Hampshire College

A Marketing Opportunity and Image Analysis

Volume IV: Executive Summary & Strategic Recommendations

Maguire Associates, Inc.
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Section I:
Introduction
INTRODUCTION

A team from Maguire Associates has worked with administrators and faculty members at Hampshire College over a period of eight months, conducting research that will enable the College to have a clearer understanding of how it is perceived by some of its most important constituencies. These include prospective students and their parents, admitted students (both enrolling and non-enrolling), faculty, staff and current students.

In order to make recommendations leading to optimal enrollment, the research sought to:

- explore the image of Hampshire College among potential students and parents as they make decisions about educational opportunities;

- profile the needs, characteristics and preferences of prospective students;

- compare this data to that collected from admitted students;

- validate or challenge student expectations with the perspectives shared by those on campus;

- develop an effective means of targeting market segments of importance to the College;

- analyze students' perceptions of Hampshire vis-a-vis its primary
competitors; and

- suggest strategies for student recruitment and college-wide recommendations on the basis of research results.

Volumes I, II and III describe in detail the univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses of the research conducted with 559 students from Hampshire's inquiry pool in June, 1997. Those volumes also summarize data collected from the parents of prospective students, as well as faculty, staff and currently-enrolled Hampshire students. Further analysis of the Admitted Student Questionnaire (ASQ) has been reported in Volume III.

The purpose of this volume is to summarize the most important findings of earlier reports and to translate these findings into strategies. The recommendations offered in this report are designed to inform the College's strategic planning and marketing efforts, to provide the building blocks of a strong recruitment program and to increase the conversion rate of inquiries to applicants -- thus providing an even stronger pool of candidates from which Admissions staff can construct a freshman class.

In making the recommendations outlined in this report, the Maguire Associates team drew upon the following, in addition to the research conducted for the College:

- background information and publications provided by the Hampshire community;

- on-campus interviews with faculty, administrators and students conducted by Maguire Associates' staff;
• experience gained by members of the Maguire Associates' research team in their own work as enrollment managers and as consultants to colleges and universities across the country; and

• Maguire Associates' cumulative research database, which provides a context within which to analyze Hampshire data.

The question that guides this final report is "Given the necessary time and resources, how can experienced enrollment managers use this research gathered from Hampshire's constituencies to advance the College's enrollment goals?" The answers span the practical and the theoretical, with responsibility resting in many administrative areas throughout the College.

In an effort to organize and synthesize the research findings uncovered for the College, this report has been divided into four sections:

• **Image Development**
• **Target Marketing**
• **Competitive Positioning**
• **Enrollment Management**

The recommendations in this report are based on the belief that it is the cumulative effect of many sound policies, strategies and procedures, informed by research, that yields desired enrollment goals. No single idea or suggestion will necessarily impact goals dramatically; but action taken on many recommendations will prove to be very effective. This report seeks to identify many areas in which small gains can be made.

While many important issues will be addressed in this document, the staff
at Hampshire is encouraged to return to the rich source of information provided in the first three volumes to probe additional questions as they arise. At the conclusion of this project, the data disk will be sent to the College to allow for further analysis on campus.
PROFILE OF THE OVERALL SAMPLE

The research on which this report is based was conducted with 559 students from Hampshire College's inquiry pool. This sample presents the following profile:

- 23% are more likely to apply to Hampshire, while 16% are unsure of their application intentions, 26% are least likely to apply, and 35% are unfamiliar with the College;
- Primarily female (70%);
- Somewhat diverse ethnically (72% white, 9% Black/African-American, 5% Asian, 8% Hispanic/Latino, 5% mixed race and 2% other);
- Geographically dispersed (16% Massachusetts, 12% New York, 10% Connecticut)
- 31% report family incomes over $60,000;
- Expect to apply for financial aid (87%);
- Typically attend a public high school (76%);
- Cite potential majors in biology (9%), psychology or English (both 7%), and medicine/pre-med (6%);
- 55% rank in the top 10% of their high school class; SAT I scores average 1219;
- 66% plan to study beyond the baccalaureate level, 33% are undecided;
- Prefer enrollment sizes of 2,000 or less students (38%); and
- Hope to attend a college or university in a suburban setting (55%).
Section II:
Image Development
IMAGE DEVELOPMENT

By engaging in studies of its crucial constituencies – prospective students and parents, current faculty, staff and students, and accepted students -- Hampshire College has sought to identify the most important and desirable elements of a college or university. Beyond desirability, the research seeks to determine which of Hampshire’s distinctive features are most compelling to prospective students and what most powerfully influences students’ decisions to apply to, and enroll at, the College. The analysis of this extensive data regarding Hampshire’s image necessitates categorization that may seem to contradict the College’s aspirations for a seamless merging of its academic and community life dimensions. Hopefully, after dissection, all these dimensions will flow together again.

The categories used to explore Hampshire’s image are suggested by a review of a variety of factor analyses conducted on the data. The college characteristics and descriptions, rated in general for importance and desirability and then for Hampshire quality and fit, have been considered within the context of the following dimensions. Research summaries and recommendations for image development have been categorized as follows:

- Hampshire’s Distinctive Features
- Academic Image
- Community Ethos
- Affordability and Value

The data from prospective students and parents, and from admitted
students, is based on large enough samples to yield reliable data. The information from current Hampshire faculty, staff and students is not as reliable, given the self-selection of respondents and the relatively small sample sizes (54 faculty and staff and 36 current students). Nonetheless, the insights provided by these groups are of great value to this study, adding balance and perspective that would not be available without them.

HAMPShIRE'S DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

It is abundantly clear from this data that Hampshire College occupies a perceived niche in the minds of its inquirers, some of whom know the school very well, and others only slightly. While many schools – particularly liberal arts colleges – have to cope with vague, undifferentiated images such as “good school” and “small school,” more than a third of Hampshire inquirers make top-of-mind associations with the College that include independent, freedom, different, unconventional and innovative. When asked about the good things they know or have heard about Hampshire, students are notably specific, including a third of the sample who cite design your own major and coursework as a feature of the College, and others who mention independence, less structure, different and no grades. A question regarding negative aspects of Hampshire elicits comments about too much freedom, unstructured and not enough discipline.

The concerns inquirers raise about Hampshire initially are verified when they are asked why they choose not to apply to the College. Their responses include the lack of structure in the curriculum, that the school just “doesn’t fit” them, that it is too far away, or that it does not have their major.

The tested characteristic that is most readily associated with Hampshire College is the ability to create individualized programs of study. While this feature receives the highest quality rating for Hampshire, the level of importance inquirers attach to it varies tremendously. More-likely applicants rank this
among their top ten considerations in selecting a college or university, whereas less-likely applicants attach a very modest degree of importance to this feature. This characteristic is also significantly more important to enrolling students than to those who were admitted to Hampshire, but will matriculate elsewhere. When asked for the single, most-important reason for selecting Hampshire, almost half the enrolling students cite self-structured curriculum.

A number of college descriptions that were selected for testing capture some of the distinctiveness of Hampshire. Many of them ultimately end up "loading" on the Academic Freedom desirability factor, which is correlated with likelihood of applying. Close scrutiny of these descriptions provides some insights for developing effective marketing messages for Hampshire. For instance, Description A, which refers to a college that gives new meaning to the term "academic freedom", encouraging students to develop their own program of study and shape their college experience, is the scenario most closely associated with Hampshire. This is also true when comparisons with the competition set are analyzed. Students feel this describes Hampshire better than Bard, Sarah Lawrence, Oberlin, Vassar or Skidmore.

While Scenario A enjoys a strong fit to Hampshire, it is not rated among the most desired statements by students overall – ranking in the bottom third. More-likely applicants prize the scenario among their top four, however, while unsure applicants vote more closely with the less-likely applicant group. This description also receives high fit ratings for Hampshire from current students, faculty and staff. All this indicates a message that has integrity, but little appeal beyond those who are already "converted."

Another description that enjoys strong identification with Hampshire is one that portrays a school where students build a portfolio that tracks intellectual and creative growth throughout their undergraduate years (P). Ranked 11th out of 21 descriptions for desirability, this concept is significantly
more appealing to likely-applicants, inquirers who are interested in smaller schools, and enrolling students than to their counterparts. Faculty, staff and current students assign strong desirability and fit ratings, and Statement P is associated most readily with Hampshire, among the schools in the competition set.

Faculty, staff and current students appear to be very aware of the advantages of membership in a five-college consortium (F), and obviously give Hampshire high fit ratings on that scenario. Inquirers associate Hampshire with a consortium, certainly more so than the other schools in the competition set, but attach a moderate level of desirability to the description. There is an opportunity here to market the consortium even more effectively than Hampshire is presently doing.

Additional possibilities for enhanced marketing are the concepts of a teaching philosophy that challenges students with unsolved problems (U) and a school that students experience as if it were a graduate school, challenging mentors and working as far as they choose (N). Statement U is particularly appealing to more-likely applicants, to both sets of accepted students and to faculty and staff. The fit to Hampshire is generally strong among these groups, and the statement is seen by inquirers as a more apt description of Hampshire than of Bard or Sarah Lawrence, and equal to Oberlin, Vassar and Skidmore. Statement N enjoys a higher desirability than fit-to-Hampshire rating among this group of inquirers. Current students are most emphatic about their interest in this "like a graduate school" concept, yet they (along with faculty and staff) do not assign very strong fit ratings to Hampshire. Fit ratings among the competition set are statistically similar, indicating that none of these schools have staked out this niche in the minds of inquirers.

Student reactions to two scenarios send mixed signals about how to portray Hampshire. The description of a school where without the pressure
of grades or tests, students must invent their own pressure to discipline themselves (J) yields the lowest desirability ratings overall from inquirers. Likely applicants are not as critical of the concept as are less-likely and unsure applicants. While enrolling students rate the desirability of this statement much higher than non-enrolling students, faculty, staff and current students rank it among the least desirable. Fit ratings, on the other hand, are higher than desirability ratings. Hampshire beats all other schools in the competition set on this description.

The other statement that students find lacking in appeal is one that describes a school that offers a demanding curriculum, yet is far from mainstream and the students admit that it isn't suited to everyone (H). Again, likely applicants find this more desirable, but even their response is lackluster. Unsure applicants lean closer toward the less-likely applicants' lower rating on this. The most enthusiastic ratings come from current students. Both faculty/staff and current student groups agree that this statement is a good fit to Hampshire, a sentiment shared by inquirers and accepted students. Inquirers see this scenario as a closer fit to Hampshire than to Bard, Sarah Lawrence or Oberlin, yet equal in fit to Vassar and Skidmore. Some of these findings may have to do with small sample size minimizing significant differences.

CHAID analyses for both admitted students and inquirers uncover some important insights regarding the desirability and fit of some of these descriptions. Among those admitted, the number of enrolling students increases from 43% to 62% among students who assign the highest possible desirability rating to the concept of inventing their own pressure to discipline themselves (J). Even if students assign moderate ratings to this, along with highest ratings to a school that offers a demanding curriculum, yet is far from mainstream (H), the representation of enrolling students jumps from 43% to 53%.
Among inquirers, a CHAID analysis reveals that the number of more-likely applicants grows from 36% to 69% among students who assign the highest desirability rating to Statement J. A CHAID fit analysis further indicates that strong ratings for Statements F (five-college consortium), Q (students are prepared to adapt to rapid social change) and J (no tests or grades) cause the representation of likely applicants to increase from 37% to 65%.

This overview of Hampshire’s distinctive features highlights the importance of taking the analysis of data to the next level of sophistication. Simply relying on desirability or importance ratings might lead to the elimination of some messages that ultimately serve to identify the students who are most inclined toward Hampshire. They perhaps should not be “main messages” in initial recruitment literature, but should be introduced as the student becomes more familiar with the College and may be useful in qualifying inquiries.

The following are recommendations that are suggested by the research outlined in this section. They will be elaborated on throughout the report.

- Review carefully the analysis of “distinctively Hampshire” themes that are summarized in this report when crafting recruitment publications and presentations.

Much of the data here can be construed as contradictory and requires careful analysis to determine which audiences should hear what theme when. The current Hampshire publications have obviously been quite effective, given the readily recognized Hampshire messages documented in the research. In constructing a flow of communications, the operant strategy should be to
maximize opportunities to reach the most appropriate candidates for Hampshire at each stage of the selection process.

- **Continue to use the bold approach of identifying who should not apply to Hampshire in Student Search and other outreach mailings.**

While some may view this approach as risky, it can be supported by the research. It is not enough to know Hampshire as a different academic experience; one also has to want Hampshire and that experience. A process that gives broad exposure to these educational concepts, but at the same time tries to winnow down the masses to those prospective students who most resonate with the concepts, makes sense.

- **Develop, through anecdotes, a more comprehensive portrayal of the five-college consortium and the advantages it offers Hampshire students.**

Consortium stories should be told by students and faculty alike. Those students who value a broader social life, or wider variety of courses, should understand that the consortium makes this possible, while still allowing one to choose the distinctive educational environment of Hampshire. The concept of a consortium may be recognized by inquirers, without going any deeper to detect possible personal benefits. An established consortium such as the one in Amherst deserves to play an even larger role than it does in Hampshire’s communication strategy.
• Work on positioning Hampshire as an undergraduate institution that is particularly well suited to being viewed "like a graduate school."

This is a concept that is received well among inquirers, yet is not strongly identified with any of the schools tested. The sense of independence and freedom already associated with Hampshire must be joined with images of high standards and academic challenge in order to position the image of the College distinctively along these lines.

**ACADEMIC IMAGE**

In importance factor analysis, the factor named *Academic Reputation* identifies most of the characteristics that will be probed in this section, including academic rigor, challenge of academic programs, academic reputation, preparation for graduate/professional school, selective admissions, academic facilities, living in an intellectual environment, quality of faculty, academic advising and undergraduate research opportunities. Interestingly, the variable that emerges as the single most important to students, quality of area of concentration, does not "load" on any importance factors, but is clustered on the *Academic Reputation* factor for quality of Hampshire.

Because of its enormous importance to prospective students, it is appropriate to begin with an analysis of quality of area of concentration. Faculty, staff and current students also attach great importance to this variable, although it does not dominate their interests. They rate the quality of Hampshire on this characteristic as somewhat mediocre. Prospective students,
on the other hand, differ dramatically in their perceptions of Hampshire's quality in this area. More-likely applicants indicate extremely high expectations, while less-likely applicants assign one of their lowest Hampshire quality ratings to quality of area of concentration.

CHAID analysis verifies this by determining that, among students who assign the quality of area of concentration at Hampshire their highest quality rating, the percentage of likely applicants increases from 37% to 67%. By contrast, a low-to-neutral rating for this variable causes yield to drop to 14% and then further to 2%, if similar ratings are assigned to challenge of academic programs. The data clearly points to this as an important area for Hampshire to address in its marketing messages.

Many faculty and staff at colleges and universities express skepticism at students' focus on specific academic areas early in their college search, given the propensity observed for changing academic interests often, once in college. Recruitment efforts simply must take these interests seriously, however, in order to be effective. Only 7% of the inquirers in this study claim that they are undecided about their major field of study. Almost one-third cite majors/programs/courses as their primary reason for selecting their first-choice school. These stated inclinations must be honored with appropriate responses.

The variable challenge of academic programs emerges as the number one priority of Hampshire faculty, staff and current students, and is also prized equally by more-likely and less-likely-to-apply inquirers. While most of these groups give Hampshire strong quality ratings for this feature, the less-likely and unsure applicants are simply not as convinced that this is a clear asset of the College. If it has the internal validity it appears to have, this concept must be conveyed more effectively.
Two characteristics that receive very high importance ratings from prospective students are **academic facilities** and **quality of faculty**. Both receive quality ratings that are among Hampshire’s best, but tepid. More-likely applicants indicate significantly higher expectations in both areas than do less-likely applicants. **Quality of faculty** is of special importance to the parents surveyed and of great importance to accepted students, as well as to faculty, staff and current students. The highest Hampshire quality ratings for this variable are assigned by enrolling students and more-likely applicants; faculty, staff and current students give the faculty at Hampshire solid, but unenthusiastic ratings.

The perceptions of **academic facilities** at Hampshire raise some serious concerns. While the quality ratings from prospective students are not strong, they are complimentary compared to the ratings of faculty, staff and current students -- who view this variable as quite important, but Hampshire’s quality on it as dismal. Those on campus assign some of their lowest quality ratings to **academic facilities**, pointing to what may be a significant discrepancy between expectations of prospective students and the reality of what the College has to offer. In fact, a comparison of current student quality ratings on this variable with how they would have rated Hampshire as high school seniors uncovers almost a full point difference between what was anticipated and what has been experienced. This is the only variable for which such a gap was found. It is not uncommon, overall, for those on campus to be harsher critics of facilities than less-knowledgeable inquirers; but this feedback is dramatic.

The characteristic **academic reputation** emerges as an interesting feature, based on the varying levels of importance different groups attach to it. It is significantly more important to less-likely applicants than to more-likely applicants, to non-enrolling than to enrolling students, and to faculty and staff than to current students. No group assigns particularly high quality ratings to Hampshire for this variable; more-likely applicants are the most generous. The
College’s academic reputation is generally viewed by admitted students as “very good,” with enrolling students rating the quality significantly higher than those who do not plan to enroll.

One of the more intriguing findings in the inquiry study is the apparent disconnection between students’ stated educational aspirations and their ratings for the characteristic preparation for graduate and professional school. An unusually high number of inquirers (both likely- and less-likely applicants) in this sample (41%) plan to pursue a doctoral degree. Another 25% are aiming for a master’s or professional degree. While one-third are as yet undecided about their educational goals, less than 1% plan to complete their education at the bachelor’s level. Yet, when asked to evaluate the importance of preparation for graduate and professional school, inquirers assign ratings just barely in the top-half of their priorities. Likely applicants are particularly singled out for the lack of importance they attach to this feature. Parents of inquirers indicate the greatest interest in this variable; admitted students, faculty, staff and current students all assign it moderate importance ratings.

Despite their lack of strong interest, more-likely applicants rate Hampshire’s quality of preparation for graduate and professional school significantly higher than do less-likely applicants. This is also true for enrolling versus non-enrolling students. Faculty and staff rank Hampshire’s quality on this variable higher than current students do, and appear to be the group that is most confident about the College’s strength in this area.

A number of characteristics – academic rigor, living in an intellectual environment, and academic advising – rank in the second tier of importance variables for inquirers overall, but are seen as more important for some subgroups than for others. Academic advising is more important to less-likely and unsure applicants than to their peers, and is ranked much higher in importance by faculty and staff than by current students. Both groups on
campus assign moderate Hampshire quality ratings to this variable; more-likely applicants are, once again, more inclined to expect high quality in this area.

Inquirers who are likely to apply to Hampshire rank the importance of living in an intellectual environment higher than do students overall, but generally this does not seem to be a major issue among the groups surveyed. Academic rigor is a characteristic that appears to be more important to non-enrolling students than to any other subgroup; enrolling students assign higher Hampshire quality ratings to that variable, however. It is notable that those surveyed appear to make a sizeable distinction between the concepts of academic rigor and challenge of academic programs, placing much greater stock in the latter than the former.

Three characteristics – selective admissions, reputation of graduates, and undergraduate research opportunities – are also among inquirers’ lower-ranked priorities, with the first two viewed as appreciably less important than the last. More-likely applicants are more convinced about the quality of Hampshire’s undergraduate research opportunities than less-likely and unsure applicants are. Faculty and staff, however, assign some of their highest quality ratings to this feature – identifying an area that has credibility on campus and may be able to find a larger audience off campus. Selective admissions is a concept in which few participants express much interest. However, it is current students who assign the lowest Hampshire quality rating of all groups to this variable. Among the groups surveyed, non-enrolling students and faculty/staff attach the highest importance ratings to reputation of graduates. Highest quality ratings for this variable are assigned by faculty/staff and more-likely applicants.

In addition to individual characteristics that are related to Hampshire’s academic image, important insights emerge from an in-depth look at the college descriptions that cluster on the Academic Challenge desirability factor. Often,
these more complex scenarios evoke clarifying responses to image issues. Four descriptions, far ranging in their desirability and levels of fit to Hampshire, will be considered in this section.

The description that elicits the highest desirability rating from prospective students is one that refers to a school where there is much interaction with professors, both inside and outside the classroom...discussion and independent thinking are encouraged...professors are available to talk about coursework and other subjects (I). Happily for Hampshire, this scenario also receives high fit ratings for the College, from inquirers and from both enrolling and non-enrolling admitted students. Faculty, staff and current students also find the statement very desirable and assign solid fit ratings to it. This emerges as a consensus statement; its spirit should be a cornerstone of marketing messages. Unfortunately, the description does not distinguish Hampshire within its competition set; all schools in the set receive similar fit ratings to Statement I.

Another description that receives very high desirability ratings portrays a college where there is an academic atmosphere which energizes students to work hard and grow tremendously; students leave with much greater intellectual and social maturity than when they entered (G). Again, Hampshire receives good fit ratings among inquirers and among both sets of admitted students, although enrolling students rate the College as a substantially stronger fit than do non-enrolling students. CHAID analysis indicates that, among admitted students who assign their highest fit-to-Hampshire rating to this statement, the representation of enrolling students increases from 43% to 56%. Current students show some hesitancy about Hampshire’s fit to this description, assigning a rating that is closer to less-likely applicants than to faculty and staff or more-likely applicants. As was true with Statement I, this description does not give Hampshire any competitive advantage within the competition set.
The qualities outlined in Statements G and I have proven highly desirable over and over in studies Maguire Associates has conducted. Hampshire would be well-served to develop examples of how these qualities and outcomes are part of the education it offers to students.

In general, inquirers assign relatively high desirability ratings to the description of a school where students work hard and play hard; students are very serious about learning and the social scene is very active (D). Less-likely applicants rank this as higher in desirability than more-likely applicants and both sets of admitted students assign Statement D higher desirability ratings than likely applicants. All fit ratings are modest, with enrolling students providing the highest assessment of Hampshire’s fit to this scenario. Current students indicate that they expected Hampshire to be a much better fit to Statement D when they were high school seniors than they assess the fit now, having experienced campus life. Among the competition set, no one school stands out as being identified with Statement D.

Finally, the statement describing an institution that is challenging and the students are competitive; where one works very hard and is rewarded with a high quality education (K) receives relatively low desirability ratings and comparably low fit-to-Hampshire ratings. Faculty, staff and current students generally concur with inquirers on both sets of ratings. Current students recall finding this statement more desirable in high school than they do now. Statement K is more closely associated by inquirers with Vassar and Oberlin than it is with Hampshire.

Few observers would disagree that Hampshire must be true to its heritage by emphasizing, celebrating and enhancing its distinctive approach to education. It must be vigilant, however, in improving areas that are valued as more common attributes of a collegiate education. Students may select an educational
"alternative," but they still bring high expectations for quality and service.

The analysis of variables related to academic image yields a rich set of messages to be emphasized and issues to be addressed at Hampshire. Among them are the following:

- **Enlighten all involved in marketing Hampshire about the very significant role that "quality of area of concentration" plays in the college selection process.**

One of the great advantages of market research is that it can occasionally lay to rest some debates about what is and is not important in decision making. In research conducted by Maguire Associates for colleges across the country, students are remarkably consistent in this finding: in selecting a college or university, they attach their highest priority to the quality of their academic area of interest. While Hampshire inquirers, and particularly likely applicants, differ in other priorities, on this issue they align themselves with previously-established norms.

This finding presents itself as more of a challenge to Hampshire, however, than to other institutions. Without academic departments and majors, a different language must be employed to convey the College's academic offerings. It is very important to meet prospective students on their own ground when discussing academic programs, interpreting for them the Hampshire way of approaching the study of their intended discipline.

- **Continue to respond in a timely and thorough way to inquirers' requests for information about academic areas of interest.**
Materials sent in response to anonymous inquiry to Hampshire and selected competitors indicate that Hampshire shines in terms of responding to specific requests early in the inquiry process. While the publications about academic areas are not particularly polished, they are informative. The staff at Hampshire showed that they were attentive to the stated information needs of the inquirer. The next step would be a follow-up procedure, driven by academic area of interest, that would further clarify a student's interest in the College.

• Capture the tone and balance of Statements G and I in Hampshire publications, correspondence and presentations.

The images conveyed in these descriptions transcend strict "academic versus campus life" categories and are therefore very appropriate to be developed at Hampshire. They speak to the hoped-for outcomes of a college education using values-driven, rather than strictly pragmatic, criteria. A customization of these sentiments, exemplified on campus at Hampshire, could set the foundation of an image development campaign. Faculty, staff and students can be challenged to come up with examples of how students have "grown tremendously" at Hampshire. Profiles of students and faculty working together on topics of common interest help to "flesh out" and validate the expectations students have of a school that espouses Hampshire's philosophy of education.

• Create a long-term plan for the improvement of academic facilities at Hampshire.

The research suggests that, along with attracting and retaining excellent faculty members, the improvement of academic facilities
must be the primary focus of resource allocations. The quality of academic facilities is a priority for all audiences surveyed. Prospective students are willing to give Hampshire the benefit of the doubt in this area; those on campus are not. Students, especially more-likely applicants, are not particularly demanding of amenities. Academic facilities, however, appear to be essentially linked to their sense of an institution's academic quality. People need the right tools in order to be held accountable for excellence in their teaching and learning.

- **Work on testimonials that describe how students are challenged academically at Hampshire.**

The concept of academic challenge at Hampshire seems understood and verified by those on campus and by inquirers who are inclined to apply. Other audiences may need this more clearly articulated. Some may assume that no grades and no tests intuitively leads to no challenge. The deeper way in which Hampshire students experience academic challenge and the high expectations faculty have for scholarship deserve to be conveyed.

- **Ensure that the climate and policies at Hampshire support the selection and retention of highly-qualified and talented faculty.**

An institution that espouses the educational goals that Hampshire does engenders high expectations on the part of students. This is probably even more pronounced when it comes to expectations of faculty. Documentation indicating student expectations for accessible, high-quality faculty who will guide them through their years at Hampshire is plentiful. This places tremendous responsibility on faculty members, who must balance student
contact with research, writing and teaching. Faculty members must feel that respect for and contact with students are values that are shared and rewarded by the institution.

- **Expand messages that reinforce images of student-faculty rapport at Hampshire and detail the availability of research opportunities.**

Although students associate Hampshire with providing access to faculty that is not restricted to in-class learning, the connection to enhanced research opportunities is not necessarily made. The faculty and staff's positive evaluation of research opportunities at Hampshire must be made explicit to students by communicating examples of student-faculty research projects. Profile these partnerships in publications, and go beyond the people-focus by listing a range of research studies and the extent to which students are responsible for them.

- **Promote the accomplishments of Hampshire faculty and their students through both internal and external publications.**

In addition to brief faculty biographies and vignettes in recruitment literature, profile students and faculty together -- describing how they met, the work they have done and the influence they have had on each other. Select diverse students with accomplishments in a variety of areas -- not only the academic stars. Seek broad audiences for these and other stories about Hampshire faculty in the local and national media. Nominate faculty for recognition beyond campus.
• **Convey Hampshire's unique ability to prepare students for graduate or professional school.**

Even if this does not appear to be a top priority of prospective students, Hampshire should develop its reputation in this area, given the aspirations of its inquirers and its claim to offer an academic experience “like graduate school.” This, by necessity, is a College-wide effort, involving administrators who track statistics on graduate school placement, and both administrators and faculty who communicate with graduates and pass vital information along to a central information clearinghouse. This should be the procedure for information about both graduate school and employment outcomes of a Hampshire education.

• **Ensure that faculty members are provided with the best available information on current students, enabling them to provide helpful academic advice.**

It is particularly important in an academic environment such as Hampshire’s for faculty advisors to have an accessible and current overview of a student’s progress towards his/her degree from Hampshire. This provides an academic “safety net” and helps to assure that student needs do not go unmet. Academic advising is traditionally an important concern of parents; they should be able to be assured that this is a strength of Hampshire’s.
CAMPUS ETHOS

This section is designed to examine those characteristics and descriptions that combine to create a certain “feel” or sentiment to a campus. Despite their own category, they cannot be easily separated from the academic spirit and ambience, nor from the features that make up the distinctive nature of a school like Hampshire. The characteristics to be probed here are suggested by two themes in the importance factor analysis – Accessibility and Campus Atmosphere.

The variable campus atmosphere receives strong importance ratings from inquirers – slightly higher from less-likely than from likely applicants – as well as from parents, faculty, staff and current students. More-likely applicants rank campus atmosphere among their top five quality ratings for Hampshire, while less-likely applicants rank this feature in the bottom half of their ratings. Current students and faculty/staff rate Hampshire’s quality on this variable among their lowest, indicating that the high expectations of likely-applicants may not be met. This gap does not bode well for retention and bears further investigation.

Another characteristic that is important to inquirers, faculty, staff and current students is close contact with faculty. Here there is consensus on quality at Hampshire, as well as on importance, making this a feature of the College that can be heralded to prospective students.

Quality of students is a variable that enjoys solid importance ratings from all constituencies, yet is assigned Hampshire quality ratings that are much higher from likely applicants than from those less inclined to apply, and remarkably lower from current students than from faculty and staff. Again, findings from current students (and faculty/staff) must be interpreted
cautiously, given the limited sample size and self-selection of those groups, but this identifies a concern that should be addressed.

More-likely applicants split from their less-likely counterparts on the importance of the quality of on-campus housing. This variable is significantly less important to the former than to the latter, with whom unsure applicants side. Current students rank this feature as more important than do faculty and staff. Inquirer ratings are mediocre for the quality of on-campus housing at Hampshire; faculty, staff and current student ratings are notably low. In order to broaden its appeal beyond already-interested students, improving housing quality on campus may have to be considered.

Interestingly, small class size, a feature that is prized by more-likely applicants, faculty, staff and current students, and that receives very strong quality-of-Hampshire ratings, is not particularly important to less-likely applicants. Access to a city, on the other hand, is more important to less-likely and unsure applicants than to any other subgroups. Ethnic diversity of student body is generally viewed as low in importance and in quality at Hampshire, although non-enrolling students view this variable as significantly more important than do enrolling students.

Inquirers rank access to cultural and social events ahead of social life and outdoor recreation activities on a scale of what is important to them. Although faculty, staff and current students give Hampshire substantial credit for outdoor recreation activities, this strength is not readily recognized by prospective students. Based on the ratings of faculty and staff, Hampshire probably has more to offer in terms of access to cultural and social events than less-likely students realize. Current students are more generous in their ratings (though not significantly so) of social life at Hampshire than faculty and staff are; enrolling students also rate this higher than non-enrolling students.

Two final variables in this section call for further attention. One is the
physical appearance of campus, which is ranked low in importance by most constituencies, but also very low in quality by current students, faculty and staff. In fact, both more- and less-likely applicants rate Hampshire’s quality on this variable higher than those on campus. These findings invite some serious questions about the wisdom of encouraging campus visits. The other variable may raise a related issue. Inquirers and those on campus attach a modest degree of importance to a sense of campus community. Hampshire quality ratings from prospective students are moderate, and enrolling students rate Hampshire higher than non-enrolling students. But Hampshire students and faculty/staff assign particularly low quality ratings to sense of campus community. Some of these messages carry a cautionary tone about the advisability of using on-campus events to encourage student interest in the College.

The issues raised by the ratings of these two variables present an opportunity to explore a question asked of inquirers regarding whether or not they had visited Hampshire’s campus. The 74 students (21%) who had visited were then asked to rate their general impression of the overall environment at Hampshire. On a scale where 5 = very favorable and 1 = very unfavorable, only 15% of the students rated their impressions as very favorable, while 63% of the visitors rated their impressions a ‘3’ or ‘4’. All the students who assigned a rating of ‘2’ to their impressions of the environment are among those least likely to apply to Hampshire.

The Campus Community desirability factor includes a number of scenarios whose desirability and fit to Hampshire will be analyzed to determine effective marketing messages. Many of the same issues that emerge among the characteristics are echoed in these college descriptions.

Among the most desirable descriptions tested is one that was based on a conversation with current students at Hampshire. In the course of a focus group
on campus, a young woman spoke passionately about "loving education because she was able to study what she loved." This comment led to the creation of Statement S: **Students at this institution find deeper meaning in their studies than just getting a degree. Students and faculty believe that if you incorporate what you love into your education, it will help you love your education.** Unbeknownst to the person who inspired this statement, it turns out to be a "winner" of a description for Hampshire College. Not only is it highly desirable, it is also seen as a very strong fit to Hampshire. The desirability and fit ratings from campus groups are also high, yielding a description that is both appealing and credible. Perhaps most importantly, Statement S is clearly associated with Hampshire – receiving higher fit ratings than all other schools in the competition set. The sentiments captured by this statement can be configured into truly a "signature" statement for the institution.

A theme that appears in Hampshire's recruitment literature was also tested, with favorable results. It refers to a college where students are **encouraged to explore how to put their learning to good use in the world, through careers or professions and in the way they live (M).** This description receives high desirability ratings from inquirers and a solid identification with Hampshire (more so for likely applicants than for those less inclined to apply). Faculty, staff and current students are even more emphatically drawn to Statement M, although more-likely applicants and current students rate fit-to-Hampshire with greater conviction than less-likely applicants and faculty/staff do. The faculty/staff ratings raise some questions. Why do current students believe this about Hampshire more than faculty and staff do? The substance of the statement appears to be supported by profiles and anecdotes in Hampshire's literature. A review of competition set ratings indicates that Statement M is similarly identified with all the schools, yielding no immediate competitive advantage for Hampshire.

Two scenarios, referring to a sense of community and togetherness, are
among the descriptions that are desirable to prospective students, but not strongly associated with Hampshire. Inquirers attach high desirability ratings to Statement O, which describes **a strong sense of community among the students at this institution and, on an informal level, between the students and faculty; college events are attended by faculty, students and staff**, but assign mediocre ratings for fit-to-Hampshire. Faculty, staff and current students concur with inquirers' high desirability ratings, but suggest that fit to Hampshire is even lower than prospective students evaluate it to be. Faculty and staff assign Statement O their lowest fit rating of all the descriptions.

The other scenario, referring to an institution where students can easily relate to most other students and there is a common feeling of togetherness from almost the first week of freshman year (T), follows a similar pattern to Statement O. The description is desirable to both inquirers and accepted students, yet fit-to-Hampshire ratings are low. In fact, enrolling students assign their only fit rating under '4' to this statement, indicating that despite their enthusiasm for this concept, they do not expect to find it at Hampshire. CHAID analysis on admitted student data shows that when the highest fit ratings are assigned to Hampshire for Statement G (**an academic atmosphere which energizes students to work hard and grow tremendously**) and good, but not best, ratings are given Statement T, the representation of enrolling students increases from 43% to 74%.

Faculty, staff and current students do not rank Statement T among their most desired descriptions, but still give decent desirability ratings to it. Their fit-to-Hampshire ratings, however, are very low. Current students assign their lowest fit rating of all to Statement T. Their expectations as high school seniors that Hampshire would fit this description dramatically exceeded the reality they have experienced. Inquirers give similar fit ratings for Statement T to all schools in the competition set, indicating that their expectations may not be easily met at any school.
Statement B describes an institution where students develop genuine concern for social justice, respect for the value of work well done, and a sense of ethical behavior. Faculty, staff and admitted students find this description significantly more desirable than do inquirers, among whom less-likely applicants rank it higher than those who are more likely to apply. The fit ratings for Hampshire are similar among these groups, as well as among admitted students. This description is assigned similar fit ratings for all schools in the competition set.

Finally, the description of an institution where community, cooperation and collaboration are emphasized, and every effort is made to reduce competitive pressures in the learning process (R) emerges among the least desirable descriptions rated by inquirers. Current students, faculty and staff find it more desirable than inquirers do, yet rate fit-to-Hampshire lower than prospective students (particularly those likely to apply) do. Among the competition set, Statement R is viewed as fitting Hampshire better than Bard, Oberlin or Vassar.

The concerns raised in this section have serious implications for both recruitment and retention at Hampshire. With few exceptions, the high expectations that students bring to campus will inevitably yield some sense of disappointment in the environment that apparently exists on campus. To minimize potential problems, it will be important to accurately assess the campus climate, to change for the better what can be changed, and to portray the atmosphere on campus as accurately as possible to prospective students. Some recommendations to consider include:

- Consider undertaking a comprehensive retention study that will clarify some of the issues raised by current students, faculty and staff in this image study.
The role campus-based constituents play in this research is that of supplementing external impressions with internal ones, and pointing to differences that may create a gap between prospective student expectations and reality. While there is rarely full agreement in perceptions, occasionally this exercise evokes strong messages that should not be ignored. This is the case with Hampshire. A certain amount of grousing is acceptable on campuses; if it is serious enough to contribute to student attrition, however, it must be addressed. The elements that define a sense of community, an atmosphere, or a campus ethos must be reviewed and maybe even re-defined at Hampshire, to minimize dissatisfaction with the institution.

- **Incorporate the sentiments captured by Statement S into Hampshire recruitment messages.**

The concept of learning what you love and then loving your education is filled with the same passion that is part of many conversations at Hampshire. This “homegrown” description sets Hampshire apart from other schools in a very positive way. It should be used to portray the depth and emotionality that often accompany intellectual and personal growth.

- **Continue to emphasize examples of how Hampshire students “put their learning to good use in the world.”**

This is an appealing idea to prospective students that is already quite well developed in College publications. It is a theme that may find a receptive audience if advertised in progressive and socially-conscious periodicals and other mass communication vehicles.
• Emphasize to prospective students the availability of social and cultural events in the greater Amherst area.

Inquirers may not realize that the close proximity of five colleges to one another makes a variety of social and cultural opportunities available that are usually only possible in a city. Faculty and staff at Hampshire appear to endorse this concept.

• Explore objectively the quality of on-campus housing at Hampshire compared with competitors and commit to making strategic improvements where necessary.

Reports like this one on student opinions could easily lead to a long list of recommended campus improvements. Priorities for resources need to be set, however. While on-campus housing receives relatively low quality ratings from campus respondents, it does not emerge as a priority for any groups except the less-likely and unsure applicants. Enhancing housing should not, therefore, divert funds from areas that are more important (like academic facilities), but improvements should be made so that housing does not become an impediment to students' interest in Hampshire.

• Probe reactions of visitors to campus more deeply, going beyond feedback about campus appearance and Admissions-associated activities.

The Admissions Office does’ survey visiting prospective students about the quality of their visit to campus. Include on these surveys some questions about how current students respond to visitors, what sense they get of interaction on campus, and what the overall “feel” of the campus can be described as, to help clarify some of their
reactions to their visit experience.

**AFFORDABILITY AND VALUE**

Few concerns occupy the minds of enrollment managers more than the challenges of making their institutions affordable to the students they most hope to attract, and of conveying the value of their college or university to the families that will sacrifice to enroll their son or daughter. The data gathered to shed light on these particular issues for Hampshire comes from inquirers and their parents and, perhaps most significantly, from admitted students.

Parents of inquirers were asked to identify their main considerations as they explored higher education for their children. **Majors, programs and courses** top their list, followed closely by **total costs**. Over 80% of the parents and students interviewed said that the family would be applying for financial aid, with 73% of the parents expecting their child to receive some amount of **merit-based aid** or **scholarship**. **Cost** is a concern raised by both parents and inquirers when asked about negative aspects of Hampshire College. The rate of response is typical of what is usually seen in research for private institutions.

A number of characteristics group together in factor analysis on the factor labeled **Affordability**. When evaluated individually, **value of education** emerges as the most important variable of the group, followed by **employment opportunities after graduation, availability of financial aid to meet need, total costs** and **merit-based scholarships**. It is important to note that the variable **value of education** "loads" on the **Affordability** importance factor and on both the **Affordability** and **Academic Reputation** quality factors. All loadings are on the lower end of the scale, but the double loading does indicate that students relate the concept of value to both academic quality and cost.
Both more-likely and less-likely applicants place the same degree of importance on these variables, except for availability of financial aid to meet need, which is somewhat more important to less-likely applicants, and employment opportunities after graduation, which is remarkably less important to more-likely applicants. Faculty, staff and current students rank the importance of financial aid very high, but tend to de-emphasize the importance of employment opportunities after graduation.

Hampshire enjoys few high quality ratings for these characteristics, a predictable finding among many private schools, but a liability nonetheless. Value of education is rated highest in quality among these affordability variables, with total costs and merit-based scholarships ranked among the lowest of the Hampshire quality ratings. Of particular concern, however, are the low quality ratings assigned by inquirers, parents, faculty, staff and current students for the important variable availability of financial aid to meet need.

The discrepancies between more- and less-likely applicants present a challenge in terms of recommended strategy for employment opportunities after graduation. The quality ratings for this characteristic are equivalent to the importance placed on it by all but less-likely and unsure applicants. Although it does not appear to be a top priority for those on campus, this area needs some attention in order to attract a broader audience. Given limited resources, the question remains, how much should be dedicated to this goal?

When non-enrolling students are asked to state their most important reason for not attending Hampshire College, cost (cited by over one-third) dominates the responses. CHAID analysis succinctly portrays the role a number of variables play in an accepted student's decision to enroll at Hampshire. Among accepted students who assign Hampshire their highest quality ratings for value for the price and parents' preference, the
representation of enrolling students increases from 43% to 84%. Even among those who assess value for the price at Hampshire as neutral, the percentage of enrolling students jumps (from 43% to 62%) if students rate cost of attendance anything but their lowest quality rating, and availability of majors of interest to you their highest rating. If, on the other hand, students are unconvinced about Hampshire’s value for the price (rating it “low” or “very low” quality), the representation of enrolling students drops to 25%.

Pricing and financial aid strategies are critical for all colleges and universities in the competitive arena of higher education. As part of this research project, an analysis of financial aid and enrollment data from Hampshire’s applicant pool for September, 1997 is being conducted by Maguire Associates. Results, including suggestions for more strategic allocations of Hampshire funds, will be reported separately to the College. The pricing analysis conducted among parents of inquirers gives some insight into what parents expect to pay at Hampshire ($16,480) and at their child’s first-choice school ($14,503). After factoring in what parents consider too expensive and too inexpensive for a college education, the “range of acceptable prices” for Hampshire is $11,508 to $13,954, and the range for first-choice schools is $11,091 to $13,344.

The following recommendations are made based on the research findings outlined here, and on the experience of these consultants:

• Reinforce the concept of the value of a Hampshire education when addressing audiences of prospective students and their families.

Students and parents in this study appear to recognize that Hampshire offers good, but not exceptional, educational value. Themes that should be tied to value include the distinctive
opportunity to create one's own program of study, the close collaboration of faculty and students, and the challenge to use freedom creatively and responsibly. The value in Hampshire's education must be initially defined by its distinctive qualities, and then bolstered by tangible assurances that important academic qualities are not "traded off" for Hampshire's novel approach to education.

- **Set Hampshire's tuition in strategic relation to the College's top competitors.**

Given the proliferation of rankings and comparisons of institutions in the popular press, decision-makers at Hampshire must "see the school as the public sees it" when determining tuition. The distinction of being among the "most expensive schools in the country" is not one that will necessarily enhance Hampshire's image. It may also set up expectations for amenities that are not priorities on campus, and give students an easy mark about which to complain.

- **Enhance prospective students' awareness of, and appreciation for, the commitment Hampshire makes to financial aid by creatively marketing scholarships and grants.**

Hampshire allocates a tremendous amount of resources to financial aid, yet is not necessarily recognized for that among its inquirers. In order to maximize the benefits of financial aid, it must be promoted at a point when it can influence a student's decision to apply. This may mean more "named" scholarship opportunities focussed at groups of students who are of particular interest to the College. The most common scholarships to be promoted in this way are merit-
based awards, but this strategy can also be employed with need-based funds.
• Emphasize the concept of net cost from the outset of a family’s search for the right college or university.

On many levels, it is apparent that Hampshire’s inquirers are inclined to anticipate financial assistance from the College. The **Affordability** factor for importance is led by students' perceptions of the **availability of financial aid to meet need**, followed by **total costs** and **merit-based** aid. This is an opportunity to reinforce messages about the College’s commitment to making a Hampshire education affordable and to mitigate some concerns about "sticker price."

• **Create the most cost-effective and professional career services program possible at Hampshire.**

Prospective students are split on their expectations of employment opportunities following graduation and perhaps the role a college should play in that. While it may not be necessary for Hampshire to create a world-class operation, it is important for all students to get the message that the College is concerned about, and positioned to assist with, their transition to the world of work. Reliable statistics on, and listings of, job opportunities; workshops on job search skills; and accurate listings of alumni by field of employment are all reasonable expectations for students and parents to have of a career center.

• **Develop a method and schedule for cross-training between the offices of Admission and Financial Aid.**

Families at the inquiry level seek general information about financial
assistance programs. They also want to learn all they can about the process of applying for assistance. At this early point, families are not expecting much more than general guidance as they face the challenge of deciding whether the institutions they want to consider will be affordable.

Counselors in both admissions and financial aid should become qualified to address these general needs. Cross-training is likely to have many positive outcomes -- but the potential impact on the cultivation of the inquiry pool is the most substantial.
Section III:
Target Marketing
TARGET MARKETING

The previous section highlights a series of themes that form the building blocks of Hampshire’s image. They were defined by identifying the messages that capture both the College’s most distinctive qualities and the strongest preferences expressed by inquirers overall. While the themes of image development ideally help a school to reach a broader, yet well-matched, audience, analysis targeted at specific subgroups yields information that will clarify messages to particularly important constituencies.

The research was segmented in several ways to unearth the many divergences in opinion masked by the aggregate findings. From these sets of data, three subgroups of students emerge as having rich and interesting differences within each. Along with parents of prospective students, who were studied in a separate but coordinated survey, these subgroups have been selected for closer scrutiny in this section of the report. They are:

- Likely and unsure applicants
- Higher-scoring candidates
- Students drawn to smaller schools
- Parents of prospective students

Targeted strategies directed to these audiences can be also be adjusted as needed for other groups of interest to Hampshire (defined perhaps by gender or family income), by drawing upon the segmented data in Volumes I and II of the research findings.

— Maguire Associates  •  November 1997 —
LIKELY AND UNSURE APPLICANTS

One of the most important questions asked of inquirers in this research is "How likely is it that you will apply to Hampshire College?" Responses indicate that 23% of the inquirers are among the more likely to apply and 16% are unsure of their application intentions. These two groups of students represent Hampshire's strongest opportunity to convert inquirers to applicants. Even if only half the students who claim that they are likely to apply actually did, Hampshire's current inquiry conversion rate of 9% would increase. The unsure group provides an important glimpse into what may cause some hesitancy in a student's decision to apply to Hampshire.

There are surprisingly few demographic variables that distinguish more-likely applicants, or those unsure of their application intentions, from the overall sample. This makes traditional recruitment of these groups challenging, for there is no immediately obvious geographic location, type of school, or area of study that appears to yield a disproportionate number of likely applicants for Hampshire. Among the very few demographic clues are the following:

♦ Catholic students are significantly less represented among more-likely Hampshire applicants than in the sample overall;
♦ Likely applicants include a higher representation of students ranked between the top 25-50% of their high school class; and
♦ A higher percentage of likely applicants have fathers who have graduate or professional degrees than is true for the overall sample.

It is in the area of personal preferences, however, that these likely and unsure students distinguish themselves within the group studied. On ideal enrollment size, for example, more-likely Hampshire applicants are
disproportionately represented among students who prefer enrollments of **1200 or under**. In a departure from what Maguire Associates typically sees in studies of this nature, likely applicants set themselves apart by attaching different levels of importance and desirability to college features and descriptions than students who are less likely to apply. Typically, likely and less-likely applicants indicate a full range of differences when assessing the quality of an institution, but not on the variables used to sort schools. At the outset, it is clear that likely Hampshire applicants care about different things in selecting a college than do their peers.

**Likely Applicants**

As has been mentioned previously in this report, likely applicants place significantly greater importance on the **ability to create individualized programs of study** than less-likely applicants. On the other hand, they view as significantly less important a whole array of variables – including **preparation for graduate/professional school, employment opportunities after graduation, academic reputation and quality of on-campus housing** – that their peers value.

A similar pattern can be seen in the analysis of participants’ desirability ratings for descriptions of college environments. Of the 21 descriptions tested, likely applicants find eight significantly more desirable than less-likely applicants do. All of these descriptions represent the particular style of education offered at Hampshire, without mentioning the College by name. It is clear that in declaring their interest in Hampshire College, these students know what they are choosing.

It is not surprising that students who are more inclined to apply give significantly higher quality ratings to Hampshire on 31 of the 37 college characteristics tested. This pattern is repeated with the college descriptions, with likely applicants rating Hampshire’s fit to 15 of the 21 scenarios higher.
than their less-likely counterparts. These are more typical findings that verify students' knowledge of, and bias toward, an institution that will win their application choice.

CHAID analysis provides an intriguing "shorthand" for identifying likely Hampshire applicants. It indicates that the representation of likely applicants increases from 36% to 82% among students who report that the ability to create individualized programs of study is of strong importance to them, that employment opportunities after graduation are of anything other than extreme importance, and that academic reputation is of moderate to low importance in selecting a college. When CHAID is used to analyze students' quality ratings of Hampshire, it uncovers two variables whose ratings increase the presence of likely applicants. The highest rating for quality of area of concentration, coupled with anything but the highest rating for values-oriented curriculum, yields an increase in more-likely applicants from 37% to 77%. On the other hand, low-to-medium Hampshire ratings for quality of area of concentration, and similar ratings for challenge of academic programs, reduces the representation of likely applicants to just 2%.

Further CHAID analysis reveals that the concentration of likely applicants increases (to 69% from 36% overall) among inquirers who give their highest desirability rating to the description of a school where without the pressure of grades or tests, students must invent their own pressure to discipline themselves (J). A CHAID analysis of fit to the descriptions indicates that, among students who strongly identify Hampshire as a member of a five-college consortium (F), find it a good fit to a school where students are educated to adapt to rapid social change (Q) and clearly see it as a place where students invent their own pressure to discipline themselves (J), the representation of likely Hampshire applicants increases from 37% to 65%.

The "Ways of Learning" exercise completed by survey participants also
provides insights into likely Hampshire applicants. When asked to report on
their preferred ways to learn, likely applicants were disproportionately
represented among students who were emphatic about liking to write papers
(as opposed to taking tests), learning best by participating in class
discussions (versus taking notes), preferring to choose his/her own courses
(rather than having a pre-determined program of study), and preferring detailed
teachers comments without grades (over grades without comments). CHAID
analysis verifies these findings, showing that more-likely applicants increase
from 36% to 76% among students with these inclinations.

Unsure Applicants

There are some notably significant differences in the degree of importance
students who are unsure about applying to Hampshire attach to a number of
college selection variables, as compared to their more-likely-to-apply
counterparts. Most importantly, they attach higher value to academic advising,
employment opportunities after graduation, and quality of on-campus
housing than likely applicants do. They also view access to a city, a values-
oriented curriculum and their parents’ preference as more important than do
likely applicants, although these characteristics are not among their top
priorities. An analysis of desirability ratings for the college scenarios reveals that
likely applicants find descriptions of a college that encourages students to
develop their own program of study and shape their college experience (A),
of a place where students invent their own pressure to discipline themselves
(J) and of a school with a demanding curriculum that is far from mainstream
and not suited to everyone (H) significantly more desirable than do the unsure
students.

When rating Hampshire, unsure applicants are significantly less
convinced of the high quality of the College’s faculty, students, area of
concentration, academic rigor, undergraduate research opportunities,
challenge of academic programs and campus atmosphere than likely applicants are. This skepticism, or lack of knowledge, is also seen in their fit ratings for the college descriptions, where they do not strongly identify Hampshire as a college that students experience as if it were a graduate school (N), nor as a place where students are challenged with questions and problems that are not yet answered or solved (U). While they are more inclined to see Hampshire as a college where students build a portfolio of work that tracks their intellectual and creative growth (P) and where they are encouraged to develop their own programs of study (A), their fit ratings to these descriptions are still significantly lower than those of likely applicants. Unsure inquirers also give lower fit ratings to Hampshire as a member of a five-college consortium (F) and as a school whose academic atmosphere energizes students to work hard and grow tremendously (G).

Note that the detailed descriptions elicit a great many more differences among unsure and more-likely applicants than the more terse characteristics. This suggests that developing substantive information about Hampshire will eventually lead to the conversion of at least some of this group.

How can Hampshire most effectively convert those students in its inquiry pool who are leaning towards applying into actual applicants? What will persuade the fence-sitting, unsure applicants to count Hampshire among their application schools? One of the lasting values of this research is the information it provides about these groups -- first, that they exist and second, what they are thinking. Many of the recommendations proposed thus far in this report address issues raised here. Further suggestions that flow from this section are both broad and specific:

- Consider doing further research on "more-likely applicants" to determine what factors contribute to students' decisions to not
apply to Hampshire.

The actual behavior of these more-likely applicants, who present the greatest hope for application growth, merits some follow-up. Maguire Associates can provide names to Hampshire that can be matched to the applicant pool. Students who have not applied can be phoned and asked a brief set of questions regarding their final application choices. Results should be studied to detect patterns in decision-making.

- **Place the highest priority on communicating information about areas of study at Hampshire that will support students' selection of the College.**

The research makes it abundantly clear that the choices inquirers are making about desirable schools are greatly influenced by their perception of an institution’s ability to satisfy their academic interests. If information about specific programs of study or fields of interest is not convincing, or if students doubt a school’s ability to satisfy their academic needs, they will readily choose to go elsewhere.

- **Use the “Ways of Learning” exercise to identify likely applicants in the inquiry pool.**

This can be presented in a light-hearted way to qualify inquiries. Students can be asked to complete this “self-help” survey, similar to those in magazines. They can then be instructed to compute their score and, if in an “Appropriate for Hampshire” range, to return it to Admissions. Special follow-up correspondence should be prepared for responding to those who reply.
• Follow up with identified “hot prospects” by phone, using a script fashioned from Hampshire-inspired scenarios as topics for discussion.

A major goal in Admissions should be the identification and cultivation of students in Hampshire’s inquiry pool who are most inclined towards the College’s unique offerings. The research provides excellent guidelines for developing ways of identifying these students. It should be used creatively by the recruitment team to reinforce the inclinations of likely applicants.

**HIGHER-SCORING CANDIDATES**

When reviewing this data, it is difficult to know whether student opinions that may motivate institutional change are the opinions of potential candidates in whom the College is most interested. For this reason, the inquiry data was segmented by measures of inquirers’ academic ability and achievement. After analyses were conducted using both rank in class and standardized test scores, it was determined that the scores yielded the greatest differences in student inclinations.

This section will compare 249 higher-scoring inquirers (defined as those who scored 1200 or higher on the SAT or 29 or higher on the ACT) with 176 inquirers whose scores fell below those points. Differences in how these two groups rate the variables tested, and a further dissection of more-likely applicants among them, will be reviewed.

Overall, higher-scoring inquirers place significantly higher importance
than their lower-scoring peers on only one characteristic, challenge of academic programs. Lower-scoring students rate 14 variables as significantly more important to them, including physical appearance of the campus, ethnic diversity of student body, social life, availability of financial aid to meet need, descriptions in guidebooks, employment opportunities after graduation, undergraduate research opportunities and quality of on-campus housing, among others. Interestingly, there are no significant differences among these two groups in their assessment of Hampshire's quality on these variables.

The desirability ratings for the descriptions yield no examples of scenarios that are more appealing to higher-scoring inquirers, though a number are significantly more desirable to lower-scoring students. These include references to a traditional liberal arts college (E), an institution where students are given responsibility in order to develop leadership skills (L), and a college where students are encouraged to put their learning to good use in the world (M). All these descriptions also receive higher fit-to-Hampshire ratings from lower-scoring inquirers than from those with higher scores. Other scenarios that are more desirable to lower-scoring participants describe an institution where students develop a genuine concern for social justice (B), have an entrepreneurial spirit (C), and both work hard and play hard (D). Statement J, describing a school where, without the pressure of grades or tests, students must invent their own pressure to discipline themselves, receives the lowest desirability rating of higher-scoring students.

The data appears to suggest more strategies for appealing to lower- than higher-scoring students. CHAID analysis provides some further direction. On the importance CHAID for college characteristics, the representation of higher-scoring students increases from 59% to 78% among students who attach little or no importance to descriptions in guidebooks, high importance to challenge of academic programs, and anything but the highest ratings to
internships/fieldwork. The corresponding quality CHAID indicates that representation of higher-scoring inquirers increases from 56% to 71% among students who rate the quality of outdoor recreation activities at Hampshire as neutral to very high, and the availability of financial aid to meet need as very low to neutral.

Additional CHAID analyses on the college descriptions shed more light on the dispositions of higher-scoring students. The representation of higher-scoring students increases from 59% to 75% among students who give low-to-neutral desirability ratings to Statement M (students put their learning to good use in the world). This representation climbs to 81% among students who find Statement M desirable, but rate Statement E (a traditional liberal arts college) as very undesirable. Finally, the CHAID for fit to Hampshire suggests that the number of higher-scoring students climbs from 59% to 83% among inquirers who rate Statement L (responsibility to manage activities and develop leadership skills) as anything but the highest fit, and Statement K (a challenging and competitive institution where students work very hard) as a low or very low fit to Hampshire.

Among more-likely applicants to Hampshire, how do the higher-scoring differ from the lower-scoring? A review indicates that a number of variables are significantly less important to higher-scoring students than to lower-scoring. These include many variables that were previously cited as important to lower-scoring inquirers, including physical appearance of campus, employment opportunities after graduation, descriptions in guidebooks, undergraduate research opportunities and quality of on-campus housing. There are no significant differences in the quality ratings each group assigns to Hampshire.

Among the college descriptions, more-likely applicants depart from each other on the desirability of four scenarios. Lower-scoring are significantly more drawn to an institution where they will develop a concern for social justice
(B), be given responsibility to manage activities and to develop leadership skills (L), and put their learning to good use in the world (M). Among likely applicants, lower-scoring students are also much more interested in a traditional liberal arts college (E) than higher-scoring students, who give Statement E their lowest desirability rating. There are no significant differences between the ratings higher-scoring and lower-scoring likely applicants give to Hampshire’s fit to these descriptions.

An analysis of learning styles indicates that higher-scorers are more inclined to prefer choosing their own courses than lower-scoring inquirers -- who lean in that direction, but not as heavily. Higher-scoring students more often claim to disagree with their teachers than their lower-scoring counterparts. CHAID analysis verifies this by finding that the representation of higher-scorers jumps from 59% overall to 69% among students who prefer to choose their own courses and tend to disagree with their teachers. One further note on learning styles: higher-scoring students among the more-likely Hampshire applicants are significantly more inclined to state that they learn best by participating in class discussions than their higher-scoring peers who are less likely to apply.

In evaluating their first-choice schools, students often provide further insight into their priorities. Higher-scoring inquirers give significantly higher ratings than their lower-scoring counterparts to quality of faculty and academic rigor at their selected school. Lower-scoring students attach higher quality ratings to their first-choice school’s social life, availability of financial aid to meet need, and internships/fieldwork.

Lower-scoring students in Hampshire’s inquiry pool give indications of having strong social consciences and somewhat traditional interests in college amenities. They appear to be attracted to the College by its social activist bent. Higher-scoring students give the impression of being somewhat detached from
social concerns (broadly defined) and motivated by almost "purist" intellectual interests. No full-fledged recruitment strategy for high-scoring inquirers is suggested by this dissection of the data, although the following recommendations do emerge:

- Be mindful of the varying priorities expressed by students at different ability levels in determining allocations of resources.

If Hampshire were confident that it could fill its first-year class with higher-scoring students, its priorities could be viewed as fairly simple: work on the academic programs and the rest is relatively unimportant. No doubt, however, the class is made up of both higher- and lower-scoring students, as well as those who differ less predictably in their priorities. The College has to make decisions on resource allocation that will maximize its attractiveness to a number of audiences, without trying to be all things to all people.

- Emphasize the interactive approach to learning that is characteristic of a Hampshire education.

Students, particularly those high-scoring students who are inclined toward Hampshire, identify their learning styles as participative, not passive. They need to know that the expectation at Hampshire is that they will be very active members of class discussions, and that students learn from each other as well as from the professors.

- Portray Hampshire as a place where a range of people, motivated by different interests, can find their niche.

The inclinations of both groups of students described in this section have traditionally been satisfied at Hampshire. It is important to
convey that neither group will be imposed upon to “fit the mold” of the other, but that they can happily co-exist on campus.

- **Review Hampshire’s requirement for involvement in a social service project in light of this data.**

While Hampshire’s lack of academic course requirements has been tested and recognized throughout this study, the service requirement has not. The question that emerges from this data on higher-scoring students is, “Is there any evidence, anecdotal or otherwise, that the service requirement may be a barrier to students’ interest in Hampshire?” The question can only be posed, not answered, by the results of this study.

**STUDENTS DRAWN TO SMALLER SCHOOLS**

Participants in the Hampshire image study were asked to report their ideal school size as they search for a college or university. The majority (62%) selects schools with student populations of over 2,000. Another 36% choose an ideal size of 2,000 or under. The interests and concerns of these two groups will be compared in this section.

In the college search process, students who are interested in larger schools place greater importance than their peers on **preparation for graduate/professional school, access to a city, social life, academic reputation, employment opportunities after graduation** and **reputation of graduates**. By contrast, those interested in smaller schools attach greater value to **close contact with faculty, small class size, and ability to create individualized programs of study**. The two groups appear to “read” Hampshire similarly, displaying no significant differences in their quality
ratings of the College.

CHAID analysis provides further insight into these findings. A CHAID based on importance ratings indicates that the representation of students who are interested in schools with populations of 2,000 or under increases from 38% to 58% among those who rate small class size and ability to create individualized programs of study as important or very important, and access to a city as anything other than very important. A Hampshire quality CHAID detects an increase in students interested in smaller schools (from 44% to 56%) among those who give the College a good ('4') rating on sense of campus community. Any other rating for this variable – either higher or lower – causes the yield of this group to drop to 36%.

Many scenarios receive higher desirability ratings from students interested in smaller schools than from their counterparts, who express stronger interest in just two descriptions – one portraying a school where students work hard and play hard (D), the other an institution where students are given responsibility for activities and organizations (L). Inquirers who select smaller schools as their ideal choice find many of the Hampshire-distinctive scenarios to their liking, including Statements A (new meaning to the term “academic freedom”), F (five-college consortium), H (far from mainstream, not suited to everyone), J (no grades or tests, invent own pressure), N (like a graduate school experience) and P (students build a portfolio of work). They also assign higher desirability ratings than those interested in larger schools for descriptions of an institution where there is much interaction with professors (I), a strong sense of community (O) and where competitive pressures are reduced in the learning process (R). Inquirers interested in smaller schools consider Hampshire a significantly better fit to Statements F, I and N than do their peers who prefer larger schools.
When CHAID analysis is used, many of these findings are supported. The representation of students who select a smaller "ideal school" size increases from 38% to 65% among inquirers who assign the highest desirability rating to Statement N, desirable or very desirable ratings to Statement P, and then anything but the highest rating to Statement K (a **challenging institution with competitive students; you work hard and are rewarded with a high quality education**). A fit-to-Hampshire CHAID indicates that, among inquirers who give the highest fit rating to Statement N, the representation of students inclined toward smaller schools increases from 43% to 55%.

When the data is probed for differences among more-likely Hampshire applicants based on their desired school size, a number of findings emerge. Those who are inclined toward both Hampshire and smaller institutions place greater importance on **close contact with faculty** than students who express interest in larger schools, yet are also inclined toward Hampshire. The latter group attaches greater importance to **preparation for graduate/professional school**, **selective admissions** and **academic reputation** than the former. The only variable on which these groups differ when rating Hampshire's quality is **selective admissions**, which is rated higher by those inclined toward larger schools.

It is also interesting to note some other differences that emerge from importance ratings. More-likely applicants who are interested in smaller colleges differ from their less-likely counterparts on **small class size** and **ability to create individualized programs of study** (to which more-likely applicants attach higher importance), and **preparation for graduate/professional school** and **academic reputation** (to which less-likely applicants assign greater value.) On the other end of the spectrum, students who are drawn to larger schools vary somewhat based on likelihood of applying to Hampshire. Those more likely to apply place higher importance on **ability**
to create individualized programs of study, while less-likely applicants view employment opportunities after graduation and quality of on-campus housing as more important.

Of those inclined to apply to Hampshire, students who are interested in smaller schools find Statements A (give new meaning to "academic freedom"), I (much interaction with professors) and R (competitive pressures reduced in learning process) more desirable than their peers who prefer larger schools, who find Statement D (work hard, play hard) more desirable. These groups indicate no differences in their perception of Hampshire based on assigned fit ratings.

On “ways of learning,” students who are interested in smaller schools are significantly more interested in detailed teacher’s comments without grades than are students who prefer larger schools; they are also more drawn to writing papers rather than taking tests. CHAID analysis verifies this, by finding a higher representation (48% from 38%) of students interested in smaller schools among those who prefer teacher comments over grades.

Finally, a review of first-choice school quality ratings indicates that students who select larger “ideal” schools rate their first-choice institution higher on access to a city, ethnic diversity of student body, social life, wide variety of courses and access to social and cultural events. By contrast, those inclined toward smaller institutions rate their first-choice school higher on close contact with faculty and small class size.

Unlike many liberal arts colleges with similarly-sized populations, Hampshire’s size does not dominate its image. Size is raised as both an asset and a liability in open-ended responses to Hampshire image questions, but does not appear to be a major consideration in students’ application decisions. It is always a good strategy, however, to emphasize the advantages
of a smaller-sized school, while distancing the institution from perceived disadvantages. Some recommendations toward this end follow:

- **Work on developing tangible indicators of the positive outcomes of a Hampshire education.**

  Some students in this study are clearly “sold” on Hampshire and its educational approach; others need to be convinced, or need some “ammunition” to convince influential people in their lives that Hampshire is an acceptable choice for them. Without dismaying the first group by assuming values that are too conventional, the College has a responsibility to gather the data that makes as strong a case as possible for itself. Testimonials from colleagues of Hampshire graduates, from graduate school professors of Hampshire undergraduates, from professors at other consortium colleges – all help to “make the case” for Hampshire. As has been mentioned previously, data about graduate school admission and various career paths traveled by Hampshire alumni is also important to gather.

- **Play to Hampshire’s strength – ability to create an individualized program of study – with all audiences of prospective students.**

  Although this concept does not win an overall popularity contest, it powerfully identifies students who are most suited to Hampshire. It can also serve to win some students away from larger institutions. Given their numbers, this is a crucial constituency from which Hampshire must “grab a bigger piece of the pie.”
• Emphasize the importance of “close contact with faculty” being a visible concept to prospective students during recruitment and yield events.

Students’ expectations of this accessibility may be unrealistically high, but it consistently emerges among those who select small schools and who show great interest in Hampshire. Faculty must play a visible role, whether formal or informal, during prospective students’ visits to campus, or in their process of narrowing college selections. The best way for faculty to be involved should be determined on campus, but the importance of their involvement is not debatable.

• Amplify the description of Hampshire that likens it to a graduate school environment.

This description is remarkably appealing to students interested in small schools, perhaps because of the reference to mentors. In other studies conducted by Maguire Associates, students connected preparation for graduate study with large institutions. This finding allows Hampshire to develop itself as an alternative to that. This statement is strong. If supported by examples of how students “push themselves to work as far as they choose” it could be even more potent.

• Beware of stratifying inquirers based on desired school size.

While it is tempting to find any variable that helps to segment an inquiry pool, and clarify a student’s degree of interest, this data suggests that stratifying by ideal size may eliminate some inquirers who can be “converted” to a school of Hampshire’s size. Again, this
is not always the case with studies of this kind; sometimes ideal size is a clearer determinant of application intentions.

**PARENTS OF PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS**

Extensive research conducted for Maguire Associates' clients supports a finding often discussed in higher education literature: the impact of their parents on the college selection process is typically underestimated by students. Hampshire's inquirers give some indications of following this behavior pattern.

Consistent with data collected for virtually every client image study, Hampshire's prospective students rank **parents' preference** last in a list of important college-choice characteristics. Almost one-quarter of the students interviewed claim that this feature is "not at all important." Interestingly, students who are unsure about applying to Hampshire assign the highest (although still very low) importance ratings to **parents' preference**, of the groups categorized by likelihood of applying. While likely applicants rate Hampshire's quality on this variable significantly higher than less-likely applicants do, the overall quality rating ranks last among all 37 characteristics.

Admitted applicants, faculty, staff and current students concur that **parents' preference** is of minimal importance, also ranking this variable last in their priorities. Their quality-of-Hampshire ratings, however, are higher than those of prospective students in general and significantly higher than those of less-likely applicants. Current students, and those planning to enroll at the College, assign the highest quality ratings of any groups. Non-enrolling students rate **parents' preference** at their enrollment school a full point higher than at Hampshire. This is also true for inquirers' rating of this variable at their first-choice school versus their Hampshire rating. So there is a correlation between
higher parents’ preference ratings and school of choice, but apparently one that is not particularly obvious to students.

In the accepted student factor analysis of Hampshire quality, parents’ preference “loads” on the Academic Reputation factor, indicating that students associate it with variables including academic rigor, reputation of graduates, preparation for graduate/professional school and academic reputation. This is the only factor on which parents’ preference appears, yielding few additional clues as to what students associate with this concept.

The Parent Study provides specific insights into how parents of inquirers view Hampshire and the college selection process. Interviews were conducted with 278 parents of prospective students who participated in the Image Study. Only 43% of these parents were familiar enough with Hampshire to answer questions about the College. Inquirers’ familiarity with Hampshire is significantly higher than that expressed by the parents interviewed. This is not unusual.

When asked about the criteria they use for navigating a college search, parents report greatest interest in majors/programs/courses, total costs, location and academics. In response to questions about their impressions of Hampshire, parents cite innovative and individualized as initial “top-of-mind” associations with the College, and also refer (sometimes incorrectly) to its location. Prompts for positive and negative impressions of Hampshire yield comments that echo those of prospective students: creative/design own program, majors/programs/courses, five- college consortium; and not structured enough, cost, far away/distance from home. Those parents who are familiar with Hampshire appear to have a fairly good understanding of its qualities.

There are very few demographic differences that distinguish parents whose
children express varying degrees of interest in Hampshire. One, that has been
cited previously, is that a disproportionately high number of more-likely
applicants are found among inquirers whose fathers have earned
graduate/professional degrees.

Parents rated a subset of characteristics for their importance to them in
helping their children choose a college or university, and for their quality at
Hampshire. Compared to their sons and daughters, parents place significantly
more importance on preparation for graduate/professional school, quality of
faculty and value of education. Quality-of-Hampshire ratings from parents are
similar to those from prospective students.

In addition to rating their familiarity with Hampshire College, parents also
assessed their familiarity with Bard, Sarah Lawrence, Oberlin, Vassar and
Skidmore colleges. Those familiar with the institutions rated them as well on
academic quality, affordability and value. Few significant differences emerge
from this analysis. Among them is the finding that parents are significantly
more familiar with Hampshire than with Bard College. It is Vassar College,
however, that stands out in the data, in comparison to Hampshire. Parents
assign Vassar significantly higher ratings for familiarity, quality and value than
they do Hampshire.

How do parents and their children actually interact in the college selection
process? Based on extensive research and analysis, Maguire Associates
hypothesizes that parents and students exercise mutual veto power. Neither one
tends to drive a choice that is unacceptable to the other, but both influence the
final "short list" of schools that remains in serious consideration throughout the
search.

Indications from this research portray Hampshire inquirers as strong,
independent-minded individuals. If parents are to be appealed to in the
recruitment process, it must be without diminishing the role of their sons and daughters as the focal point. Prospective students should always be viewed as the primary audience; parents as important, but secondary. Some ideas for striking this balance sensitively and effectively include:

- **Continue to produce a parents' publication that treats the choice of Hampshire forthrightly and with humor.**

  From the perspective of these consultants, Hampshire's approach to communicating with parents sets an appropriate tone. Monitor parent reactions to the current piece and incorporate this feedback into future publications.

- **Assign a member of the Admissions staff to be an advocate of the perspective parents bring to the admissions process.**

  This person should "think like a parent" in reviewing and critiquing admissions literature and procedures, and be particularly attentive to creating a role for parents in recruiting events. At times, it is advisable to separate parents and prospective students during tours and special programs -- enabling the most appropriate spokesperson to address their different concerns.

- **Work with other offices on campus to ensure excellent service to parents, during the enrollment process and throughout their child's years at Hampshire.**

  Parents influence one another. Positive experiences with all aspects of the College generate important goodwill among current parents and also impact prospective parents. Check the following for tone, accuracy and consistency:

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_Maguire Associates  • November 1997_
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financial aid awards,
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billing procedures,
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fund-raising appeals,
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news of parent events, and
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information on health services, safety and security, and housing.

Assess the level of hospitality to parents at major events -- new student orientation, parents' weekends and graduation. Any concerns about the responsiveness of the College to this very important parent constituency should be an important topic at the senior management level.

• Communicate with parents of admitted students at a key point in the enrollment decision process.

Although most correspondence is directed to the candidates themselves, discreet contact with parents regarding certain issues can be extremely effective. The research on prospective Hampshire parents indicates that, in addition to costs and financial aid, communication about preparation for graduate/professional school, additional information on Hampshire faculty members, and a general presentation of factors that add to the value of a Hampshire education would be of special interest to parents. Although this did not emerge as a major issue in the research, more information about Amherst and the area surrounding the campus might also enhance the College in parents' minds.
Section IV:
Competitive Positioning
Hampshire College competes with some of the country’s top liberal arts colleges and comprehensive universities for the attention of students in its inquiry pool. The College’s challenge is to make steady gains on these institutions by offering students an experience they simply cannot find elsewhere, and then identifying and cultivating those students who are most responsive to Hampshire’s distinctive educational philosophy. Competition analysis identifies attributes to be emphasized to prospective applicants in different categories of institutions.

The research suggests that Hampshire inquirers initially consider a fairly broad range of schools. It is not unusual, particularly among liberal arts colleges, to find that the competitors an institution faces at the inquiry level are quite different from those at the point of application -- reflecting the winnowing process students follow. This extensive range of schools will be analyzed by taking a close look at inquirers’ first-choice schools, grouping them by type, and comparing their quality ratings to Hampshire’s. The information gathered from inquirers is supplemented by data from the Admitted Student Questionnaire, to provide a broader understanding of perceived competitive advantages and disadvantages as students move closer to a final enrollment decision.

The competitors Hampshire has traditionally faced at the application and enrollment stages have been included in the “competition set” of schools that was evaluated by survey participants, providing more in-depth information about the role these rivals play early in the decision-making process. In this section, data about the competition set will be summarized first, followed by the analysis of first-choice schools.
University leads the set by a large margin, followed by Vassar, Wesleyan and Oberlin. Hampshire is situated in a cluster of schools that includes Reed, Sarah Lawrence, Bard, Skidmore and UMass, Amherst. Bennington and UC Santa Cruz form the next small tier, with Evergreen State a low-rated outlier.

Inquirers who indicate interest in applying to the College are more generous with their Hampshire quality ratings than inquirers overall, rating Hampshire equal to Brown, Oberlin, Reed, Vassar and Wesleyan and higher than the rest of the set. On prestige, however, the more-likely applicants generally agree with inquirers overall, except to rate Skidmore and Bennington as equal to Hampshire.

Students were asked to rate a number of schools in the competition set (Bard, Sarah Lawrence, Oberlin, Vassar and Skidmore) for fit to a subset of the descriptions rated for desirability and fit to Hampshire. The few significant differences that emerge have been discussed elsewhere, but one finding deserves attention in this section of the report. A scenario was selected that is deliberately not descriptive of Hampshire, to test the validity of student responses. The statement describes a traditional liberal arts college that requires all students to master the core disciplines that create a “complete education” (E). This concept receives desirability ratings that are among the lowest assigned, and appropriately low fit-to-Hampshire ratings. It is important to note that Statement E serves to verify the niche Hampshire occupies within the competition set. Inquirers associate this statement as a significantly stronger fit to Bard, Oberlin, Vassar and Sarah Lawrence than to Hampshire.

**FIRST-CHOICE SCHOOLS**

Inquirers were given the opportunity to name up to five colleges or universities to which they were considering applying. They were subsequently
THE COMPETITION SET

Twelve colleges and universities comprise the competition set that was determined in consultation with Hampshire administrators. This group was derived largely from the institutions that emerge as cross-application schools on the Admitted Student Questionnaire. The set includes Bard and Bennington colleges, Brown University, Evergreen State, Oberlin, Reed, Sarah Lawrence and Skidmore colleges, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the University of California at Santa Cruz, Vassar College and Wesleyan University.

Inquirers were asked to rate their level of familiarity with these institutions (and Hampshire College). Those who were familiar with a particular school also assigned ratings for its academic quality and prestige. Hampshire College is significantly more familiar to this inquiry sample than all other schools in the competition set are, with the exception of Brown University and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, to which Hampshire is equal in familiarity.

Hampshire academic quality ratings exceed those for Bennington, Evergreen State and UC Santa Cruz, and are similar to ratings for Bard, Reed, Sarah Lawrence, Skidmore and UMass, Amherst. Higher quality ratings are assigned to Brown, Wesleyan, Vassar and Oberlin than to Hampshire. Brown University receives the highest prestige ratings of the set, by a substantial distance. Along with Brown, Oberlin, Skidmore, Vassar and Wesleyan are rated higher in prestige than Hampshire, whose prestige is viewed as similar to that of Bard, Reed, Sarah Lawrence, UMass, Amherst and UC Santa Cruz. Hampshire receives higher prestige ratings than either Bennington or Evergreen State.

When both academic quality and prestige are considered, Brown
asked to identify one of these institutions as their first-choice school. Hampshire College tops the list of application schools, followed by Boston University, New York University, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Brown University, Syracuse University, Boston College and Oberlin College.

Overall, 69% of the inquirers select a private institution as their first-choice school, while 19% choose public institutions and 13% report that they have no first-choice school. Again, Hampshire leads the list of top choices – a finding that some may assume is always true in studies of this nature, but is not. The next most frequently mentioned schools include New York University, Boston University, Oberlin College and Brown University. Segmentation analysis indicates that a disproportionate number of higher-ability, likely Hampshire applicants express interest in Oberlin as a first choice, and a larger than expected number of lower-ability, less-likely Hampshire applicants are interested in Boston University as a first-choice school.

What follows is a comparison of quality ratings of first-choice schools, by institutional category, with quality ratings of Hampshire on the 37 characteristics tested. It is difficult to conceive of a more vulnerable position for Hampshire to be in – going up against perceptions of schools that are biased by the fact that they are top choices of students. The exercise is intended to identify the greatest gaps, the most obvious points of vulnerability and advantage. This information is drawn from balance sheets that appear in Volume II. Though based on reliable data, their intent is to provide a “snapshot” of a great deal of information. The interpretation of balance sheets tends to be more art than science.

Selective Private Colleges and Universities

The many first-choice schools that fit into the private category were further sorted by the staff at Maguire Associates by perceived level of selectivity, in an
effort to place Hampshire as closely as possible within a peer group. Balance sheets were prepared for both colleges and universities.

A comparison of Hampshire to selective private colleges yields only one clear advantage for the College – ability to create individualized programs of study. These schools are viewed as relatively comparable to Hampshire on affordability issues, including variables such as total costs, availability of financial aid to meet need, and merit-based scholarships. The greatest disadvantages Hampshire faces when being compared with these schools are academic in nature: quality of area of concentration, quality of faculty, academic facilities, challenge of academic programs, academic reputation, academic rigor and preparation for graduate/professional school. A number of other vulnerabilities are quality of life issues – living in an intellectual environment, campus atmosphere and quality of students. Some of these themes have emerged in the data analyses by subgroups.

When compared to selective universities, Hampshire adds two variables to its one advantage noted above – close contact with faculty and small class size. Again, financial issues are viewed similarly between this group of competitors and Hampshire. The gap closes here on some variables mentioned above such as quality of faculty, campus atmosphere, living in an intellectual environment and quality of students, yet is more pronounced than among the college competitors in internships/fieldwork, access to social/cultural events, employment opportunities after graduation and geographic location. The major areas in which Hampshire faces great competition remain quality of area of concentration, academic facilities and challenge of academic programs.

It is heartening, for Hampshire, to move from this analysis of competitors by inquirers to a comparable, but not similar, analysis of private enrollments schools evaluated by admitted students. The institutions that dominate both
lists include Oberlin, New York University, Smith, Vassar, Brown, Boston University and Mt. Holyoke. Additional schools that play a prominent role in the inquiry analysis are Tufts, Cornell, Georgetown and Amherst, while the accepted student analysis includes the strong presence of Bard, Sarah Lawrence, Emerson, Bennington and Wesleyan.

While some perceived Hampshire disadvantages that emerge among inquirers are echoed here (notably, preparation for graduate/professional school and academic rigor), many important variables such as academic reputation and quality of academic facilities are viewed by accepted students as similar at Hampshire and their other private enrollment schools. In addition to its individualized and flexible curriculum, Hampshire is also given greater credit by admitted students for availability of special programs (and majors of interest), personal attention to students, surroundings, quality of social life, extracurricular and recreational opportunities, quality of faculty and values-oriented curriculum. Cost of attendance, value for the price and quality of on-campus housing are seen as comparable at Hampshire and private enrollment schools, while attractiveness of campus, ethnic diversity of student body, sense of campus community, reputation of graduates and parents preference all receive higher quality ratings at enrollment schools than at Hampshire.

It is crucial to note that relatively unimportant variables at the inquiry stage appear to take on a larger role as students move closer to an enrollment decision. They have already “screened out” colleges on their most important priorities, often allowing final enrollment decisions to come down to features that do not emerge prominently in inquiry analysis.
Public Flagship Universities

Again, data in this section will be drawn from two sources – the ratings assigned to inquirers’ first-choice schools that have been categorized by Maguire Associates as public, flagship universities, and the ratings assigned by accepted students to their public enrollment schools. While the categories are not precisely matched, an analysis of the top schools in each category gives assurance of comparable institutions. For inquirers, the most frequently-cited schools in this grouping include the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, UCLA, Ohio State, University of Connecticut, University of New Hampshire, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and University of Virginia. Public institutions enrolling the greatest number of cross-admits to Hampshire include the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the University of California at Santa Cruz, Evergreen State College and the University of Texas at Austin.

The balance sheets in the inquiry study portray the perceived strengths and weaknesses of Hampshire in relation to its public competitors. Its advantages are more plentiful than among private competitors, including living in an intellectual environment, undergraduate research opportunities, and academic advising, in addition to the generally agreed upon advantages of small classes, individualized programs and close faculty contact. Once again, the major perceived disadvantages are quality of area of concentration, academic reputation and preparation for graduate/professional school. Additionally, these public institutions are viewed to have a strong advantage over Hampshire in financial areas – value of education, availability of financial aid to meet need, total costs and merit-based scholarships. Hampshire and this set of competitors are viewed comparably on some areas that were concerns among private competitors, including quality of faculty, challenge of academic programs, quality of students, internships/fieldwork and academic rigor.

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When admitted students rate Hampshire and their public enrollment school, many similar findings are uncovered. Hampshire's strong points in this competitive arena emerge as academic reputation, availability of majors (and special programs) of interest to you, personal attention to students, quality of faculty, flexible and individualized curriculum and values-oriented curriculum. The major advantages public institutions have over Hampshire are cost of attendance, value for the price, ethnic diversity of student body and parents' preference.

Many of the research findings in this Competition section validate concerns that have been raised elsewhere in this report. It is important to look closely, not only at what students say is important to them, but how their priorities get played out in the choices they make. This is why it is valuable to compare ratings of first-choice and enrollment schools, making the assumption that the qualities they see in these institutions are what they are truly valuing.

Issues that demand attention based on the competition data include the perceived quality of one's major field of interest at a school, the academic reputation and level of challenge, and the institution's ability to help them reach their goals beyond an undergraduate degree. Recommendations have been made earlier in this report about all these concerns. Additional recommendations that are suggested by this section include:

- **Reinforce messages that set Hampshire apart as “not a traditional liberal arts college.”**

Students will come to Hampshire as much for what it is not as for what it is. On the Admitted Student Questionnaire, students repeatedly select the phrase “excitingly different” to describe Hampshire. This is a very helpful distinction to have in the midst of
dozens of selective liberal arts colleges in the country. Hampshire’s strategy should not be to win a popularity contest, but to identify its small, but special, student contingent who seek “something different.”

• **Note that 87% of these inquirers can name a first-choice school by the end of their junior-year in high school, highlighting the importance of early outreach for recruitment purposes.**

This information reinforces other indications that students are considering and narrowing college choices earlier in their high school years. To the extent that colleges and universities can influence students’ decisions by being welcoming, responsive and pro-active, they must. The Admissions staff at Hampshire is aware of this trend, but needs to think creatively about how best to re-deploy resources to address earlier interest.

• **Continue to “lead” marketing messages with references to the freedom students at Hampshire have to create their own programs of study.**

This distinctive feature of Hampshire’s academic program plays perhaps the most important role in keeping the College “alive” in the minds of prospective students, as they sort through hundreds of choices of college and universities. Many will decide that the approach is not for them, that it is “too unstructured.” As a first message, however, it is intriguing and memorable.

• **Minimize the use of references to “no tests” and “no grades” in initial messages to students at the inquiry level.**
who is thinking along these lines and responsible for identifying candidates.

- **Encourage faculty, staff and students to publish research, interact with professional colleagues, and make Hampshire an even more visible presence in the academic world.**

As a young institution that takes an innovative approach to education, Hampshire is bound to fight an uphill battle in any assessment of its prestige, and in some estimations of its academic reputation. The more opportunities those on campus have to expose their scholarship to others in the field, the more impressions of the College will be based on substantive information, as opposed to hearsay.

- **Promote the financial aid program even more assertively among students who express interest in public institutions.**

When Hampshire is being compared to state-supported institutions, it is essential to remind families to think in terms of “net cost.” To avoid having inquirers self-select out of the admissions process, the College’s commitment to helping families must be expressed early and often. The goal would be to keep students in the admissions funnel long enough to be able to offer them a financial aid award.

- **Continue to profile Hampshire’s alumni prominently and consistently in Admissions publications.**

The names and stories of alumni who are engaged in unusual, successful or high-profile ventures contribute information that helps form student and parent images about Hampshire’s quality,
The data suggests that inquirers are not convinced that there is a high level of academic challenge or rigor at Hampshire. To the extent that this impression may be drawn from the fact that tests and grades are not emphasized, those references should be suppressed early on in the introduction of students to the College. As they become more familiar with the educational philosophy, those pedagogic practices will make more sense to them, but they should not be used as convenient reasons to eliminate Hampshire for further investigation.

- **Be mindful of the change in priorities on which students focus as they move from the decision to apply to the decision to enroll.**

It is evident in the comparison of inquirers with admitted students that issues (parents’ preference, ethnic diversity, campus appearance) that are in the background as students select their initial application schools often move to the foreground in their final selection of an enrollment school. Again, this may be obvious not so much by what they say as by what they do, in terms of the qualities they see in their selected institution.

- **Identify promising Hampshire students who can be “groomed” for fellowships and other academic recognition.**

In addressing issues of academic reputation and prestige, it is important to call the attention of the academic world to scholars at Hampshire. Potential candidates need to be identified, cultivated and guided through the processes that bring both personal opportunities and institutional recognition. Schools that have met with some success in this arena usually have a designated person
reputation and outcomes. There are indications that this is an even more important consideration at the enrollment point than at the application stage. Hampshire has very impressive stories to tell and has done a good job chronicling them.
Section V: Enrollment Management
Hampshire's history of recruiting and enrolling students reflects the enthusiasm with which the fledgling college was received in the 1970's, as well as the growing pains and enrollment fluctuations of the 80's and 90's. Sustained and strong enrollment efforts call for the enthusiastic, strategic and coordinated support of all facets of the Hampshire community. Image formulation, the experience students have on campus, the spirit of the school, the quality of students' interaction with professors -- none of these can be controlled by the Admissions Office alone, nor can they be effectively marketed unless they are valid. All members of the Hampshire community share the responsibility for, and the rewards of, strong enrollment.

The final section of this report pays particular attention to the Admissions Office, but also explores topics that relate to many other offices at Hampshire. Included in this segment are sections on:

- Admissions Strategies and Operations
- Public Relations

*Admissions Strategies and Operations*

Based on indications in the research, and on observations of the team from Maguire Associates, the Admissions operation at Hampshire appears to be professionally and competently run. Admitted students compliment the College's publications and on-campus interviews, requests for enrollment data were met, and the staff appears to represent the school well.

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Many of the following recommendations are included to make connections between suggestions made throughout this report and the role of Admissions, as the Office with primary responsibility for the development of recruitment strategies and their implementation. The recommendations are intended to reinforce their importance, not to imply that they are not currently practiced. To the extent that these suggestions are not in operation, additional personnel and financial resources might be necessary to put them into effect.

Recommendations for the Admissions area are as follows:

- **Prepare a written, comprehensive strategic marketing plan.**

As difficult as it is to put into writing what an office plans to do to meet its goals this year -- and for the next five -- the written plan is worth the effort. It provides focus, direction and organization and commits the office to assessment. Once it is written, it is easily updated in subsequent years.

This plan should be prepared by the Admissions Office on a yearly basis, in consultation with other offices involved in enrolling students, and should include the following:

- **Current position** - Evaluate recent history and current state of enrollment at the College.

- **Environment/Forecast** - Assess economic, governmental, technological and other trends that have potential or actual impact on Hampshire recruitment and enrollment. Project the possible impact of these changes on enrollment-related factors.

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Problems and constraints - Outline concerns, both internal and external to the Admissions Office, that may present challenges to meeting the mission of the Office.

Enrollment goals - The goals should flow from and be supportive of the institutional goals established by Hampshire's leadership.

Enrollment targets - The targets add a quantifiable dimension to the goals of the leadership, including the desirable number of incoming students by market segment and the anticipated rate of retention.

Objectives - The objectives should outline and integrate the specific kinds of activities, and responsible parties, intended to meet the enrollment goals and identified targets.

Calendar - Activities should be entered on a yearly calendar to oversee the timeliness of program execution and the frequency of contacts with students.

Budgets - The estimated expense of each objective should be calculated within an established budget.

Evaluation - The cost-effectiveness of each program should be scrutinized to determine which minimally effective programs can be terminated to free funds for new ventures.

Revised Plan - Recommendations from the evaluation process should be incorporated into the next year's strategic
marketing plan.

- **Use the research findings to help qualify students in the inquiry pool, thus focusing resources on those students who are most likely to apply.**

Hampshire College has designed and implemented one of the strongest inquiry response systems these consultants have encountered. The Admissions Office clearly understands the importance of cultivating inquirers to yield more substantial application numbers. Response time, appropriateness of initial information sent, and the tone of the correspondence are all first-rate.

The next step lies in devising a more sophisticated system of identifying those students who are more likely to apply to Hampshire. The current system includes extensive follow-up mailings, but few opportunities for the inquirer to communicate his or her level of interest in the College. Suggestions for incorporating research findings into this process are made throughout this report. The ultimate goal is to engage students in a “two-way conversation” that allows for an exchange of information leading to a better understanding of likely applicants. The implementation of a new information system at Hampshire should enhance the Admissions Office’s ability to respond to this recommendation.

- **Consider re-directing personnel resources from travel to the on-campus cultivation of inquirers.**

There is evidence to suggest that Hampshire's greatest gains in applications could come from even more personal cultivation of the
students who find their way into the College's inquiry pool. Experiment with the idea of managing this conversion process more from the office than from the road, charging Admissions staff with identifying the strongest candidates in the inquiry pool and customizing recruitment plans for them.

- **Continue to enhance the role of the Alumni Admission Team.**

Given the geographical dispersion of Hampshire's prospective students, the role alumni play in recruitment efforts is critical. This is an effort that demands the attention of a dedicated staff member with primary responsibility for overseeing all aspects of the program. The number of Hampshire alumni involved in the current program and the geographical coverage they represent are impressive. Systematic monitoring of and follow-up with alumni volunteers are crucial elements of success. Ways to provide added motivation for alumni efforts are to invite volunteers to workshops on campus, to include them in receptions around the country, and to share the findings of this research with them.

- **Explore ways of enhancing students' visits to the Hampshire campus.**

The research validates the fact that the campus visit is an important component in a student's decision to apply to or enroll at Hampshire. The approach taken for these visits must be carefully analyzed. Consider experimenting with formats that include a variety of elements, from formal panel discussions to campus events focussed on particular academic areas of interest.
Assign responsibility to Admissions staff members for tracking publications from, and programs at, competing institutions.

A comparison of the competition's response times, mailing devices, number of contacts and content of brochures can be very instructive for the Admissions Office. Maguire Associates, posing as an inquirer, requested information from Hampshire and some of its competitors at the outset of this project. As previously mentioned, Hampshire’s response was exceptional, in both timing and content. This is an exercise that should be a standard in Admissions. Assign special responsibility for keeping up with changes and strategies at other schools. Make sure information is passed on to colleagues via staff meetings.

Continue to place a high priority on the cultivation of sophomores and juniors in high school.

Evidence in this study verifies what Maguire Associates has witnessed among scores of inquiry studies -- students are considering and narrowing college choices earlier and earlier in high school. Hampshire needs to take preliminary interest seriously and respond to younger students enthusiastically, quickly, and continuously in a pre-determined flow of helpful communications. Monitor the results of the sophomore Student Search and pay particular attention to follow-up efforts with interested students.

Dedicate even greater resources to cultivating the interest of transfer students.

It has been reported that transfer students are among the most
satisfied students at Hampshire. While it is not considered an ethical practice to actively recruit students from other four-year schools, special attention should be directed towards those transfer candidates who initiate an interest in Hampshire. Review financial aid policies that affect transfer students, for possible opportunities to increase enrollment.

- **Develop formal campus visitation programs for guidance counselors.**

More so than many colleges, Hampshire needs interpretation to the outside world. Counselors who have been there and had an opportunity to deeply explore its differences can explain them more competently to prospective students and, even more importantly, to their parents.

A program offered in conjunction with the five-college consortium would be economical and attractive to counselors, but even if Hampshire sponsors and funds its own program, the benefits will justify the cost.

- **Work with other offices on campus to gather information on current students to provide to their high school counselors.**

It is particularly important to keep the lines of communication open with influential members in the secondary school market. Their impressions of Hampshire's level of organizational effectiveness would be enhanced if Admissions representatives were able to update them on their former students who are currently at Hampshire. That is a typical expectation of a small school, and perhaps even a more crucial expectation of a school considered to be
an alternative choice.

- **Pay special attention to developing relationships with private school college counselors and independent counselors.**

  Hampshire draws a sizeable portion of its incoming class from private schools, where counselors play more of a role of "image brokers" than may be true in general. It is particularly important to keep them, and their independent counselor colleagues, up-to-date on the College.

**Public Relations and Publications**

There is substantial good news in this data regarding Hampshire's image in the marketplace. The College's distinctive qualities are readily recognized by inquirers and their parents. The challenge now is to assist Hampshire in competing effectively when being judged on more traditional criteria such as academic reputation, prestige, etc.

The audience that has received the most attention in this research is prospective students. As important as direct communications with inquirers are, however, students and their parents are also influenced by other, less-direct information sources -- the media, guidebooks, opinions of teachers and counselors, etc. Hampshire cannot control these information sources, but can influence them.

Responsibility for these recommendations may lie in a number of different offices at Hampshire. It is important to discuss who will follow through on the
following:

- Decide upon hallmark messages for Hampshire that provide "snapshots" of the College and guide more in-depth communication.

While assiduously avoiding shallowness, it is important in marketing a school to be able to sum it up in a few distinctive, descriptive words. This provides a mental picture for people who hear about many schools and want something simple to distinguish them. More so than with most schools, these images for Hampshire arise from the respondents to this research. The more successful images to portray have to do with flexibility of curriculum, close contact with faculty, "loving" one's education, and being a different kind of liberal arts college.

- Encourage all editors of College publications to become familiar with these research findings about prospective and enrolling students.

College constituencies — alumni, trustees, current parents, foundations -- vary from one another in significant ways, although common concerns and impressions often unite them. To the extent that it may provide insights for other audiences, or that all those on campus might become more aware of student priorities and perceptions, this research should be circulated widely.

- Designate a staff member to monitor entries about Hampshire in guidebooks, directories and other media.

Although the influence of guidebooks was not viewed as particularly
important in this research project, these and other outside sources of information undoubtedly contribute to a student's impression of Hampshire. These sources can enhance Hampshire's image, particularly if the comments reflect the positive associations with the College found in this research. In fact, given their "feature" style of writing, guidebooks often capture the spirit of an institution quite effectively. If, on the other hand, it is determined that Hampshire is being misrepresented in guidebooks, it is important to advocate for a more accurate portrayal of the College. A designated person should be assigned to keeping up with the content of all guidebook entries.

- **Continue to develop a sophisticated portrayal of Hampshire through the Internet.**

Increasing, students are relying on electronic versus print communications to gather information about, and impressions of, colleges and universities. Perhaps the greatest challenge with Web sites is keeping them up-to-date. A designated person should be responsible for periodically viewing Hampshire's home page from the viewpoint of a prospective student, and making recommendations for revisions and updates.
Section VI:
Conclusion
CONCLUSION

There is a current advertisement sponsored by Apple Computer that portrays recognized geniuses, artists and leaders such as Einstein, Ghandi, John Lennon and Picasso and implores the audience to “Think Different.” Grammar notwithstanding, the ad evokes a feeling of respect for those who have “gone against the grain” to accomplish something extraordinary. A similar feeling of respect for Hampshire is felt as this report is brought to its conclusion.

It has been an honor for Maguire Associates to work with Hampshire at this important moment in the College’s history. The concerns, hopes, challenges and possibilities of the institution all seem to be under evaluation. It is an exciting time for this young college, but not without anxiety.

Questions have been posed in the course of this research about the “right” enrollment size for Hampshire. While this research study in and of itself cannot answer the question, it has much to add to the discussion. In the long run, the appropriate question to ask may be, “Is there a sufficient population of students who both know Hampshire and want Hampshire to sustain enrollments at the current or higher levels?” The authors of this report submit that it would be prudent to prioritize and act on the recommendations in this report before making that assessment.

It is the hope of the Maguire Associates’ team who worked on this project that the research findings and recommendations will provide a foundation for continuing to build a strong, confident and distinctive Hampshire College. It is a gift to the world of higher education.

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