less faculty/less full time faculty	(P, NT)
Get degree in 2 years	(T, T/SC, NT)	Lack of information/outreach on programs of different colleges	(P, T/SC)
Easy to get accepted	(P, NT)	Students less serious or motivated	(P, NT)
Smaller, less overwhelming	(T/SC, NT)	Stigma/embarrassment	(T/SC)
Job preparedness	(T, T/SC)	Job placement after degree	(P)
Good place to start	(T, T/SC)	Don't venture out beyond comfort zone	(T)
More student support services than 4-year schools	(T/SC, NT)	Locations	(T/SC)
Financial programs/assistance	(NT)	Less motivated faculty	(P)
Accept transfer credits	(NT)	None in Western CT	(T/SC)
Facilities	(T/SC)		
Diversity	(P)		

Note: T = traditional students, P = parents of traditional students, T/SC = teachers/school counselors, NT = non-traditional students

Perception of CSCU Community Colleges

Strengths – Representative Verbatim Responses

35

- *“They're very cheap, so you don't have to get a lot of financial aid.” (T)*
- *“Locations, so you can commute.” (T)*
- *“I feel like it helps you when you are undecided so instead of sitting at home doing nothing you can go there to figure it out and take general studies.” (T)*
- *“They are cost effective, and it only takes two years to get a degree. More focused on getting a job out of college.” (T)*
- *“Kids can go there for two years and then transfer to so many other schools with some scholarship money.” (P)*
- *“Access to university staff or — some of the university professors teach at the community colleges.” (P)*
- *“Provides step for a 4-year degree. Cheaper way to get a 4-year degree.” (T/SC)*
- *“Extra support offered, cost, preparedness. Nice option for student that doesn't know what they want to do.” (T/SC)*
- *“Amazing programs and updated facilities.” (T/SC)*
- *“I think it's also a good place to start if you are very focused. Whether you want to be a vet tech or a dental hygienist, there's a campus for you.” (T/SC)*
- *“Flexible timeframes. You could be in community college for 20 years if you want to be, that is if you can afford it.” (T/SC)*
- *“Since there's a large number of community colleges for kids all across the state, you're bound to have a community college somewhere close to you.” (T/SC)*
- *“I think they're smaller and less overwhelming. And more student supports.” (T/SC)*
- *“Better financial programs. Like grants.” (NT)*
- *“Major strengths are its price, locations, and flexibility. Also willing to accept transfer credits and it's a shorter degree program.” (NT)*
- *“If you were going to transfer, especially if it's a state school, they're just going to scoop up pretty much everything that you did at a community college.” (NT)*
- *“I think the number of options — like there's just such a vast number of community colleges to choose from.” (NT)*
- *“Flexibility. Evening and weekend classes.” (NT)*

Perception of CSCU Community Colleges

Weaknesses – Representative Verbatim Responses

36

- *“The majors are focused at different schools.” (T)*
- *“Not as challenging an education.” (T)*
- *“Don’t get the college experience.” (T)*
- *“No campus life. No housing opportunities to get full college experience.” (P)*
- *“Because then he won't have like the full experience of being independent and learning to navigate the world without mommy and daddy.” (P)*
- *“I think it would be after they're done, with job placement.” (P)*
- *“Brand reputation. People wouldn't even know who you were talking about, unless it's a local company.” (P)*
- *“Stigma. Need to rebrand.” (T/SC)*
- *“Students don't want to admit they're not going to a 4-year school sometimes, so they are embarrassed.” (T/SC)*
- *“A lot of school counselors will recommend like Capital Community College, and then it just ends up being like a composition of the neighborhood schools in Hartford all winding up at Capital so it's like high school all over again. (Creates) a negative reputation.” (T/SC)*
- *“One may have unique program that the others don't offer.” (T/SC)*
- *“I don't think you get as much oomph behind you when you're applying to a job if it's just a community college.” (NT)*
- *“Kids are very immature. They don't take it as seriously, because they don't have as much involvement in it. They don't have as much money invested in it.” (NT)*

Perception of Central Overall Ratings

Figure 5a provides focus group participants’ overall ratings of Central Connecticut State University. As shown in Figure 5a:

- 30 (91%) of the 33 focus group participants asked to rate Central had an overall impression.
- 10 (33%) of the 30 participants able to rate Central recorded “very positive” and 27 of the 30 (90%) were “somewhat” or “very” positive.
- Far and away, the **teachers/school counselors** had the most favorable impression of Central with 8 of the 10 teachers/school counselors saying they were “very positive.” **Traditional students** and **parents of traditional students** were typically “somewhat positive,” while **non-traditional students** were uninformed or divided in their overall image.

Figure 5a
Ratings of Central Connecticut State University

	<i>Very Positive</i>	<i>Somewhat Positive</i>	<i>Somewhat Negative</i>	<i>Very Negative</i>	<i>No Impression</i>
Traditional Students (N=9)	0	8	0	1	0
Parents of Traditional Students (N=10)	2	6	1	0	1
Teachers/School Counselors (N=10)	8	2	0	0	0
Non-Traditional Students (N=4)	0	1	0	1	2
Total (N=33)	10	17	1	2	3

Perception of Central

Strengths and Weaknesses

Figure 5b (see page 39) displays whether any participants in each of the four focus groups recorded a specific strength or weakness on the handout completed during the focus group. As revealed in Figure 5b:

- Focus group participants cited many strengths and some specific weaknesses for Central indicating they believed students received many benefits but also some specific drawbacks as well.
- Strengths attributed to Central most often across the groups were:
 - Cost
 - Location is close to home
 - Broad range of programs/majors
- Other specific strengths cited across multiple focus groups were: specific programs offered (e.g., education, nursing, business, technology), the college experience/social life at Central, support services available, the CTfastrak stops there, and athletics.
- The most frequently cited Central weaknesses were:
 - New Britain location (not much happening outside the campus, depressed area)
 - Lacks community as students leave on the weekends
 - Doesn't offer some specific majors of interest
 - Hard to graduate in 4 years (core classes not offered enough)
 - Parking
- **Traditional students** frequently expressed concern that Central was like a continuation of high school as they know so many people going there.

Perception of Central Strengths and Weaknesses (continued)

Figure 5b
Central Connecticut State University

Strengths		Weaknesses	
Cost	(T, P, T/SC, NT)	New Britain area	(T, P, T/SC)
Location/Close to home	(T, P, T/SC, NT)	Lacks community, students leave on weekends	(T, T/SC)
Range of programs/majors	(T, P, T/SC)	Doesn't offer some majors	(T, P)
Specific programs (education, nursing, business technology)	(P, T/SC)	Hard to graduate in 4 years	(T, T/SC)
College experience/Social life/Dorms	(T, T/SC)	Parking	(P, T/SC)
Support services	(P, T/SC)	Generic, not exciting, no vibe	(T)
CTfastrak bus stops there	(P, T/SC)	Too close to home	(T)
Athletics	(T, P)	Know too many high school students going there	(T)
Can transfer to Uconn	(T)	Safety problems	(P)
Acceptance rate	(T)	Library	(P)
Investing in campus/buildings	(P)	Lack of brand awareness	(P)
Safety department	(P)	Faculty	(P)
Students leave well prepared	(P)	Reputation	(P)
Size of campus	(T/SC)	Job prospects	(P)
Internships	(T/SC)	Overall quality	(P)
Facilities	(T/SC)	Not interjected into community	(P)
Class size	(P)	Housing cost	(P)
Faculty	(P)	Lack of brand advertising	(P)
Reputation	(P)		

Note: T = traditional students, P = parents of traditional students, T/SC = teachers/school counselors, NT = non-traditional students

Perception of Central

Strengths & Weaknesses – Representative Verbatim Responses

40

Strengths

- *“Location, acceptance rate, cost.” (T)*
- *“Close to home.” (T)*
- *“A lot of social life on campus.” (T)*
- *“It looks like they're investing, too, in the campus. They built new dorms, and I think they're expanding.” (P)*
- *“Central offers a good array of studies. The cost is manageable even for students paying their own way. Job opportunities were available to many students I know after they graduated. The location gives students the opportunity to keep costs down by living at home.” (P)*
- *“They offer many resources and services to students.” (P)*
- *“Wide range of different fields of study.” (P)*
- *“Engineering, nursing and a professional safety department.” (P)*
- *“Great school for someone who wants to pursue a degree in education.” (T/SC)*
- *“They are only one of a few in the state who offer tech-ed certification.” (T/SC)*
- *“The accessibility because it's on a bus line.” (T/SC)*
- *“Social services, business, nursing.” (T/SC)*
- *“From what I hear, it's come a long way, that campus life is improved in the social community.” (T/SC)*

Weaknesses

- *“Five minutes from home, know most people. Not interesting.” (T)*
- *“Know too many people there.” (T)*
- *“There's nothing really stand out about it. I mean, it just kind of seems like a traditional 4-year college. It doesn't have any special things to offer.” (T)*
- *“I feel it could offer more majors and minors, widen what they offer students.” (T)*
- *“In the news recently there was a female student raped, so some negative news.” (P)*
- *“Located near a depressed area.” (P)*
- *“Hard to get to. Parking. I've been there many times, library is just ancient, run down, and not with the times.” (P)*
- *“Campus life. Not much around the campus.” (T/SC)*
- *“I just feel generally it's more of a commuter school. They have a large number of even adults that are commuting or students from around the area that are commuting. If you go on the campus let's say on a Saturday, it's like a desert.” (T/SC)*
- *“I think it's hard to graduate in four years from there. Core classes that you need to take are not scheduled in enough sessions, so then you're bumped to the following semester.” (T/SC)*
- *“I agree with that, too. If you are freshman you can't register for classes until the upperclassmen have registered. So by the time, because they were delayed in their first years, then it just creates this long waiting line.” (T/SC)*

Perception of Eastern

Overall Ratings

Figure 6a provides focus group participants' overall ratings of Eastern Connecticut State University. As shown in Figure 6a:

- Focus group participants were less likely to be able to rate Eastern than the community colleges or Central, as 20 (61%) of the 33 participants completing the handout had an impression.
- 6 (30%) of the 20 focus group participants able to rate Eastern recorded "very positive" and 16 (80%) were "somewhat" or "very" positive.
- **Teachers/school counselors** had the most favorable impression of Eastern with 4 of the 8 teachers/school counselors offering a rating saying they were "very positive" and the other 4 recording "somewhat positive." **Traditional students** offering a rating tended to be "somewhat positive," whereas **parents of traditional students** and **non-traditional students** were often unable to rate Eastern or divided in their opinions.

Figure 6a
Ratings of Eastern Connecticut State University

	<i>Very Positive</i>	<i>Somewhat Positive</i>	<i>Somewhat Negative</i>	<i>Very Negative</i>	<i>No Impression</i>
Traditional Students (N=9)	1	4	1	0	3
Parents of Traditional Students (N=10)	1	1	1	1	6
Teachers/School Counselors (N=10)	4	4	0	0	2
Non-Traditional Students (N=4)	0	1	1	0	2
Total (N=33)	6	10	3	1	13

Perception of Eastern

Strengths and Weaknesses

Figure 6b (see page 43) displays whether any participants in each of the four focus groups recorded a specific strength or weakness on the handout completed during the focus group. As shown in Figure 6b:

- Focus group participants cited fewer strengths and weaknesses for Eastern reflecting the fact that many had no impressions and recorded no strengths or weaknesses. **Teachers/school counselors** were the most familiar and favorable.
- Strengths mentioned most often across groups were:
 - Cost (reasonable, cheap)
 - Specific program offered (liberal arts, education, business)
 - Campus living (improvements made to the campus, not a commuter school)
- Other specific strengths cited across multiple focus groups were: broad range of programs offered, athletic facilities, and its location being close to home. **Teachers/school counselors** praised Eastern for its faculty, president, and programs.
- The most frequently cited weakness was its Willimantic location (high crime rate, dangerous, drug problem), followed by lack of brand awareness and not having some specific academic programs.

Perception of Eastern Strengths and Weaknesses *(continued)*

Figure 6b
Eastern Connecticut State University

<i>Strengths</i>		<i>Weaknesses</i>	
Cost	(T, P, T/SC)	Willimantic location (high crime, drugs, dangerous)	(T, P, T/SC, NT)
Specific programs (liberal arts, education, business)	(P, T/SC, NT)	Don't hear about, no brand awareness	(T, P)
Campus living (improvements, not a commuter school)	(T, P, T/SC)	Lack specific programs	(T, P)
Broad range of programs/majors	(T, T/SC)	Doesn't stand out	(T)
Athletic facilities	(P, T/SC)	Job opportunities after graduation	(P)
Location/Close to home	(T, P)	Near Uconn	(T/SC)
Many go from my high school	(T)	Campus life	(T/SC)
Graduates well-prepared	(P)		
Student resources	(P)		
Launch to better schools	(P)		
Reputation	(P)		
Faculty (helpful, supportive)	(T/SC)		
President (dynamic, progressive)	(T/SC)		
Small class sizes	(T/SC)		

Note: T = traditional students, P = parents of traditional students, T/SC = teachers/school counselors, NT = non-traditional students

Perception of Eastern

Strengths & Weaknesses – Representative Verbatim Responses

44

Strengths

- *“The cost of ECSU is very reasonable.” (T)*
- *“In-state, and cheap.” (T)*
- *“Good teaching school and affordable.” (P)*
- *“Similar to Central, they've done a lot of campus improvements.” (P)*
- *“Nice facilities. Great price. Know a student who went there and is now pursuing a doctorate.” (P)*
- *“Great school for someone who wants to pursue a degree in education.” (T/SC)*
- *“Students live there and stay there on the weekends.” (T/SC)*
- *“Faculty are very knowledgeable, very helpful, supportive individuals. Diverse.” (T/SC)*
- *“President. She's very dynamic. She's a progressive thinker. She's female.” (T/SC)*
- *“Strong liberal arts emphasis. Housing options. Students live and stay on the weekends. Small class sizes. Sports program. Science.” (T/SC)*

Weaknesses

- *“Doesn't stand out to me. I just don't hear about it. When people recommended schools, they don't really tell me to go to Eastern.” (T)*
- *“Eastern, like all of the Connecticut State universities, there's not a lot that makes them really stand out compared to other schools.” (T)*
- *“Eastern is located in high crime part of Connecticut. Not Eastern's fault but would impact my choice of school.” (T)*
- *“Near drug infested Willimantic. Don't hear in marketing from ECSU.” (P)*
- *“Well, it's in the news, the girl that get pulled out of the dorm - killed. It doesn't seem safe to me, really like not a safe area.” (P)*
- *“Close to UConn but on smaller side. Get university feel due to UConn, but stigma (compared) to UConn.” (P)*
- *“Distance. Name recognition.” (P)*

Perception of Southern

Overall Ratings

Figure 7a provides focus group participants’ overall ratings of Southern Connecticut State University. As shown in Figure 7a:

- Like Eastern, participants were less likely to be able to rate Southern than the community colleges or Central, as 21 (64%) of the 33 participants completing the handout had an overall impression of Southern.
- Just 3 (14%) of the 21 focus group participants able to rate Southern recorded “very positive,” but 18 (86%) were “somewhat” or “very” positive.
- **Teachers/school counselors** were again the most favorable, with 3 of the 9 teachers/school counselors offering a rating saying they were “very positive” and 5 others saying “somewhat positive.”
- **Traditional** and **non-traditional students** with an opinion said “somewhat positive,” **parents of traditional students** offering a rating were split between “somewhat positive” and “somewhat negative.”

Figure 7a
Ratings of Southern Connecticut State University

	<i>Very Positive</i>	<i>Somewhat Positive</i>	<i>Somewhat Negative</i>	<i>Very Negative</i>	<i>No Impression</i>
Traditional Students (N=9)	0	5	0	0	4
Parents of Traditional Students (N=10)	0	3	2	0	5
Teachers/School Counselors (N=10)	3	5	1	0	1
Non-Traditional Students (N=4)	0	2	0	0	2
Total (N=33)	3	15	3	0	12

Perception of Southern

Strengths and Weaknesses

Figure 7b (see page 47) displays whether any participants in each of the four focus groups recorded a specific strength or weakness on the handout completed during the focus group. As shown in Figure 7b:

- As was the case for Eastern, focus group participants cited fewer strengths and weaknesses for Southern than the community colleges and Central reflecting the fact that many of the participants had no impressions of Southern and recorded no strengths or weaknesses.
- Strengths mentioned most often for Southern across the groups were:
 - Cost
 - Specific programs offered (nursing, education, library science)
 - Location (local community thriving with many other colleges in the area)
 - Offering a broad range of programs
- Multiple focus groups also mentioned athletic facilities as a strength.
- The most frequently cited weaknesses for Southern were its location (near New Haven) and being too far away from home. Participants in multiple groups said it was a party school and lacked some specific academic programs.

Perception of Southern Strengths and Weaknesses (continued)

Figure 7b
Southern Connecticut State University

<i>Strengths</i>		<i>Weaknesses</i>	
Cost	(T, P, T/SC)	Location (near New Haven)	(T, P, T/SC, NT)
Specific programs (nursing, education, library science)	(P, T/SC, NT)	Too far away	(T, P, NT)
Location (community thriving)	(T, P, T/SC)	Party school	(P, NT)
Broad range of programs/majors	(T, P, T/SC)	Lack some majors	(T, P)
Athletics	(T, T/SC)	Blah	(T)
Online class	(P)	Lack brand awareness	(P)
Reputation	(P)	Computer science program	(P)
Student support services	(P)	Admissions does poor job with paperwork	(T/SC)
Acceptance rate	(P)	Kids leave on weekends	(T/SC)
Advising programs for freshmen	(T/SC)		
Small class sizes	(T/SC)		

Note: T = traditional students, P = parents of traditional students, T/SC = teachers/school counselors, NT = non-traditional students

Perception of Southern Strengths & Weaknesses – Representative Verbatim Responses

48

Strengths

- *“Broad range of majors and minors. (CSCU universities) are all the same. They're just in different parts of Connecticut.” (T)*
- *“Programs offered. Location is around many other schools.” (T/SC)*
- *“Strong education program.” (T/SC)*
- *“Advising program. I think it's very personalized. They get to know their freshmen very soon into the first year.” (T/SC)*
- *“Nursing, education, pre-professional. Small class sizes.” (T/SC)*
- *“They have a graduate school in library science. They're the only ones in the state.” (P)*
- *“Just generally located next to some really nice schools and universities.” (P)*
- *“Solid nursing program.” (NT)*

Weaknesses

- *“Just blah (like the others).” (T)*
- *“Location, reputation as a party school, safety.” (P)*
- *“Location and not big on computer science.” (P)*
- *“Close to the city. Not the greatest area.” (T/SC)*
- *“Kids don't stay (on weekends).” (T/SC)*
- *“Just keeping track of paperwork that you send in, from counselor's perspective, sending in documents multiple times.” (T/SC)*
- *“Too far. Excessive partying.” (NT)*

Perception of Western

Overall Ratings

Figure 8a provides focus group participants' overall ratings of Western Connecticut State University. As shown in Figure 8a:

- Western had the fewest number of participants offering an overall impression of the university, 12 (36%) of the 33 participants completing the 4-year college rating forms. **Non-traditional students** (4 of 4 rating 4-year colleges unable to rate) **parents of traditional students** (8 of 10 unable to rate) were the least familiar with Western.
- Only 1 (8%) of the 12 focus group participants able to rate Western recorded "very positive." However, 9 (75%) of the 12 providing a rating were at least "somewhat positive."

Figure 8a
Ratings of Western Connecticut State University

	<i>Very Positive</i>	<i>Somewhat Positive</i>	<i>Somewhat Negative</i>	<i>Very Negative</i>	<i>No Impression</i>
Traditional Students (N=9)	0	3	1	0	5
Parents of Traditional Students (N=10)	0	1	0	1	8
Teachers/School Counselors (N=10)	1	4	1	0	4
Non-Traditional Students (N=4)	0	0	0	0	4
Total (N=33)	1	8	2	1	21

Perception of Western

Strengths and Weaknesses

Figure 8b (see page 51) displays whether any participants in each of the four focus groups recorded a specific strength or weakness on the handout completed during the focus group. As shown in Figure 8b:

- Focus group participants cited the fewest strengths and weaknesses for Western as participants were much less familiar with Western than the other CSCU state universities.
- The strength mentioned most often across the groups was cost, with multiple focus groups also mentioning its specific programs (art, chemistry, nursing) and location.
- The most frequently cited weaknesses were it being far away and having two separate campuses. While not viewed as a weakness of the school, many participants mentioned they have heard very little about Western.

Perception of Western Strengths and Weaknesses (continued)

Figure 8b

Western Connecticut State University

<i>Strengths</i>		<i>Weaknesses</i>	
Cost	(T, P, T/SC)	Location (far away)	(T, T/SC, NT)
Specific programs (art, chemistry, nursing)	(P, T/SC)	2 separate campuses	(P, T/SC)
Location	(T, P)	Don't hear about it	(T)
Artsy feel	(T)	Job opportunities post graduation	(P)
Nice campus	(P)	Brand awareness	(T/SC)
Campus integrated into community	(P)	Commute to school	(T/SC)
Quality of education	(T/SC)	No physical education program	(T/SC)
Option for those in remote part of the state	(T/SC)	Small	(T/SC)

Note: T = traditional students, P = parents of traditional students, T/SC = teachers/school counselors, NT = non-traditional students

Perception of Western

Strengths & Weaknesses – Representative Verbatim Responses

52

Strengths

- *“Cost and artsy.” (T)*
- *“I’m pretty sure they have like a new art facility, which I’m really big into that type of stuff. That’s like different than the rest of the other schools.” (T)*
- *“In-state and cheap.” (T)*
- *“Nice campus and tied into the community.” (P)*
- *“They do have a smaller campus. The classroom size is also smaller. They actually have a great chemistry program.” (P)*
- *“I think it’s a good school for kids who are in more remote areas of the state.” (T/SC)*
- *“I think they have a phenomenal nursing program that attracts really strong kids.” (T/SC)*

Weaknesses

- *“Don’t hear about it.” (T)*
- *“Lacking my major.” (T)*
- *“Brand recognition.” (P)*
- *“Poor marketing. Don’t know much about it.” (P)*
- *“I do not like how WCSU is separated.” (P)*
- *“Party school.” (P)*
- *“Split campus. Kids leave.” (T/SC)*
- *“Doesn’t offer the same majors as the other universities.” (T/SC)*
- *“Smaller school.” (T/SC)*

Student and Parent Overall Perception of CSCU Universities

53

- It is important to note that **traditional students** expressed a concern about CSCU universities overall that transcended the four individual universities. The high school students typically felt that CSCU universities were “average” or “generic” 4-year schools where nothing stands out or excites them. They felt these state universities lacked the appeal and community feel offered at UConn.
- Some **parents of traditional students** expressed a similar concern and felt CSCU universities lacked branding and a distinction from each other.
- **Non-traditional students** typically were most interested in the CSCU community colleges, but those interested in 4-year colleges felt the CSCU universities were pretty much the same and the only difference was which one was close to you.
- **Non-traditional students** also expressed a very cynical view about colleges/universities as they believe graduates do not get the same career/job opportunities they used to and that colleges/universities are more about getting their money than helping the student.

Student and Parent Overall Perception of CSCU Universities – *Representative Verbatims*

54

- *“Nothing to it that's like special, in my opinion. Like it's like an average school. I feel like it would be the same to applying to any of the other Connecticut State school.” (T)*
- *“It's kind of just like a generic 4-year college. Nothing that makes me particularly excited about it, or that sets it apart from any other 4-year school.” (T)*
- *“(Whereas at UConn) you become part of a community. When you think of UConn, you kind of think of the Dairy Bar, the farm that's on it. There's that really good cookie place on UConn. I can recommend it, there's so much different stuff about it. But when you think of all the other schools, most of us said we don't know anything about it. There's nothing that stands out that'll make a student want to go there to further their education.” (T)*
- *“Going to these state schools, you kind of feel like you're just going back to high school again, but you don't get a feel of being in a new territory. Whereas at UConn there's woods, and then you just come into UConn. It's just like UConn campus and only UConn campus.” (T)*
- *“They have a lot of sports at UConn. Granted, the football team's not great, but you can go to football games in the fall, basketball games. Women's basketball is doing great.” (T)*
- *“I know Eastern, I think there's a high school like straight across the street from it. So you get that like high school feel still, even in college.” (T)*
- *“The graduation rate for like Central, it's like 50-something percent, so like not everyone sticks around. I think a lot of people transfer. It's almost like high school part two.” (T)*
- *“Like they said, there's nothing that stands out. I feel like Connecticut places more of an emphasis on UConn, and that's why everyone thinks so positive of it. So I feel like if we knew more about the other colleges, then maybe we would have a more positive (opinion). Because at college fairs, too, everyone's at the UConn place, but like for Eastern and other places there's like no one there.” (T)*
- *“This applies to all of the four — Central, Eastern, Western, and Southern. Their names just don't invoke anything. It almost makes you think of like a conveyor-belt type. It doesn't jump out at you. It's not like a lot of other states where their senior colleges have a name that you could associate. But it's just sort of these are just these general geographic regions. That would be the first thing I would I would do. I would change the names of those four schools, because they don't really invoke anything, which probably plays into it.” (P)*
- *“I was going to say it's brand awareness. I don't have any knowledge. They don't resonate.” (P)*

Student and Parent Overall Perception of CSCU Universities – *Representative Verbatims (continued)*

55

- *“I look at them all the same, pretty much. They're like state schools, so they pretty much are very similar.” (P)*
- *“People tend to think of them as community colleges, even though they're 4-year colleges. Again, their brand marketing is pitiful. They don't distinguish at all. There's nothing that makes them pop.” (P)*
- *“I feel like they're all comparable.” (NT)*
- *“I feel like it just matters where you live in the state and what's close.” (NT)*
- *“I look at them all the same, because I don't think it was ever specified or shown to me that maybe one has strength in one program versus the other to know where to pick.” (NT)*
- *“There are 130 servers at my job, and I want to say more than half of them have full college educations. They all have the 4-year degree, and they all work the same job I do, you know? It doesn't really guarantee.” (NT)*
- *“It's that you have to go to college, and you had to go to college because that's the only way you're going to get a good job. Now all these people are finding out that's not the real reality.” (NT)*
- *“It seems like it's turned into more of a business on the college's part, right? Does that sound right?” (NT)*
- *“But I still think that like for college, in general, is it necessary to get this job? No. I mean, if you're like a brain surgeon or something like that, then I completely see that. But like my husband, he went to all private schools his whole life. We have a ton of education debt, and the jobs he has, they pay good, but he could've gotten them without the degree.” (NT)*
- *“That ties into the problem that they spend so much time getting into the college that they have no one there once you're in there to help guide you to where you need to go. Because they already kind of have your tuition, so they're good.” (NT)*

Desired Communications Approach

56

Participants were asked how they wanted educational institutions to get information to them about what they have to offer. We found:

- **Traditional students:**
 - Were interested in face-to-face meetings (e.g., at the school, at Starbucks)
 - Disliked impersonal, mass mailings; preferred a personal touch; and preferred a brochure to an email
 - Disregarded testimonials on college websites as one-sided and a form letter from the president (even if signed) as insincere
- **Parents of traditional students** were evenly divided on a preferred communications approach, with one-half preferring email (easy to delete, easy to save, do all communication via email) and one-half preferring regular mail (want it in my hand).
- **Non-traditional students** were slightly more likely to prefer hardcopy (N=6) over electronic (N=4) communications.
- **Teachers/school counselors** do not feel they need more information about CSCU and thought CSCU should focus their communications efforts on the students. They do not want the state to spend money sending expensive brochures to them.

Desired Communications Approach

Representative Verbatim Responses

57

- *"I was looking at a school, and they had one of their representatives come to Starbucks. And I went there, and then we talked, and it was nice to have it face-to-face with somebody. One way to not do it though is through emails, I just disregard them." (T)*
- *"They've just been spamming my inbox. If it's not a school I was looking at, I kind of disregarded them." (T)*
- *"I think that all the emails say pretty much the exact same thing. You're not reading anything different." (T)*
- *"I think getting an actual piece of mail is better than an email, because it gives you like a visual, and it can tell you about the campus or the type of majors they have. I think it's better than an email." (T)*
- *"I would say that's because emails are pretty much the same, like the same content for every school. Actual hardcopy you can see through everything, see what they have to offer, and sometimes the presentation of the brochure and everything makes a difference, and that says a lot about the school. A lot more than an email does." (T)*
- *"I like when they come in and talk to students in my high school. When my guidance counselor tells us that this school will be there if I'm interested in it, I'll go listen and ask questions." (T)*
- *"I don't pay attention to website testimonials. I look at them sometimes, but honestly they kind of make it try and seem like their school is amazing, and they don't really mention the flaws of their school. They just talk about the great things that their school offers." (T)*
- *"As for a letter signed by the president, I would appreciate that if it was like physically signed, not like an electronic copy." (T)*
- *"I just feel like if everybody got the same letter (from the president) but they just changed the first like sentence — I'd just feel like kind of cheated in a way. That's so like, not genuine." (T)*
- *"One of the acceptance letters I got, it just had a little sticky note, and someone wrote like, 'Welcome to the school. You have aspirations,' or something. That was more special than getting a long letter that was just a copy." (T)*
- *"Why waste time with a brochure? Just make sure that if I want some information, I know it's on the website and everything's there." (T/SC)*
- *"I want to be able to go on a website that's user-friendly that has all of the information." (T/SC)*
- *"I guess I'm looking for highlights. We can all go to a website and find out the basic general information, but what sets them apart? What are they doing right now that is, you know, different, unique, innovative?" (T/SC)*
- *"I think I'm better with a book than with a computer. So if I have it there, I can highlight. In the computer it's going to disappear." (NT)*
- *"It's easier to flip back and forth and just like go back and say "What was that on that page over there?" (NT)*
- *"Definitely the email. I will either file that email or discard it. If I get it in the mail, I'm probably going to rip it open quick, toss it." (NT)*

Suggestions to CSCU

58

Participants were asked if there was anything they wanted to suggest CSCU consider as they seek to meet the need of students. We found:

- **Traditional students** and **parents of traditional students** said CSCU needs to create an identity for the colleges and universities whether it be through something fun and social (e.g., UConn's Dairy Bar) or academic specializations so when people hear the name they associate something with the school. They said the universities need to distinguish themselves from each other as well as from other competitors.
- **Parents of traditional students** suggest that CSCU emphasize the opportunity to transfer to UConn and draw students that way.
- **Teachers/school counselors** recommended that the different colleges and universities take a more active role in their communities and create brand awareness by doing so. They also suggested that community colleges looking into offering housing as creating a community along with lower tuition cost would help make the community colleges a more attractive option to the higher cost colleges and universities.
- **Non-traditional students** suggested open houses targeted at their age group as they do not want to visit with high school kids. They also emphasized the importance of friendly and helpful counselors that express a sincere interest in helping them make the college decision.

Suggestions to CSCU

Representative Verbatim Responses

59

- *"I think they need something that stands out to get a student's attention. They all sound kind of bland, so I definitely think there needs to be something special." (T)*
- *"I think they need like a staple. Most colleges have something that they're notoriously known as. Like UConn has the Dairy Bar. I know I was looking at a college in New Hampshire, and they have this thing on Halloween. There's like pumpkins that show up on the tallest building, and nobody knows how it gets there. There's just like things that you need that when somebody mentions it, something pops into your mind right away that you can associate with that college." (T)*
- *"The schools I'm really interested in, they like specialize in one area or another. That doesn't mean they have any less programs everywhere else. It's just they have a particular specialty with a more variety of classes and majors in that area. So maybe offering those sort of classes would make the school appeal more to me." (T)*
- *"What caught my attention with CCSU was using that as a stepping stone to transfer up to UConn. That was kind of an attention-grabber, and I said to my son, 'Hey, do a couple of years at CCSU, and then you transfer up to UConn.' That's kind of a good direction, I think, to head into to get more kids interested." (P)*
- *"I think they need to distinguish themselves (from each other and completion). Their competition is all those other schools. It's UConn. It's Quinnipiac." (P)*
- *"I would say take more of an active role in the community in general wherever they may be located. Trinity College is plastered everywhere. They have their ice skating rink. They offer lessons to the community. If you're interested in going there, they have a sub-station that now has their name on it. They have an Info Café where you can go and use computers, for people in the community. Granted, that's a private college, but still getting out into the community." (T/SC)*
- *"MCC, it just happened to pop up on my Facebook page, that they were having a Saturday two-hour free thing for kids for make-up artistry for theater production, which I never would have known about. Having small kids, I would have done that, but it came up that day. Even just trying to send out information for populations that are not high school age, things that they might be hosting or trying to draw in families, that type of thing." (T/SC)*
- *"And not just a one-time event because that seems like ingenuous, but like something ongoing and them actually impacting the community and not just being this institution where you pay to go and that's your service and then you leave." (T/SC)*
- *"I know they're only community colleges, but housing or even a housing collaboration." (T/SC)*

Suggestions to CSCU

Representative Verbatim Responses (continued)

60

- *“I think a thing that they should have, especially for people in our age range, is like open houses, so we can get a feel for (it). Instead of just having it online or in a brochure, we can just spend like a night going down there and get some firsthand knowledge, and they should advertise that, too.” (NT)*
- *“Maybe even specifically for like our age group. Because sitting through that with kids that are coming out of high school is going to be vastly different.” (NT)*
- *“Counselors. I want some feedback. I don't want to sit there, help me out. Somebody that's there with a smile, because there's a lot of grumpy people working (at colleges).” (NT)*
- *“Definitely what she said. Counselors.” (NT)*