

**Institutional Marketing Approaches,
Student Decision Points,
and Motivational Factors
Affecting Student Decisions
to Participate in Summer Session
and Attend a Particular Institution**

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Introduction

Why do students enroll in Summer Session? What are the most effective ways to market summer programs? When do students decide to enroll? What leads students to particular institutions for their studies? Summer Session directors ask these questions every year. Possible answers are proposed in the offices and halls of our institutions, while assumptions are often made based upon anecdotal information and—far less frequently—upon institution-specific survey findings. Despite the fact that answers to these questions should inform much of what we plan and do, little empirical research has been conducted to seek answers to these and other critical questions to support solid planning efforts. Many program directors and deans lament the lack of resources to adequately explore these issues, yet do not question how their current allocation of resources might be realigned to continually assess student motivations, trends affecting enrollment and patterns in decision-making behavior.

Purpose of Study

This study was designed to answer six major questions:(1) What

are the motivational factors that influence an individual's decision to participate in Summer Session in general? (2) What motivational factors influence an individual's decision to attend Summer Session at a particular institution? (3) How do Summer Session students learn about opportunities to attend Summer Session? (4) At what point during the academic year do students decide to participate in Summer Session? (5) When do students select courses? (6) How do motivational factors affecting Summer Session participation compare between undergraduate students attending a private and a state-supported liberal arts college?

Review of Literature

The literature regarding Summer Session participation and related topics is quite limited. No studies were found that addressed when students make the decision to attend Summer Session or when they make decisions about course selection. A handful of studies were identified that address the concept of motivational factors that affect Summer Session attendance.

Patterson, et al. (1981) explored attitudes and characteristics of students attending Summer Session. They identified several reasons students choose to attend Summer Session at a particular institution, including the number of classes offered, location, and relatively low tuition. They also identified several reasons why students decide to attend Summer Session in general, including the desire to accelerate their academic progress, to make up academic deficiencies, for purposes of enrichment or self-improvement, for professional certification, and to take courses they were unable to schedule during the regular academic year.

Keller (1981) used an instrument consisting of 21 potential influences on student decisions to attend summer session. He included traditional academic reasons as well as non-academic reasons. His findings suggested most students attend Summer Session for the opportunity to accelerate progress toward a degree. Additional reasons included to maintain normal progress toward a degree, prepare more fully in their major field of study, take courses needed for advancement in their profession, or lighten academic load in succeeding semesters. Brook, et al. (1989) found the most frequently reported motivations for registering for Summer Session courses were to speed up degree completion or to ease students' course loads during the regular term.

Chandler and Weller (1995) studied students majoring in business and their motivations to attend Summer Session. This study attempted to identify reasons students attend Summer Session and underlying factors influencing their motivations. Four factors emerged that accounted

for 39.9% of the variance and were labeled “Academic Issues,” “Independence,” “Finances,” and “Summer School Academics.” “Academic Issues” included such reasons as meeting grade standards, gaining admission without meeting regular admissions requirements, meeting prerequisites, repeating classes, graduating on time, or completing a minor or major. “Independence” included getting away from home, avoiding having to work at home, seeing what summer school is like, parents insisted on summer school, and social reasons. “Finances” included reasons such as using up scholarship/grant funds, using up a lease, and graduating early. The fourth factor, “Summer School Academics,” included finishing a class faster, improving grade point average, and lightening academic load during the regular academic year.

White (1999) identified motivations similar to previous studies: to finish a degree early, repeat failed courses, and to decrease course loads in subsequent semesters. Respondents’ attitudes revealed they liked the smaller class size, faster pace, easier access to lecturers and tutors, and the more casual nature of classes. Students disliked the limited subject choices, and some students also disliked the faster pace of Summer Session courses. Taylor and Doane (2003) studied a single motivational variable: the desire to graduate in less than four years. Kowalik (2005) described the development of instruments designed specifically to gather data exploring motivational factors influencing student decisions to attend Summer Session.

These studies, with the exception of Kowalik (2005), use the terms reasons and factors interchangeably. For purposes of this study the two terms are not interchangeable. The term “reason” represents a single variable; that is, a more narrowly defined explanation of motivation and behavior. The term “factor” represents a cluster of related variables that can be useful in identifying conceptual patterns in motivation and behavior. Although the ranked listing of reasons for Summer Session attendance in previous studies has proven helpful to Summer Session administrators, when making decisions students seldom confine their thinking to one or two variables. Their decision-making process involves the consideration of a number of variables. Often these variables can be combined to explain some underlying, unifying concept that can be used to provide a more cohesive or comprehensive explanation of factors that influence their decision. By using exploratory factor analysis, we can reduce the variables into a set of factors that explain underlying connections in decision making.

Design

A multi-dimensional survey was developed to determine how students learn about Summer Session and their decision points. The 42-item *Kowalik-Fish Summer Session Motivation Inventory (KFSSMI)* was utilized to determine reasons for attending Summer Session, while the 29-item *Kowalik-Fish Summer Session Institutional Choice Inventory (KFSSICI)* was used to determine reasons for choosing a particular institution. A variety of questions were also asked to gather demographic data. The instruments were developed through literature reviews, structured interviews and e-mail correspondence with Summer Session directors throughout North America. Focus groups consisting of past Summer Session students and students contemplating attending Summer Session were also utilized, as was a panel of Summer Session administrators, to review the instrument to determine face validity, appeal, understanding and ease of self-administration. A pilot study was conducted with a small random sample of 20 students representing the undergraduate target population to assess initial validity and reliability, administration procedures and overall instrument design. The final survey was administered to a random cluster sample of 373 students enrolled in Summer Session undergraduate liberal arts courses at two Northeastern universities, including 263 students from a mid-sized state institution and 110 from a small private liberal arts university.

Measurements

Simple descriptive statistics, frequency, and item means were performed to determine how students learn about Summer Session and when they decide to participate. Item means for the 5-point Likert format *KFSSMI* and *KFSSICI* were ranked to determine the level of importance particular reasons held in student decisions to attend Summer Session and choose a particular institution. Exploratory factor analysis using orthogonal and oblique rotations was performed to determine factor structures describing student motivations to attend Summer Session in general as well as to attend Summer Session at a particular institution. Solutions ranging from three to 11 factors were examined. Although standard criteria such as Kaiser Criteria and scree tests were considered, the optimal solutions for this study were selected on the basis of conceptual meaningfulness. In both instances, solutions resulting from orthogonal rotation were selected. Data from each institution were also analyzed separately and findings were compared to

determine similarities and differences between students attending a public versus a private university.

Findings and Implications

Demographic Characteristics

Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 55 years and 57.4% were female. Ethnic distribution was as follows: 51.2% were Caucasian, 7.8% black, 7.5% Hispanic, 18.8% Asian or Pacific Islander, 1.1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 6.5% Other, and 7.2% did not identify their ethnic origin. Eighty percent of respondents lived in the same state in which the college was located. Those attending college full-time during the academic year made up 93.2% of the respondents. A large percentage, 86.1%, was matriculated at the institution where they attended Summer Session. Student academic profiles showed 6.6 % had a GPA of less than 2.0, 40.5% had GPAs between 2.0 and 2.9, 48.8% had GPAs between 3.0 and 3.9, 1.9% had a GPA of 4.0, while 1.1% didn't know and 1.1% did not have it available.

Rank-ordered Reasons Students Attend Summer Session in General

The following table displays reasons students attend Summer Session, with comparison rankings for students attending a public institution and those attending a private institution. The table displays an ordered listing of all variables. Variables are ranked by combined scores.

Combined Rank	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Private Rank	Public Rank
1	I wanted to take a course to fulfill degree requirements.	3.82	1.52	2	1
2	Class size is smaller and more intimate in the summer, allowing more interactions between students and instructors.	3.16	1.49	3	3
3	I wanted to improve my GPA.	3.15	1.65	1	6
4	I wanted to finish my academic program in four years.	3.13	1.74	5	2
5	It is easier to learn when I only have to focus on one class.	3.04	1.53	6	5
6	I wanted to take a course that I couldn't fit into the regular academic year.	3.02	1.57	10	4

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Combined Rank	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Private Rank	Public Rank
7	I wanted to take a course to catch up on credits.	2.88	1.73	4	8
8	I was required to do so.	2.74	1.73	7	10
9	I prefer the condensed timeframe of summer classes.	2.68	1.49	9	11
10	I wanted to take a course to complete a prerequisite.	2.64	1.72	24	7
11	I wanted to lighten my course load during the academic year.	2.58	1.54	17	8
12	I retain more in summer with classes everyday.	2.54	1.51	12	12
13	There are fewer people and distractions on campus, and I am able concentrate on class work better in summer.	2.48	1.54	13	13
14	I wanted to learn in a relaxed, informal atmosphere and the environment on campus is less stressful in the summer.	2.37	1.49	8	17
15	Faculty are more flexible and relaxed in the summer.	2.33	1.39	11	16
16	I wanted to take courses to get a second major or minor and still graduate in four years.	2.31	1.63	19	14
17	The summer schedule allows me to have a job while attending classes.	2.22	1.46	20	15
18	I could pick up a job because Summer Session classes are held at the same time every day.	2.17	1.43	21	18
19	I wanted to improve a grade in a course.	2.09	1.54	22	21
20	Courses are easier in the summer.	2.09	1.33	26	20
21	I wanted to get prerequisite courses out of the way to meet graduate or professional school application deadlines.	2.05	1.51	34	19
22	I wanted to graduate early.	2.00	1.49	18	29
23	Homework loads are less in the summer.	1.94	1.25	31	22

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Combined Rank	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Private Rank	Public Rank
24	I wanted to take a specific or unique course offered only in summer.	1.90	1.29	14	25
25	Grading is easier in the summer.	1.87	1.23	36	23
26	I wanted to take a course to make up a failed course.	1.84	1.49	16	29
27	It's less expensive to take courses in the summer.	1.83	1.30	15	30
28	There was nothing better to do during the summer.	1.79	1.28	29	27
29	I can do research with professors in the summer.	1.77	1.26	30	28
30	Summer session courses are offered at reasonable tuition prices.	1.76	1.21	23	33
31	I wanted to see what it is like to take courses in the summer.	1.75	1.20	25	35
32	I couldn't get a job, and I wanted to use my time wisely.	1.74	1.26	35	26
33	I needed to earn summer credits/improve my GPA to maintain my eligibility for athletics or study abroad.	1.73	1.36	27	34
34	I am able to take a course and work with a specific professor.	1.73	1.24	28	32
35	I was seeking personal enrichment not connected to a specific academic program.	1.66	1.15	32	37
36	I decided on a new career, and attending Summer Session was the fastest way to make the move.	1.65	1.21	38	31
37	I wanted to take a course to improve job-related skills.	1.63	1.16	33	38
38	My parents told me to take a course this summer.	1.59	1.16	37	39
39	There are numerous evening courses available during Summer Session.	1.57	1.11	40	36
40	I was seeking professional development not connected to a specific academic program.	1.47	.99	39	40

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Combined Rank	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Private Rank	Public Rank
41	I wanted to get a head start on college before my freshman year.	1.28	.85	41	41
42	I wanted to take a course for college admission.	1.27	.78	42	42

Students attended Summer Session for many reasons, at times accomplishing multiple objectives during a single Summer Session. Utilizing the *KFSSMI*, 42 discrete reasons for attending Summer Session were ranked. A ranking of variables contained in the *KFSSMI* by mean scores based upon student responses demonstrated seven of the top 10 reasons students attend Summer Session were related to sustaining academic progress and improving academic standing, such as, “to fulfill degree requirements,” “to improve my GPA,” or, “to take a course that I couldn’t fit into the regular academic year.” Interestingly, the reasons that did not relate to making academic progress dealt with the unique learning environment afforded by summer studies, including, “class size is smaller and more intimate in the summer,” “it is easier to learn when I only have to focus on one class,” and “I prefer the condensed timeframe of summer classes.” These findings validated results from the few previous studies that identified similar, albeit smaller, lists of reasons affecting student decision-making patterns.

Comparing public university student responses with those of private university students showed some difference in the level of importance certain variables held in the decision to attend Summer Session. Students from both institutions ranked similar variables in the top nine reasons they attend Summer Session. There was considerable difference, however, in how the variable, “I wanted to take a course to complete a prerequisite,” ranked: students attending the private institution ranked it 24th, while students attending the public institution ranked it seventh, perhaps a reflection of difference in prerequisite course availability or overall curricular structure and requirements.

Factor Analysis of Motivational Factors Influencing Student Decisions to Attend Summer Session in General

Using exploratory factor analysis, the *KFSSMI* generated six motivational factors influencing student’s decisions to attend Summer Session, accounting for 52.3% of the variance: “Academic Enrichment and Career Enhancement,” “Summer Learning Environment,” “Perception of Summer Session as Easier,” “Improve Academic Standing,” “Summer as

Academic Semester,” and “Save Money.” Domain intra-item reliability ranged from .41 to .82. Each factor is shown in a table below with its component variables (reasons), loading values (correlations) and scale rank. The table shown below presents the six-factor solution deemed most appropriate for this study. Scree tests showed that anywhere from three to 13 factors could be retained. In an effort to achieve the most parsimonious solution, explaining maximum variance with the fewest and most meaningful number of factors, the six-factor orthogonal solution was chosen. A loading criterion of .50 was used to determine the factor subscales selected for this study.

Variable	Loading Value	Item Mean	KFSSMI Scale Rank
Factor 1: Academic enrichment and career enhancement			
I was seeking professional development not connected to a specific academic program.	.729	1.47	40
I wanted to get a head start on college before my freshman year.	.695	1.28	41
I was seeking personal enrichment not connected to a specific academic program.	.678	1.66	35
I wanted to take a course to improve job-related skills.	.674	1.63	37
I decided on a new career, and attending Summer Session was the fastest way to make the move.	.603	1.65	36
There are numerous evening courses available during Summer Session.	.598	1.57	39
I couldn't get a job, and I wanted to use my time wisely.	.587	1.75	32
I can do research with professors in the summer.	.572	1.77	29
I wanted to take a course for college admission.	.556	1.27	42
I needed to earn summer credits/improve my GPA to maintain my eligibility for athletics or study abroad.	.519	1.73	33
Factor 2: Summer learning environment			
Class size is smaller and more intimate in the summer, allowing more interaction between students and professors.	.797	3.16	2
I retain more in summer with classes every day.	.769	2.54	12
There are fewer people and distractions on campus, and I am able to concentrate on class work better in the summer.	.706	2.48	13
It is easier to learn when I only have to focus on one class.	.697	3.04	5

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Variable	Loading Value	Item Mean	<i>KFSSMI</i> Scale Rank
I could pick up a job because Summer Session classes are held the same time every day.	.681	2.17	18
I prefer the condensed timeframe of summer classes.	.676	2.68	9
The summer schedule allows me to have a job while attending classes.	.660	1.46	17
I wanted to learn in a relaxed, informal atmosphere and the environment on campus is less stressful in the summer.	.642	2.37	14
Faculty are more flexible and relaxed in the summer.	.532	2.33	15
Factor 3: Perception of Summer Session as easier			
Homework loads are less in the summer.	.823	1.94	23
Courses are easier in the summer.	.801	2.09	20
Grading is easier in the summer.	.788	1.87	25
Factor 4: Improve academic standing			
I wanted to take a course to make up a failed course.	.654	1.84	26
I wanted to take a course to catch up on credits.	.639	2.88	7
I wanted to improve a grade in a course.	.545	2.09	19
I wanted to finish my academic program in four years.	.532	3.13	4
I was required to do so.	.521	2.74	8
I wanted to improve my GPA.	.509	3.15	3
Factor 5: Summer as academic semester			
I wanted to take a course to complete a prerequisite.	.664	2.64	10
I wanted to take a course that I couldn't fit into the regular academic year.	.629	3.02	6
I wanted to get prerequisite courses out of the way to meet graduate or professional school application deadlines.	.580	2.05	21
I wanted to take a course to fulfill degree requirements.	.573	3.82	1
Factor 6: Save money			
Summer Session courses are offered at reasonable tuition prices.	.798	1.76	30
It's less expensive to take courses in the summer.	.733	1.83	27

Factor I was labeled “Academic Enrichment and Career Enhancement.” The items loading on this factor appeared to focus on getting ahead and enriching the personal, professional, and academic aspects of student lives. Respondents had a perception that attending Summer Session was a great way to “seek professional development,” “get a head

start on college,” “seek personal enrichment,” “improve job-related skills,” “do research with professors,” “take a course for college admission,” and “earn summer credits/improve GPA.”

Factor 2 was labeled “Summer Learning Environment.” The items loading on this factor appeared to focus on the special qualities and attributes available at most higher education institutions during Summer Session. Respondents recognized that attending Summer Session afforded them a special learning opportunity in a unique learning environment. They were motivated by the “small class sizes,” the opportunity to “retain more in summer with classes every day,” the fact that “there are fewer people and distractions on campus,” “it is easier to learn when they only have to focus on one class,” “faculty are more flexible and relaxed in the summer,” and they could “learn in a relaxed, informal atmosphere.”

Factor 3, the “Perception of Summer Session As Easier” (than other academic semesters) was based in students’ perceptions of “homework loads,” “courses,” and “grading” as easier in the summer than during fall and spring semesters. This perception may be connected to the perception of a better quality learning environment available during Summer Session (see factor two). It bears noting that institutions should discern whether the attributes of their Summer Session learning environment are conducive to learning, thereby making the perception of learning as easier. If, however, students perceive the academic Summer Session as less rigorous than fall and spring semesters, this has significant implications for course design and delivery.

Factor 4 was labeled “Improve Academic Standing” in response to the use of Summer Session as a means to “make up a failed course,” “take a course to catch up on credits,” “improve a grade in a course,” and “to improve GPA.” Utilizing Summer Session in this manner allowed students to strengthen their academic profile at their institution.

“Summer as Academic Semester,” was the label given to Factor 5. Respondents perceived Summer Session as a third academic semester during a 12-month period. They used Summer Session to accomplish educational objectives or requirements usually reserved for fall and spring semesters, such as, “to complete a prerequisite,” to “take a course that I couldn’t fit into the regular academic year,” and “to take a course to fulfill degree requirements.”

Factor 6, labeled “Save Money,” dealt with the economic advantages of enrolling in Summer Session. Respondents believed it would save them money if they attended Summer Session. They felt “courses are offered at reasonable tuition prices,” and “it’s less expensive to take courses in the summer.” It would also allow them to graduate on time, thereby saving the cost of further coursework or deferred earnings.

Reasons Students Attend a Particular Institution for Summer Session

The item means of variables contained within the *Kowalik-Fish Summer Session Institutional Choice Inventory* demonstrated the 10 most significant reasons students attend a particular institution for their summer studies (in descending rank order) are because: (1) they will receive their degree from this institution, (2) they want summer grades to count toward their GPA, (3) they know the campus, (4) the registration process is easy, (5) the institution has a good academic reputation, (6) they don't need to worry about transferring paperwork, (7) they know the professors and their expectations, (8) instructors have a good reputation, (9) they enjoy the campus environment, (10) they can't transfer in distribution requirements from other institutions.

The following table summarizes reasons students choose to attend a particular institution for summer studies, with comparison rankings for students attending a public institution versus a private institution.

Combined Rank	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Private Rank	Public Rank
1	This is the institution from which I will obtain my degree.	3.46	1.65	1	1
2	I want my summer grades to count toward my GPA.	3.42	1.67	2	2
3	I know the campus.	2.87	1.60	3	3
4	Registering for summer classes at this institution is a relatively easy process.	2.69	1.56	6	5
5	This institution has a good reputation for offering a quality education.	2.69	1.56	10	4
6	I am a student here and there is no paperwork to transfer credits if I take the class(es) here.	2.55	1.63	9	6
7	I know the faculty and their expectations.	2.54	1.58	5	8
8	Instructors at this institution have an excellent reputation.	2.47	1.50	8	7
9	This campus is a nice environment.	2.44	1.44	4	9
10	I am a student here and can't transfer courses to meet distribution requirements, so I have to take them here.	2.30	1.61	7	12

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•• Donna M. Fish & Thomas F. Kowalik ••

Combined Rank	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Private Rank	Public Rank
11	The classes are smaller at this institution.	2.29	1.54	11	11
12	This institution has developed a summer schedule that is convenient for me.	2.24	1.42	12	10
13	My friends attend summer classes here.	2.07	1.32	13	14
14	The credits I earn here will be transferable to my university.	2.06	1.59	16	13
15	This institution offers a wide array of summer courses from which to choose.	1.99	1.33	15	17
16	This institution offers a variety of different sessions from which to choose.	1.96	1.27	17	16
17	I have a housing contract that runs through the summer, so I might as well attend here.	1.91	1.44	25	15
18	I registered for courses being offered here that I cannot obtain elsewhere.	1.87	1.35	20	18
19	This institution has an equal number of lab openings and class openings.	1.82	1.28	18	20
20	It is close to my home/my parents live in this area.	1.80	1.39	21	19
21	My friends are not here, and therefore, I can focus on studies.	1.74	1.24	19	23
22	This institution is near my summer employment.	1.73	1.30	23	22
23	Tuition and fees were less expensive at this institution than at others.	1.71	1.23	27	21
24	I like the variety of daytime, evening, weekend, and distance offerings.	1.67	1.14	22	25
25	The courses and grading at this institution are easier than at others.	1.63	1.03	29	24
26	I am trying to make connections to a graduate program.	1.62	1.14	24	26

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Combined Rank	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Private Rank	Public Rank
27	I could get a job on this campus and earn money over the summer.	1.61	1.21	14	27
28	There are job possibilities in the area.	1.46	1.01	28	28
29	One or both of my parents graduated from this institution.	1.41	.97	26	29

Factor Analysis of Motivational Factors Influencing Student Decisions to Attend a Particular Institution for Summer Session

Factor analysis of the data collected with the KFSSICI generated a structure describing four motivational factors influencing students' decisions to attend a particular institution, accounting for 54.1% of the variance: "Institutional quality and responsiveness," "Familiarity with institution," "Convenience," and "Access to summer employment." Domain intra-item reliability ranged from .38 to .79. Each factor is shown in a table below with its component variables (reasons), loading values (correlations) and scale rank. The table presents the four-factor solution deemed most appropriate for this study, although scree tests showed that anywhere from three to 13 factors could be retained. In an effort to achieve the most parsimonious solution, explaining maximum variance with the fewest and most meaningful number of factors, the four-factor orthogonal solution was chosen. A loading criterion of .50 was used to determine the factor subscales selected for this section.

Variable	Loading Value	Item Mean	KFSSMI Scale Rank
Factor 1: Institutional quality and responsiveness			
This institution has a good reputation for offering a quality education.	.792	2.69	5
Instructors at this institution have an excellent reputation.	.790	2.47	8
This institution has developed a summer schedule that is convenient for me.	.748	2.24	12
This institution offers a variety of different sessions from which to choose.	.723	1.96	16
The classes are smaller at this institution.	.713	2.29	11
This institution offers a wide array of summer courses from which to choose.	.666	1.99	15
Registering for summer classes at this institution is a relatively easy process.	.589	2.69	4

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Variable	Loading Value	Item Mean	KFSSMI Scale Rank
This campus is a nice environment.	.557	2.44	9
This institution has an equal number of lab openings and class openings.	.536	1.82	19
Factor 2: Familiarity with institution			
I know the campus.	.739	2.87	4
I am a student here and there is no paperwork to transfer credits if I take the class(es) here.	.737	2.55	6
I know the faculty and their expectations.	.688	2.54	7
This is the institution from which I will obtain my degree.	.674	3.46	1
I am a student here and can't transfer courses to meet distribution requirements, so I have to take them here.	.605	2.30	10
I want my summer class grades to count toward my GPA.	.603	3.42	2
My friends attend summer classes here.	.520	2.07	13
Factor 3: Convenience			
The courses offered and grading at this institution are easier than at others.	.670	1.63	25
I registered for courses being offered here that I cannot obtain elsewhere.	.658	1.87	18
I like the variety of daytime, evening, weekend, and distance offerings.	.630	1.67	24
I am trying to make connections to a graduate program.	.608	1.62	26
The credits I earn here will be transferable to my university.	.577	2.06	14
My friends are not here; therefore, I can focus on studies.	.514	1.74	21
Factor 4: Access to summer employment			
This institution is near my summer employment.	.759	1.73	22
There are job possibilities in the area.	.747	1.46	28
I could get a job on this campus and earn money over the summer.	.711	1.61	27

Factor 1 was labeled “Institutional Quality and Responsiveness.” Respondent perceptions about institutional and faculty quality as well as campus environment were central to this factor. Items such as “this institution has a good reputation for offering a quality education,” “instructors at this institution have an excellent reputation,” and “this campus is a nice environment” clustered in this factor. Perceptions about the level of institutional responsiveness to student needs were also heavily represented in this factor through such indicators as “a summer schedule that is convenient for me,” “the institution offers a

variety of different sessions from which to choose,” and “the institution offers a wide array of summer courses.”

Factor 2, “Familiarity with the Institution,” dealt with the relative importance respondents placed upon knowing the institution. Student comfort with the institution in which they were currently enrolled contributed to student decisions to attend that institution for Summer Session. Respondents felt it was important that they “know the campus, the faculty and their expectations,” and “there is no paperwork to transfer credits.”

Factor 3 was labeled “Convenience.” This factor dealt with issues of personal convenience for the student; for example: “courses offered and grading at this institution are easier than others,” “courses being offered here that I cannot obtain elsewhere,” and “variety of daytime, evening, weekend, and distance offerings.”

The fourth factor, “Access to Summer Employment,” demonstrated how important respondent perceptions were that employment opportunities were available at or near the campus. This factor linked the respondents’ desire to “earn” while they “learn.” Respondents wanted to attend an institution where “the institution is near my summer employment,” “there are job possibilities in the area,” or they “can get a job on this campus.”

How Students Learn about Summer Session

The following chart summarizes the manner in which respondents learned about Summer Session. Percentages are shown for the total population, with a comparative breakdown for students attending a public institution and those attending a private institution.

Student Method of Learning About Summer Session	% of total	Public	Private
Common knowledge	48.2	52.1	40.0
Other students/friends	47.2	47.5	46.4
Print materials campus/postal mail	31.1	27.8	39.1
Brochures/posters on campus	29.2	21.7	47.3
Web	27.1	31.6	16.4
Advisor	14.7	12.9	17.3
Faculty	7.2	4.6	13.6
Academic Standing/Registrar	6.7	3.0	15.5
E-mail	6.7	3.8	13.6
Print ads in campus media	5.6	5.7	5.5
Parent/family	5.6	4.9	7.3
Admissions	4.0	3.8	4.5
TV	2.7	3.8	0.0
Ads in movie theater	2.7	3.0	1.8
HS teacher/guidance counselor	1.9	1.9	1.8
Radio	1.6	2.3	1.6
Print ads in local papers	1.1	1.1	.9

The top methods for learning about Summer Session provide an important window into patterns of student information access and opportunities for more effective communication about Summer Session. Both “Common knowledge” and word-of-mouth from “Other students/friends” were significant sources in both types of institutions. “Print materials,” “Brochures and posters,” and the “Web,” three communication methods that are typically the focus of institutional marketing efforts, were also mentioned among the most common ways students learn about Summer Session.

Responses from students attending the public versus the private institution, however, varied in terms of the respective ranking of several of the information source categories. Students attending the public institution ranked the “Web” as their third most common method to learn about Summer Session. “Print materials” and “Brochure” were ranked fourth and fifth, respectively, for the students at the public institution. Students attending the private institution ranked “Brochures and posters” as the number one method for learning about Summer Session, above “Common knowledge” and “Other students.” They also ranked “Advisor” in the top five sources, while the “Web” was ranked sixth as a means of learning about Summer Session at the private institution.

When Students Make the Decision to Attend Summer Session

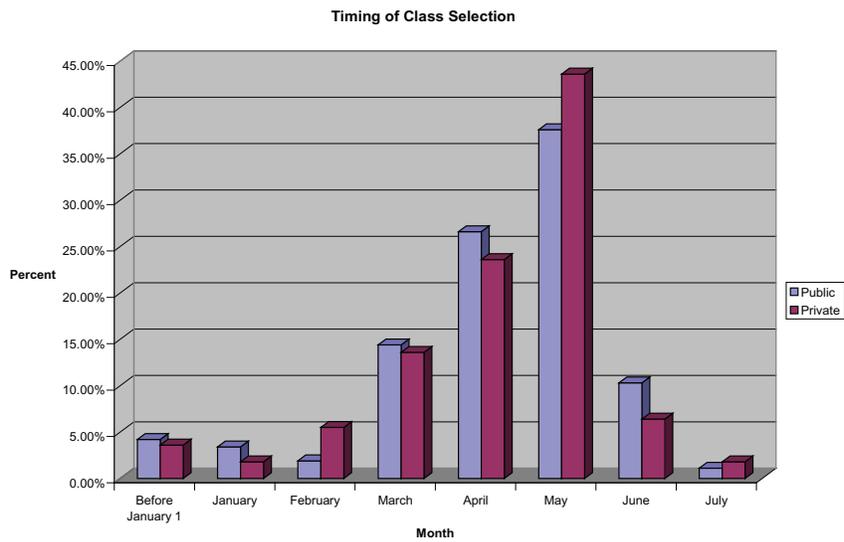
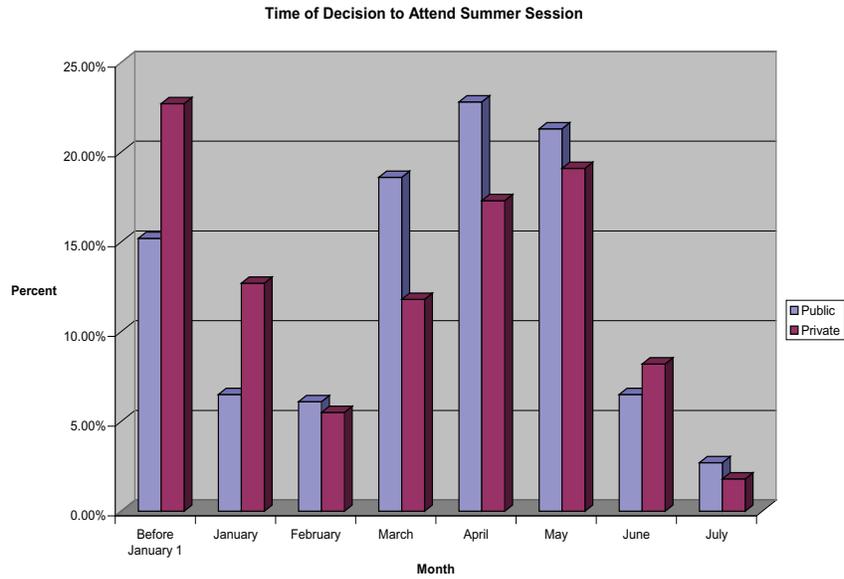
Students made the decision to attend Summer Session throughout the previous academic year. As shown in the following chart, approximately 17% of students indicated they made their decision to attend Summer Session prior to January 1, with the largest percentage making their decision to attend between the months of March and May. Very few students made the decision to attend Summer Session during June and July.

Although the general profile of responses from students at the public and private institutions was similar, it was clear that a larger percentage of students attending the private institution decided to attend Summer Session earlier than their counterparts who attended the public institution, that is, before or during January. A larger percentage of students at the public institution made their decisions to attend Summer Session in March, April or May (see Time of Decision to Attend Summer Session chart).

When Students Make Decisions about Which Class to Take during Summer Session

The second chart below shows comparative data for student decision points for class selection.

•• *Institutional Marketing* ••



Students made decisions about which classes to take during the summer at nearly the same time of year, regardless of their institutional affiliation. A slightly larger percentage of students attending the private institution appeared to choose their Summer Session classes in May, just before Summer Session began. However, comparing the data

profiles indicated the vast majority of students—nearly 80 percent—at both the public and private institution selected their class(es) during the months of March, April, or May, while approximately 40 percent make their decision in May.

Comparing Motivational Factors Affecting Summer Session Participation between Public and Private Institutions

Exploratory factor analysis of the data from the two institutions showed considerable overlap in factor structures, suggesting motivational factors influencing student decisions to attend Summer Session were similar for those attending both private and public institutions. However, some variance was evident in that a six-factor structure emerged for students attending the public institution and a seven-factor structure emerged for those attending the private institution, as evidenced in the factor structures below.

Factor structures resulting from respondents attending a public institution are shown below.

Variable	Loading Value
Factor 1: Getting ahead professionally:	
I was seeking professional development not connected to a specific academic program.	.758
I was seeking personal enrichment not connected to a specific academic program.	.736
I wanted to get a head start on college before my freshman year.	.721
I wanted to take a course to improve job-related skills.	.704
I can do research with professors in the summer.	.619
There are numerous evening courses available during Summer Session.	.574
I decided on a new career, and attending Summer Session was the fastest way to make the move.	.565
I couldn't get a job, and I wanted to use my time wisely.	.559
I wanted to take a course for college admission.	.549
I needed to earn summer credits/improve my GPA to maintain my eligibility for athletics or study abroad.	.538
I wanted to see what it is like to take courses in the summer.	.517
Factor 2: Summer learning environment:	
Class size is smaller and more intimate in the summer, allowing more interaction between students and professors.	.741
I retain more in summer with classes every day.	.733
The summer schedule allows me to have a job while attending classes.	.730
I could pick up a job because Summer Session classes are held the same time every day.	.704

(table continued on text page)

•• *Institutional Marketing* ••

Variable	Loading Value
It is easier to learn when I only have to focus on one class.	.675
There are fewer people and distractions on campus, and I am able to concentrate on class work better in the summer.	.665
I prefer the condensed timeframe of summer classes.	.649
I wanted to learn in a relaxed, informal atmosphere and the environment on campus is less stressful in the summer.	.629
Factor 3: Perception of Summer Session as easier:	
Homework loads are less in the summer.	.808
Courses are easier in summer.	.775
Grading is easier in the summer.	.748
Faculty are more flexible and relaxed in the summer.	.516
Factor 4: Improve academic standing:	
I wanted to take a course to make up a failed course.	.669
I wanted to improve a grade in a course.	.651
I wanted to improve my GPA.	.523
I wanted to take a course to catch up on credits.	.521
Factor 5: Summer as academic semester:	
I wanted to take a course to complete a prerequisite.	.640
I wanted to get prerequisite courses out of the way to meet graduate or professional school application deadlines.	.625
I wanted to take a course that I couldn't fit into the regular academic year.	.603
I was required to do so.	.518
Factor 6: Balance multiple academic goals:	
I wanted to finish my academic program in four years.	.599
I wanted to take extra courses to get a second major or minor and still graduate in four years.	.593
I wanted to lighten my course load during the academic year.	.547

Factor structures resulting from respondents attending a private institution are shown below.

Variable	Loading Value
Factor 1: Summer learning environment:	
Class size is smaller and more intimate in summer allowing more interaction between students and professors.	.893
I retain more in summer with classes every day.	.863
There are fewer people and distractions on campus, and I am able to concentrate on class work better in the summer.	.793
I prefer the condensed timeframe of summer classes.	.782
I wanted to learn in a relaxed, informal atmosphere and the environment on campus is less stressful in the summer.	.778
It is easier to learn when I only have to focus on one class.	.745
Faculty are more flexible and relaxed in the summer.	.744

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Variable	Loading Value
I wanted to improve my GPA.	.647
I wanted to take a specific or unique course offered only in the summer.	.525
Factor 2: Perception of Summer Session as easier:	
Grading is easier in the summer.	.840
Homework loads are less in the summer.	.815
Courses are easier in summer.	.777
I wanted to take a course for college admission.	.664
Factor 3: Save money:	
Summer session courses are offered at reasonable tuition prices.	.764
It's less expensive to take courses in the summer.	.759
Factor 4: Academic enrichment & career enhancement:	
I wanted to take a course to improve job-related skills.	.748
I was seeking professional development not connected to a specific academic program.	.525
I am able to take a course and work with a specific professor.	.518
Factor 5: Complete prerequisites:	
I wanted to take a course to complete a prerequisite.	.695
I wanted to take a course that I couldn't fit into the regular academic year.	.657
I wanted to get prerequisite courses out of way to meet graduate or professional school application deadlines.	.600
Factor 6: Productive use of summer (or "nothing else to do"):	
My parents told me to take a course this summer.	.719
I couldn't get a job, and I wanted to use my time wisely.	.664
I needed to earn summer credits/improve my GPA to maintain my eligibility for athletics or study abroad.	.560
Factor 7: Earn money while learning :	
The summer schedule allows me to have a job while attending classes.	.762
I could pick up a job because Summer Session classes are held the same time every day.	.713
There are numerous evening courses available during Summer Session.	.601
I wanted to get a head start on college before my freshman year.	.524

Students attending the public institution appeared to be more focused on using Summer Session to “Get Ahead Professionally,” and “Balance Multiple Academic Goals.” Students attending the private institution perceived the value of Summer Session as a productive use of their time during the summer and an opportunity to “Earn Money While Learning.”

**Comparing Motivational Factors Affecting
the Decision to Attend a Particular Institution**

Comparative analysis of the data from the two institutions showed considerable overlap in factor structures, suggesting motivational factors influencing student decisions to attend a particular institution for summer studies were similar for those attending both private and public institutions. A four-factor structure emerged for students attending the public institution and a five-factor structure emerged for those attending the private institution. However, a number of differences also emerged, demonstrating different emphases between public and private institution student populations on some factors, as shown in the factor structures below.

Factor structures resulting from respondents attending a public institution are shown here.

Variable	Loading Value
Factor 1: Quality of institution:	
This institution has a good reputation for offering a quality education.	.794
Instructors at this institution have an excellent reputation.	.771
The institution has developed a summer schedule that is convenient for me.	.751
This institution offers a variety of different sessions from which to choose.	.697
The classes are smaller at this institution.	.644
Registering for summer classes at this institution is a relatively easy process.	.617
This institution offers a wide array of summer courses from which to choose.	.615
This campus is a nice environment.	.559
Factor 2: Convenience:	
The courses and grading at this institution are easier than at others.	.669
I am trying to make connections to a graduate program.	.652
I like the variety of daytime, evening, weekend, and distance offerings.	.631
One or both of my parents graduated from this institution.	.616
I registered for courses being offered here that I cannot obtain elsewhere.	.607
The credits I earn here will be transferable to my university.	.586
My friends are not here; therefore, I can focus on studies.	.567
This institution has an equal number of lab openings and class openings.	.516

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Variable	Loading Value
Factor 3: Familiarity:	
I am a student here and there is no paperwork to transfer credits if I take the class(es) here.	.748
I know the campus.	.732
This is the same institution from which I will obtain my degree.	.693
I know the faculty and their expectations.	.665
I am a student here and can't transfer courses to meet distribution requirements, so I have to take them here.	.621
I want my summer grades to count toward my GPA.	.580
I have a housing contract that runs through the summer, so I might as well attend here.	.533
Factor 4: Access to summer employment:	
This institution is near my summer employment.	.770
There are job possibilities in the area.	.763
I could get a job on this campus and earn money over the summer.	.714

Factor structures resulting from respondents attending a private institution are as follows.

Variable	Loading Value
Factor 1: Familiarity:	
I know the campus.	.802
I know the faculty and their expectations.	.792
I want my summer class grades to count toward my GPA.	.673
My friends attend summer classes here.	.669
This is the institution from which I will obtain my degree.	.669
I am a student here and there is no paperwork to transfer credits if I take the class(es) here.	.656
This campus is a nice environment.	.637
Registering for summer classes at this institution is a relatively easy process.	.562
I am a student here and can't transfer courses to meet distribution requirements, so I have to take them here.	.549
Factor 2: Quality of institution:	
This institution offers a wide array of summer courses from which to choose.	.835
This institution offers a variety of different sessions from which to choose.	.796
This institution has a good reputation for offering a quality education.	.777
Instructors at this institution have an excellent reputation.	.751
The classes are smaller at this institution.	.748
This institution has developed a summer schedule that is convenient for me.	.722
This institution has an equal number of lab openings and class openings.	.562

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•• *Institutional Marketing* ••

Variable	Loading Value
Factor 3: Earn or save money:	
This institution is near my summer employment.	.791
There are job possibilities in the area.	.766
I am trying to make connections to a graduate program.	.667
I could get a job on this campus and earn money over the summer.	.663
I have a housing contract that runs through the summer, so I might as well attend here.	.645
It is close to my home/my parents live in this area.	.510
Factor 4: Course availability:	
I registered for courses being offered here that I cannot obtain elsewhere.	.744
I like the variety of daytime, evening, weekend, and distance offerings.	.672
Factor 5: Improve GPA without distractions:	
My friends are not here, and therefore, I can focus on studies.	.813
The courses and grading at this institution are easier than at others.	.689
Tuition and fees were less expensive at this institution than at others.	.520

For students attending a public institution, “Quality of the Institution,” accounted for the greatest amount of variance. For students attending a private institution, “Familiarity” (with the institution) was most heavily weighted. “Convenience” and “Access to Summer Employment” were factors that played a larger role in public university student decisions to attend Summer Session, yet these factors were not as prominent for students attending the private institution. Students at the private university were more heavily influenced by such variables as those represented in factors labeled, “Earn or Save Money,” “Course Availability,” and “Improve GPA Without Distractions.”

Discussion

We started with six major questions that provided the impetus for this study: (1) Why do students attend Summer Session? (2) Why do they select a particular institution? (3) How do they learn about Summer Session? (4) When do they decide to attend? (5) When do they select courses? (6) Are the motives different for students attending private versus public liberal arts institutions?

The resulting answers to these questions have implications across several levels of the institution. Perhaps most importantly, they suggest an opportunity to provide an integrative third academic semester to support the institution’s mission through enhanced delivery of appro-

priate curricular programming and services, as well as communication of these opportunities. As noted throughout the tables, the factors that emerged clustered around issues of quality, familiarity, enrichment, career enhancement, convenience, getting ahead, and cost, among others—themes not unlike what attracts our students to our institutions in the first place. The results also showed that items loaded across multiple factors, demonstrating the interrelationship of many of the factors in influencing student decision making.

On a pragmatic level, the methods, inventories and findings in this study provide mechanisms by which Summer Session directors and deans can periodically assess the culture and environment within which they are working, thereby having greater opportunities to shape and influence them both. Summer Session directors may use their understanding of the factors influencing student decisions to attend Summer Session to develop rich learning environments that are attractive to greater numbers of students. Knowing the complex motives and goals that contribute to student decision making can serve as a catalyst for campus-wide discussions of how the vision for Summer Session can contribute to meeting the institution's larger mission and goals. It can likewise inform conversations about campus policies, procedures or cultural issues that can be reviewed and perhaps reworked to develop more seamless connections and services across all sessions.

Our findings emphasize the importance of collaboration across all dimensions of the institution in more closely integrating and aligning Summer Session with the institution's mission and goals. The finding that some students know well in advance that summer studies will be a part of their academic plan suggests opportunities to market summer as an attractive option in meeting goals for accelerated study, double majors, study abroad, and other student challenges. Students can meet these goals through many institutions beyond their own, so the challenge becomes one of creating avenues to support the issues students identified as important factors in their decision making: perceptions of ease, quality, familiarity, variety, unique opportunities, enrichment, opportunities to learn and earn, ability to meet prerequisites, save money, make productive use of their summer, improve their academic standing or get ahead.

Beyond working with departments to enlist the best faculty and provide support for innovative course development, formats and teaching methods, there are opportunities to bring together registrar, housing, student accounts, facilities and many other functions to support these issues and themes. Efforts can be made to coordinate all campus summer job opportunities to give preference to Summer Session students. All offices can be advocates and advisors on behalf of student attendance in

Summer Session, not just faculty advisors. Student goals for accelerated studies, independent research with close faculty guidance, improving their GPAs or studying abroad can be supported through carefully crafted offerings and supportive services. Academic-year matriculants who wish to store their belongings over the summer can be accommodated so as to encourage staying on for summer courses. A truly service-oriented campus community can reinforce the perceptions of quality, opportunity, value, ease, familiarity, and other characteristics that shape students' decisions to attend Summer Session in general as well as to choose that particular institution.

In addition to service implications, the factors and decision-making patterns identified in this study likewise have marketing implications. Campuses can assess whether they may generalize these findings to their own circumstances, or adapt the methodology for tailored studies of their campus culture, but several themes bear exploration. The results regarding the timing of decision making suggest that there is great opportunity to influence student decisions to participate in Summer Session in general well before students select their particular courses. Every opportunity should likewise be explored to make the availability of Summer Session common knowledge, emphasize the unique learning opportunities, demonstrate the value added through attendance and create an image where Summer Session is *the* place to be, rather than a place to be avoided.

All university personnel can be enlisted to share information on Summer Session as a normal part of helping students to plan their academic, experiential, financial, career and other goals. Similarly, both the institution's matriculated students and those who are being sought from the external market can be provided with information on the services which create ease both in access and the ability to accomplish their goals. Our findings suggest that assumptions should not be made about the efficacy of particular marketing methods without careful and regular study to ascertain the response rate to various media. Word-of-mouth, advisors, print, and a variety of other methods appear to still carry significant weight in some cases in addition to the increasing influence of Web and more high-tech methods of reaching students.

Understanding the timing of decisions to select a specific course also ensures directors have complete course listings and schedules available when students are ready to make their decisions. If academic units are not currently providing course information in a timely fashion, Summer Session directors may use findings from this research or studies on their campus to determine the most appropriate course-building timeline.

Our final question attempted to determine if students attending a

public liberal arts institution were influenced by different motivational factors than students attending a private liberal arts institution. As noted, there was considerable overlap between both of these student groups. Differences that emerged may have been due to institutional attributes such as culture and policies rather than more generalizable differences among students. For example, the private institution referred students to Summer Session if their academic progress or performance was low; at the public university, this policy did not exist. Therefore students learned about Summer Session in different ways at the two institutions. Also, at the private institution there was a history of strong and effective marketing using print-based materials with less student use of the Summer Session website. At the public institution, policies reducing the availability of print materials had forced students and the Summer Session office to rely more heavily on Web-based materials. In both of these scenarios institutional culture and policy appeared to shape student responses.

As with any study of this nature, there are possible limitations on how one can generalize the findings. The institutions in this study were both located in the Northeast, had student populations in the small to mid-size range, and the study was conducted in a one-year time frame. There were also limits on the sample size for the study. Future studies that provide analysis across multiple types of campuses, collect larger data sets across a longer time period and sample institutions across a variety of regions would provide even richer opportunities for analysis and applicability across a wide spectrum of campuses.

Conclusion

At many institutions Summer Session has evolved through a series of iterations of purpose. Historically, these purposes have often ranged from better utilization of physical plant, enhancement of institutional resources, and opportunities for student academic recovery and retention, to opportunities for curricular innovation, faculty-student research, and unique learning opportunities. Yet only on a few campuses has this evolution resulted from purposive strategic planning and research-based analyses that both inform and shape the role that Summer Session can and should play in helping the institution meet its mission.

Our findings suggest that the same rigor that is applied to enacting an institutional mission through careful program building, course development, faculty support, integrative student services, support for retention and marketing of strengths during the academic year, of course, also applies to efforts in summer. Although this may be intuitive,

it is not always reflected in the structures, services and efforts that are dedicated to Summer Session at many institutions.

This study focused on developing mechanisms and instruments that can be utilized at a variety of institutions to find the underlying variables affecting student motivations. By filling a large void in the research concerning Summer Session and approaching questions dealing with student decision making, this study provides insight into how students most readily learn about Summer Session, when they decide to attend and select courses, and what factors influence their decisions to participate in Summer Session. With this knowledge in hand, directors and deans can move to the next level of analysis of curriculum, services, policies and related issues, allowing a greater focus on building and delivering programming that meets the diverse needs and goals of students.

These findings reinforce the importance of regular study and analysis of student needs and motives. There is simply no substitute for systematic research that regularly informs us of the evolving needs and motives of our constituents. It can serve as the basis to not only inform our efforts in Summer Session, but also to collaborate more effectively with our colleagues across campus and across sessions to meet larger institutional goals.

Summer Session directors and deans may choose to administer the *Kowalik-Fish Summer Session Inventories* as part of their research efforts or in combination with their own Summer Session survey. Periodic assessment of the trends that shape student decision-making patterns supports continual refinement of course offerings, marketing, and supportive services, as well as enhancement of the overall academic program. We can continue to improve our service to students and more closely meet our institutional mission through ongoing efforts to understand student motives and the role that Summer Sessions can play in support of institutional and student goals.

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