

## RMS Case Study 174 - COLLEGE

**Background:** In order to assess and continually track student satisfaction, a local college commissioned Research & Marketing Strategies (RMS) to conduct marketing research. The focus of the study was on a sampling of students (each new fall and spring semester) who are both a first-time college student as well as a newly enrolled student at the college. The college wanted a better understanding of their enrollment management services. Particularly, the college was interested in learning about admissions/enrollment, financial aid, class withdrawal, advisement, and registration. Overall satisfaction ratings would be obtained along with satisfaction ratings of each of the five subject areas previously listed.

**Methodology:** RMS developed a 7- to 10-minute telephone survey script for the student calls. With enrollment at a college heavily weighted towards the fall semester, RMS designed a methodology that would obtain approximately 500 completes in the fall surveying and 125 for the spring surveying. The research was intended to be longitudinal in order to compare results over time and monitor satisfaction with each of the five designated subject areas. Due to the profile of a fall applicant differing greatly from those of a spring applicant, results would be compared among fall semesters year to year and spring semesters year to year.

**Findings:** From the research, the college learned:

- Nearly 100% of students rated their experience with the college as good or satisfactory so far.
- Among the satisfaction measures tested, students were least satisfied with the wait time at the service counter (*over 23% reported fair or poor wait times*).
- A significant number of students submitted their financial aid applications within a month or less prior to the start of classes. Cross-tabs revealed that those who submitted their applications early (*four months or more prior to the start of classes*) tended to be somewhat less satisfied with the timeliness of the process than those who had done them at the last minute. Students actually reported that the financial aid department actually worked harder for those submitting last minute when compared to those who were proactive and submitted paperwork early.

**Results:** The College has completed the work for three continuous cycles and has been able to monitor results with students. The longitudinal study allowed the college to examine changes in opinions and satisfaction rating and make the necessary corrections to processes in real-time. The findings regarding the financial aid process were particularly interesting to the college's management team. Therefore, from this research, they commissioned RMS to complete additional qualitative research to probe into the issues regarding financial aid with students. The combination of the satisfaction work and the in-depth follow-up on key issues placed the local college as an industry example on how to use marketing research and act on it.