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# Best Practices to Increase Efficacy of Graduate School Admissions Communications at Clark University

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Best Practices to Increase Efficacy of Graduate School Admissions  
Communications at Clark University

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### Executive Summary

Within the period of time that a graduate student deposits and subsequently arrives at their academic institution, receiving timely information is important for their preparation. This process has been deemed by the Deans of the Enterprise Schools at Clark University as one that needs further investigation. As such, this Capstone looks at the array of communication that goes out to each graduate student during this four-month period. The purpose of examining this communication is to analyze its effectiveness in engaging students. To analyze the effectiveness of this communication, surveys were distributed to current students in these schools to gather data surrounding their experience after applying to Clark. In addition to looking at Clark University's current process, we conducted an analysis of trends and best practices from colleges and universities across the country. Based on findings from this research and our firsthand interviews of the aforementioned Deans and involved staff members, we have provided recommendations to improve this process. Ultimately, in order to improve student engagement our group has created recommendations that could improve some of the challenges in engaging and retaining students during this period of time.

Chapter One: Introduction

### Statement of the Problem

For this project we were approached by the Graduate Deans of the three enterprises (The Graduate School of Management: GSOM, The International Development, Community, and Environment Department: IDCE, and The School of Professional Studies: SPS) as well as William F. Fisher (the Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies) and other representatives of Graduate Admissions to examine a particular communication stream. They have noticed an increase in the student melt across the three enterprises, meaning there has been a negative trend in students attending Clark after submitting their deposit. We have been tasked with looking at the process of communication that goes out from the different graduate schools and other campus offices from the time a student deposits to the time that they arrive on campus in the Fall. We are looking to find ways to improve the onboarding process of graduate students.

Historically, the three different enterprises involved in this project (SPS, GSOM, IDCE) have operated on their own and have not collaborated as a unit. In recent years, this has shifted to a more collaborative approach in which these enterprises are working collaboratively through the Graduate School of Admissions.

With a smaller number of students following through in their enrollment and a budgetary shortfall being faced by the university, more effort is being dedicated to finding out why students are not following through. The President's directive is to increase revenue from graduate students. He wishes to increase this number because graduate students require less investment. They do not require access to 24-hour health services, they do not require extensive supervision or housing, and they are less involved in violations of the student code of conduct. As the pressure is exacerbated by current economic conditions faced both internally and externally at Clark University, the ability to keep committed students is important.

This report will show industrial trends in the context of higher-education, our research methods, our research results and the implications they have on the issue defined by our client.

### Purpose of the Capstone Project

Our purpose of the Capstone project was divided into three parts. First, we conducted a literature review of the best practices of graduate admissions at other colleges and universities. Next, we attempted to figure out why the communication is ineffective in keeping students engaged from the point of acceptance through their arrival at Clark. Additionally, we aimed to discover any positive or negative trends related to the communications distributed to deposited students. Lastly, from our findings we created a list of recommendations on how to streamline communications. This culminated in an analysis of communication and the recommendations based on our findings from the literature review and survey questions. These recommendations may be used to improve the overall engagement of students by understanding their experience during this period of time.

### Significance of Capstone Project

What is significant about this project is the applicability that our results will have on the process of engaging new students throughout the time between deposit and arrival. The various Graduate Deans are looking to make changes in this process and our results will be invaluable. Our research will provide justification for data-driven decisions to be made across these enterprise schools. These recommended changes could include: additional funding, increases in the number of staff, and the dedication of time to new programs or initiatives. Furthermore, it is our hope that this research can be shared across the university to improve the communication process. Over or under saturation of communication may be a deterrent to incoming students. Being able to recommend changes to the current schedule, and gauge the



effectiveness of this process, may result in collaboration across all departments that interact with incoming graduate students.

### Subsequent Chapters

In the subsequent chapters, our analysis will begin with the discussion of current trends in the field of higher education. The data found in this section pertains to other public and private institutions of higher education and their approach to onboarding incoming graduate students. Many of these approaches involve the use of social media, personalized videos and informative checklists that all contribute to engaging deposited students. Furthermore, we will look at the enterprise Graduate Schools of Clark University and their current operating practices around engaging this same population. Our analysis will include an audit of their current communication plan and examine any existing practices in place that engage students in the Clark experience. Following this examination, recommendations will be made as to improve the enterprise schools' existing communication and engagement strategy. The culmination of this capstone will be our conclusions as to the experience and results of this project, and how this contributes to aiding the client make changes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Abstract

This literature review addresses communication preferences of millennials and trends in higher-education enrollment. This paper examines the challenges that educational administrators face in addressing the problem of summer melt, outlines the new challenges of international student enrollment, and provides recommendations so as to close the gap in Clark University's existing Graduate School communication plans to increase the number of students who enroll within the three graduate enterprises at Clark University.

### Literature Review

Our research studies show how other colleges and universities communicate with graduate school students as part of process of on-boarding. We also looked at trends in summer melt and international student enrollment in the United States. Research studies show how other institutions within higher-education improved their communication strategies to become more effective at communicating with their students, therefore providing them with better customer service. Our investigation of the on-boarding process by looking at what is being conducted at other institutions may help to guide Clark students through the period of time from admission to enrollment.

Our research questions were as follows:

1. How is summer melt defined?
2. What are the trends in international student enrollment?
3. Is there more competition for recruiting international students?
4. How do students prefer to be communicated with?
5. Should communications to students be more personalized?
6. Is social media effective in communicating with admitted graduate students?
7. What are the new ways to communicate with students?

8. What communication channels do students use most often to find information about graduate schools?
9. What does the onboarding process at other institutions look like?
10. Should institutions stop focusing on ROI (Return on Investment) during student orientation and focus more on creating community and the student experience?

One of the key pieces of this project is to review whether the communication can be made more effective in keeping students engaged from the point of acceptance through the point of arrival on campus. We will also recommend how to streamline communications within Clark University based on our answers of these questions. Therefore, we looked at other institutions of higher education's successful onboarding practices in the hope of gaining insight from them.

The literature review addresses communication preferences of millennials and trends in higher-education enrollment. It also examines the challenges that educational administrators face in addressing the problem of summer melt while also outlining new challenges of international student enrollment. Additionally, it provides recommendations to close the gap in Clark University's exiting graduate school communication plan to increase the number of students who enroll within the three graduate enterprises at Clark University. In order to examine our concerns about the onboarding process, our group examined a number of information sources. These sources provided insight into the growing trend in summer melt, and how graduate schools improve communications with students. We reviewed journal articles due to their scholarly nature, blogs due to their relativity, research

papers, newspaper articles, reports, and survey results because of their widespread implications.

As the largest host country of international students worldwide, the U.S. has benefited from the rising interest in advanced degree programs. Therefore, we looked at research reports that talked about the trends, issues, and provided insights of international recruitment for master's programs (Chang, Lu, 2015). We used this information to help us better understand the trends and forms of international recruitment and make suggestions based upon them (Chang, Lu, 2015).

#### Defining and Understanding Variables that may Contribute to Summer Melt Rates

*Summer melt* is a term traditionally used by college admissions officers to describe the phenomenon that occurs when a college-bound student is admitted to but fails to enroll in college. These are admitted students who complete key college-going steps, such as applying to and being accepted to college as well as applying for financial aid. All appearances indicate that they are going to enroll in the fall, but they then fail to matriculate at that college following the completion of these tasks. When the student fails to show up on campus and register for classes they have “melted.” The magnitude of summer melt trends at colleges and universities is systemic and poses new questions and challenges that administrators need to address (Castleman, 2014, p. 6).

According to a 2014 report published by Hanover Research institutions of higher education: “58% identified the following pressing issues of concern: declining enrollment, competition for prospective graduate students, attracting diverse pools of candidates, challenging in recruiting international students, and recruiting quality graduate students” (Hanover Research, 2014, p. 7). This report also found that stresses related to these issues

were found more so at private masters-focused intuitions than at the public and doctoral institutions (Hanover Research, 2014, p. 7).

A report published by the Strategic Data Project at the Center for Education Policy and Research at Harvard University explain there are number of reasons why students melt. These include difficulties related to understanding “tasks related to financing education, unfamiliarity with support resources available at their intended college, families who lack experience with the college-going processes, making sense of bill payments, budgeting for expenses such as textbooks and health insurance” (Castleman, 2013, p. 6).

#### Recommendations for Reducing Summer Melt

One way for universities to encourage matriculation is to reach out to newly admitted students at the time they are admitted. This can include personalized contact, especially over the spring and summer months, by a Graduate Assistant Advisor. By reaching out and making personal contact with an admitted student it would may allow the student to feel welcome as part of their college community. These programs can easily fit into most existing staffing structures.

The Graduate Assistant Advisor could offer advice and encouragement about various processes by providing mentorship and support when it comes to walking them through arduous tasks. Examples of these tasks include: filling out FAFSAS, selecting courses, and even offer advice about different professors. They could serve as a connection to those offices and departments by directly assisting students with concerns and questions. Questions may be related to on or off campus housing, health insurance, and visas. By eliminating barriers through the development of a Graduate Assistant outreach program, Clark University may be able to engage some of these students that would have otherwise melted.

In the blog written for Usable Knowledge, in the U.K., Miriam Greenberg, director of the Center for Education Policy and Research at Harvard University, cites that obstacles for

enrollment at undergraduate institutions includes unexpected financial challenges, confusion over paperwork, and feeling overwhelmed” (Greenberg, p. 3). It is possible to imagine these same obstacles as being faced by graduate students. As an intervention strategy, Greenberg set-up a trial to test whether or not low touch strategies (or nudges) could prompt students to complete pre-college tasks. She did this through personalized phone calls and by sending text-messages. These text messages included college-specific information and included links. Accordingly, another summer melt intervention strategy may include developing a texting model where personalized messages are sent to the cellphones of admitted students. These messages can pertain to important deadlines, orientation dates, and registration dates. (Chewing, 2014). “By borrowing the concept of nudges from behavioral economics” these low touch strategies could prompt students to access support and complete tasks (Greenberg, 2015, p. 4).

By using these simple steps to connect individually with students the results were significant. The results were a “10% to 15% increase in college matriculation” (Greenberg, p. 5-6). This has led us to believe that the texting model combined with the Graduate Assistant Advisor program could be a viable solution to guiding students through the enrollment process. With increased preparation for arriving on campus in the fall, these programs could have a positive impact on reducing summer melt rates.

A recent study, conducted by Worldcom Public Relations Group partners, Schneider Associates, and The Pollack PR Marketing Group (2014), consisted of four qualitative focus groups in Boston, New York and Los Angeles, and a quantitative online survey of 130 current or recent college applicants. This study focused on the fact that there is a decreasing crop of prospective students among colleges and universities (“Class,” 2014). The study indicated that iGens and Millennials are dissatisfied with the impersonal nature of traditional college communications outreach (“Class,” 2014). iGens are those born between 1994 and

2004 and require “information on demand” with a professed inclination to trust the advice of “friends,” or strangers, who share their opinions freely on social media platforms (“Class,” 2014). Millennials, whom we define as those ages 18-34 in 2015, now number 75.4 million, surpassing the 74.9 million Baby Boomers (ages 51-69) (Richard, 2016). Therefore, colleges and universities want to engage with students directly through popular social media channels, texting and video, all with personalized messages.

A benchmark study conducted by Ruffalo Noel Levitz, found that colleges charging a fee of less than \$35 had a higher yield rate than those not charging a fee (Cohen, 2013). For private institutions the data suggested that prospective students paying a tuition deposit of less than \$200 have the highest yield rates. Perhaps increasing or standardizing the application fee for all programs combined with increasing the amount of the tuition deposit (less than \$200) will result in a lower melt rate.

#### Trends in International Student Enrollment in the United States

It would be remiss not to evaluate the role that international students play in graduate level enrollment: “international students contributed almost 27 billion dollars to the U.S. economy in 2014 and by 2017 the global middle class is project to increase spending on educational products and services by 50% from 4.4 trillion in 2012 to 6.2 trillion” (Ortiz, 2015, p.1). Moreover, the increasing trend in international students spending on graduate education has had an impact on the reputation of an American education.

Nearly 80% of international students’ college funding comes from outside the U.S. helping to grow the economy and in the last half of the twentieth century, America was the location of choice for the best and brightest scientific minds in the world, comprising 62% of the global populations star scientists and engineers, the majority of whom arrived as international students (Forbush & Wells, 2016, p. 1).



Knowing the benefits that international students can bring there is a more global competition for universities in the U.S. “Universities in Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom are trying to recruit students from emerging market economies such as Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, and China. Other countries such as Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates are also increasing driven by government scholarships such as the King Abdullah Scholarship Program and Brazil Scientific Mobility Program” (Ortiz, 2015, p. 4). “Australian and Canadian enrollments are steadily increasing, Canada in particular because it is found to be the most affordable study destination among the big four English-speaking destinations” (Ortiz, 2015, p. 3).

According to NAFSA, for every seven international students enrolled, three U.S. jobs are created or supported. Also, in the 2013-2014 academic year, international students created or supported a total of 340,000 jobs nationwide (Ortiz, 2015). It is without uncertainty that the U.S. will continue to face competition for international students as new educational destinations, like China, emerge in the global market.

According to emerging market research “the top four emerging markets for recruiting international students in the next three years are Brazil, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Nigeria.” (Yuanyuan Fang, WES 2015, p. 3-7). Due to the fact that funding for international education varies for each country depending on location, would it make sense for universities’ such as Clark to improve or engage in international student enrollment strategies by seeking partnerships with foreign governments and intuitions? These partnerships would be beneficial as foreign governments and institutions understand the needs and behaviors of students from their country.

Today, more than ever before, there is increased global competition for international students. It is possible that by increasing the application fees and tuition deposits that Clark University, they may see a reduced rate in summer melt. However, it is important to

investigate and explore how students prefer to receive communication from colleges and universities. It is also vital to look at how to construct virtual communities and build them before students arrive on campus. This may enhance their experience and potentially lead to an increase in enrollment numbers.

For the past five years, China has been the number one origin country for international students studying in America: “currently representing 31% of all international students and yet this group is the least adjusted due to their high level of stress, neuroticism, and perceived cultural distance” (Forbush & Welles, 2016, p. 2). Social networking is a popular form of communication:

Over 400 million Chinese adults use social networking sites, such as Weibo and RenRen on a daily basis. Social networking sites have been found to have a positive impact on creating social capital and improving psychological well-being for American students, so it follows that they might also help international students adapt to their new life when they’re are studying in the U.S (Forbush & Welles, 2016, p. 2).

In understanding this noteworthy trend, institutions may be able to focus on engaging this student population through their social media outlets. Also, they may be able to tailor specific social media pages for this population, as they will be sharing a similar experience. In general, social networks provide people with a number of benefits including social support and a sense of belongingness (Forbush & Welles, 2016, p. 3). Social Networks “provide emotional feedback, support, and shared experiences promoting ties” and create a sense of community (Forbush & Welles, 2016, p. 4).

Creating a sense of community and belonging to Clark University is vital for helping students adapt the campus life, even before they arrive on campus. This is especially true for international students and can be done inexpensively through various social media channels. A recent article, published in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (2016,

implied that “social media can be used to improve Chinese international students’ adaptation and that currently many universities do not provide sufficient programs to assist international students with the difficult process of adapting to life in a new country” (Forbush & Welles, 2016, p. 9). These findings suggest that “social media networks can build support structures and mitigate stress which lead to greater happiness and success in their transition to study abroad in the US” (Forbush, 2016, p. 3).

### Orientation and Onboarding Process

According to Dave Cormier’s research on New Student Orientation (NSO) process (2016), the current obsession for most colleges is to focus on how well institutions prepare their students for the job market and other ROIs. This obsession neglects the fact that students are coming from a wide variety of backgrounds, which means that they need a variety of information. In order to solve this problem, Cormier suggested to develop a resiliency model by creating experiences that enable students to make healthy connections to each other, to their student mentors, to faculty and staff, and to the local community, all in their first few days on campus.

In terms of on-boarding processes, University of Illinois, Chicago (2016) has created a webpage dedicated to students who have been accepted in an effort to welcome them to the institution and ease their transition. From this website page, students can find essential information like checklists, orientation dates, and a campus map. They can also connect with other admitted students using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. In addition, this website page also includes information especially for international students and veterans.

Additionally, having an on-boarding checklist is a popular selection for most graduate schools to put online in an effort to help students better understand the admissions and enrollment process. For instance, Wake Forest has an on-boarding checklist for WFU

undergraduate students who want to take graduate level courses as well as clinical/research internships. The checklist includes on-boarding procedures with detailed information about what kind of forms students are supposed to sign and how to contact Student Records Coordinator. It also includes exit procedures in case some students might want transfer to another college or withdraw from the institution.

The University California, Irvine (2016), has four different types of checklists that address the different needs of both international and domestic students. In order to better serve the needs of domestic students and international students as they begin their graduate career. The University of California, Irvine created two different Pre-Arrival Checklists: one for domestic students and another for international students. It also developed two different Post-Arrival Checklists for both domestic and international students to assist them after they arrive on campus. All four of these checklists have detailed information or documents about students' most common questions, such as transportation, tuition, and health insurance.

#### Marketing and Strategic Planning using Multichannel Communication Approach

Through our research on what other colleges are doing to solve their communication problems, we found out that the most frequent and effective way for the majority of colleges to communicate with student is through email. Currently, students are bombarded with emails, which makes them hard to tell which of those are truly urgent. Sometimes, it is a difficult thing to even get students open their email (Supiano, 2016).

In order to improve communications with students, Michigan State University used the sticky-note technique. Known as process mapping, this method analyzes every mass communication that departments sent to students between the time students made their enrollment deposits to the time they were accepted into their academic colleges. As a result, MSU made several improvements which include: standardizing emails, rethinking the process of placing "holds" on student accounts, and centralizing scholarships. One thing

MSU was considering was starting a central portal, a kind of clearinghouse holding all of students' important tasks that need to be completed.

To address concerns of how to increase enrollment, Central Michigan University developed a recruitment plan and it tied itself to the goals of the University's strategic plan. They wanted to transition to a more traditional campus and promote CMU as a destination university. They improved their informational materials, communication channels, partnerships with international institutions, and their marketing and communications plan. In addition, they increased their direct mail, have a greater presence online and in educational search engines, have awareness initiatives broken down by regions, and enhanced their current CRM.

According to the article written by Li Chang & Zhengrong Lu (2015), the most commonly used information-seeking channel among Master's students is the institutional website (91%), followed by web search (72%). This means website optimization is important in better serving both prospective and enrolled students. Therefore, a proactive online outreach strategy should be greatly encouraged.

Between 2010 and 2012 the University of Georgia (UGA), which offers 140 master's programs throughout 17 schools, experienced a decline in its graduate student population. In an effort to increase enrollments, UGA redesigned their academic websites, as these websites are often the first place potential students go to find out information. Therefore, designing effective web pages and being sure that contact information and content is updated, is equally important. UGA has developed a best-practice mentorship program run by graduate school assistants to personally mentor and connect with underrepresented potential students. UGA has found that this approach is "building a community of inclusivity in graduate programs" (Hanover Research, 2014, p. 25).

### Conclusions

From our research on communications to students at different colleges and universities, we discovered a series of factors that negatively influence communication. Factors such as information overload, information repetition, communication inconsistency, and low enthusiasm of students' involvement in communication are the majority of problems that most colleges are facing.

In order to solve the communication problem, most colleges began by mapping out their communication information and methods to discover deficiencies. Social networks can be used to create a sense of belonging and play an important role during transition. They can be especially helpful in reducing stress and increasing success for students while being particularly beneficial when working with international students. Social media groups can provide a space where international students can find emotional feedback, support, share experiences and build community long before they even set foot on campus for orientation. Clark University would benefit from adopting a multichannel communication plan using social media, video, text messaging, blogs, updated websites and mobile friendly email templates in order to better engage students in the communication they receive.

By extending Clark's digital footprint through texting platforms and social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn and blog it could help improve communication with potential graduate students, admitted students, and enrolled students. Creating a multi-channeled, strategic-marketing approach is extremely important for Clark University, especially in a world that is competing for the best and brightest graduate-level students. By engaging in a multiple channeled communication approach you ensure that your brand and message is consistent and has a global reach to attract as many people as possible. Creating a pilot Graduate Ambassador program that uses texting technology and

existing staffing may help in forming and creating a culture where students feel as though they're joining a caring and supportive academic community.

### Lessons Learned

Reviewing the literature was a very time consuming process as it required critically reading through a vast array of literature. Towards the end of the semester we realized we had more literature than we needed as we only needed six sources. It was also interesting to see what questions we had answered at the final stages of the literature review process.

We believe that Clark University would benefit from acknowledging the importance of communicating through social media and value its potential. By extending Clark's digital footprint through platforms including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn and blog it could help improve communication with potential graduate students, admitted students and enrolled students. Creating a multi-channeled, strategic-marketing approach is extremely important for Clark University, especially in a world that is competing for the best and brightest graduate-level students. By engaging in a multiple channeled communication approach you ensure that your brand and message is consistent and reaches as many people all over the world as possible.

Creating a sense of community and belonging to Clark University is vital for helping students adapt to campus life, even before arrival on campus. This is especially true for international students and can be done inexpensively through various social media channels. Furthermore, creating different checklists for both domestic students and international students is also important for helping students start their graduate career. The personalized checklist would help students have a better understanding of enrollment process, but also make students feel welcomed and valued.

Chapter 3: Methods



## Design

After our initial meeting with our clients (the three Deans of the Enterprises, Associate Provost and Dean William F. Fisher, and Associate Dean Paul Mack), we decided to conduct individual interviews with those involved in the process. We interviewed Dean Usoff (GSOM), Dean Carr (IDCE), Dean Chetro-Szivov (SPS, as well as the program leads for SPS), Dean Fisher (Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Admissions), Ethan Bernstein (Assistant Dean of Graduate Admissions and expert with SLATE), Jeff McMaster (Director of Student Accounts), Patty Doherty (Director of International Students and Scholars), Paige Turcotte (Graduate Admissions Recruitment Counselor). We have briefly summarized the main points from our meetings below.

### Interview Notes:

#### Ed Carr

When meeting with Dean Carr, he mentioned a need to make some change within the IDCE department. He does not send the communication to this population of students, but uses the standard emails sent through the office of graduate admissions. This begins with the social media presence, which has been dormant and underutilized for quite some time. He mentioned using programs such as Instagram to further promote events, while also creating a digital archive and presence. It is through this initiative that Dean Carr hopes to increase student engagement in the department's events. Another challenge has been transition and a loss of institutional knowledge. This has led to documents that need to be revised or recreated, such as the incoming student checklist.

#### Catherine Usoff

When meeting with Dean Usoff, she explained that even though she is not in charge of writing the emails she wants to make sure the proper tone is being used to make the students feel welcomed. She told us about initiatives that GSOM has done in the past: using

WeChat for Chinese international students and sending videos through the GSOM student council to accepted students. She feels there is a need for an overall coordinated communication plan. She wants accepted students to know and feel that we want them here and the communication needs to show that.

John Chetro-Szivos

Our meeting with Dean Chetro-Szivos also included the program leads of SPS. They were all on the same page in that they all feel as they are not involved in the process. They say they do not have access to who is coming until they show up for orientation. They feel the program leads should be more involved in the process. They suggested social media being used more as well as enticing accepted students with interesting information; for example, sending out an electronic version of Clark's history or sending out stories of some of the students who have been through the program.

Patty Doherty

Our meeting with Director Doherty helped to illuminate some of the the level of outreach that the Office of International Students and Scholars has with incoming international graduate students. The office has a packet of required documentation that is distributed through Graduate Admissions. As for their outreach, Director Doherty mentions that this only occurs when additional information is needed. This communication occurs via email, but on occasion occurs via the phone. Other than that, the office sends the occasional communication to students if the country they lived in prior to arrival at Clark experiences a crisis. This is done via email and is sometimes coordinated with Marketing and Communications.

Jeff McMaster

When meeting with Jeff, he mentioned that the primary communications are bill-related emails coming out of his office. The only time the student accounts office uses

another form of communication is if there is an emergency situation related to a student's account or if a student did not pay before the deadline. If this is the case, they then make a phone call to contact them. He noted that the emails most read were those of which had a threatening tone. For example, receiving communication about impending financial withdraw. He told us that his office does not receive many complaints about their communication process. However, they did get a lot of emails with questions such as how and where to pay the bill. The biggest challenge they are facing is in trying to determine the most effective way to reach students as students do not check their email regularly. In addition, reaching international students could also be a challenge. This is a challenge because of the language barrier, not knowing how to pay their bill, and the school not making international phone calls. At this time, they do not have a creative way to instruct international students as to how to pay their bill. For instance, a video walkthrough outlining the steps of the process.

#### William Fisher

We met with Dean Fisher who informed us that he does not always see all the communication that goes out. He fears the tone and timing of these messages is what may be problematic. He does feel the admissions team does a good job in providing accurate information to accepted students. He stressed the importance of the tone in the messages that are sent out.

#### Ethan Bernstein

Ethan provided us with the SLATE data from this past admissions timeframe. This included the emails that were sent out and the schedule by which the emails went out. When meeting with Ethan, he mentioned that the most read emails were those related to billing. He stated that WeChat has been a successful marketing strategies for GSOM to attract and interact with Chinese students. He also told us that he has experienced complaints from

students that they are getting too many emails. Ethan explained the main challenges he sees: students do not check their email regularly, some students are using made-up email addresses for the application which makes them difficult to contact, and admissions does not have a way of reaching out to international students before they come to the states (not making international phone calls and Skype could be time-consuming because it requires one on one).

### Paige Turcotte

When we met with Paige we focused on reviewing a particular set of emails that is distributed by the Graduate School of Management. These emails are sent in four different tiers, based on the date in which a student deposits. The range of the tiers begins with a day after deposit in the first tier and three weeks after deposit in the second tier. Additionally, Paige shared the different updates that were in the process of being made to these documents reflecting changes within the department. Some factors that stood out in the different tiers are how the populations are divided. For example, certain emails are sent to Chinese students while similar emails are sent to non-Chinese students.

### Our Survey

We decided we wanted to survey students from all schools. When discussing how we were going to go about the survey, we decided an anonymous survey would do us justice. We created a survey and submitted it for IRB approval. After we received approval, we piloted it by sending the survey out to several other graduate students to test it. We then requested each Dean to send it out to their students. We hoped the survey would reach all of the schools, programs, and different types of students. For this particular project, fifth years would not help in our research. Their insight would have no bearing on our research as they are admitted differently than other students.

We hoped to reach both domestic and international students as well as both full and part time students. We realize that everyone's application process is unique, but we hoped to

gather data in what they liked and what they did not like as far as communication. One implication of this survey is that some students may not fully remember the process because it happened a year or more ago.

### MSPC Capstone Survey-Graduate Student Experience

#### Cover Letter

Greetings,

We hope this message finds you well. We are a student team in a capstone course in the School of Professional Studies studying the effect of communication between Clark and students accepted into graduate programs in the International Development, Community and Environment Department; the Graduate School of Management; and the School of Professional Studies.

We ask for your cooperation by completing this anonymous survey. We are focused on studying the communication you received from Clark University from the time you made your deposit until the time you arrived for orientation. We are interested in graduate students' impressions of the communication received and want to know if there are areas students feel could be improved. Your participation in this survey will provide valuable information to assess the current processes and make recommendations to provide a better experience for incoming graduate students.

The survey we are distributing is to be completed by Monday, November 28th. You are welcome to leave questions blank or to end the survey at any point if you do not feel comfortable. None of your identifying information is required and we guarantee your anonymity. In addition, we are not capable of tracing responses back to the survey participants. We suggest that in the open-ended questions your responses do not identify who you are in any way. Thank you for your participation and taking the time to make Clark University a better place for students.

Survey

Please complete the following questions below. You are welcome to leave questions blank or to end the survey at any point if you do not feel comfortable. No identifying information will be asked for; this is an anonymous survey. Please know that we are not able to trace this data back to participants and you should refrain from listing identifying information in the open ended responses. Thank you for your participation!

Please note that whenever we are asking about the “process” or communication during a period of time, we are referring to the time from when you accepted admission and made a deposit to your graduate program until you arrived on campus for orientation.

---

What is your age?

18 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55 +

Which graduate school do you belong to?

IDCE

SPS

GSOM

GSOM and IDCE

---

In which graduate program are you enrolled?

MSIT

MSPC

MPA

MBA

MSA

MSF

MSM

MBA/MA in Community Development and Planning

MBA/MS in Environmental Science and Policy

MA in Community Development and Planning

MS in Environmental Science and Policy

MS in Geographic Information Science for Development and Environment

MA in International Development and Social Change

---

In which semester did you begin taking courses at Clark?

Fall 2014

Spring 2015

Fall 2015

Spring 2016

Fall 2016

What is your current enrollment status?

Full-time student

Part-time student

5th year student





What is your current employment status?

- I am employed full-time
  - I am employed part-time
  - I am currently unemployed
- 

Are you a Clark University employee?

- Yes
  - No
- 

How did you first learn about graduate programs at Clark University?

- Friends
- Website
- Advisor
- Social Media
- Parents
- College Fair
- Agent/Agency
- Other

Are you an international student or domestic student?

International

Domestic

Where did you obtain your undergraduate degree (State/Country)?

What was the country of your permanent residence during your application process?

How did you prefer to receive communications from Clark prior to arriving on campus (select all that apply)?

Clark Email

Personal Email

Facebook

Direct Mail

Twitter

Text Message

Group Messaging Application (Wechat, GroupMe, WhatsApp, etc.)

Other

Emails I received from Clark during the process (from deposit to arriving for orientation) were clear?

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

---

Emails I received during the process were helpful?

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Emails I received during the process were friendly?

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

---

The messages I received from different Clark offices during the process were consistent in their tone?

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

---

The instructions in the emails were clear and easy to understand?

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

---

Individuals who communicated with me during the process made me feel supported?

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Please rate communication about each of the listed topics on four dimensions (adequacy, helpfulness, importance (to you), and effectiveness) using a 5-point scale with 5 being the highest level and 1 being the lowest level on each attribute.

	Adequate					Helpful					Important					Effective				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health Insurance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transportation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On Campus Employment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Billing/Student Accounts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Aid	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Curriculum/Registration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What topic did you not receive communication about that you would have found helpful?

How would you rate the overall level of communication you received about your graduate program during the period of deposit through orientation?

- Excellent
- Good
- Adequate
- Poor
- Very Poor

Did you apply to other graduate schools?

- Yes
- No

Clark University is a good value for my educational investment:

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Do you have any suggestions regarding the communications you received from the time you made your deposit to Clark until you arrived on campus for orientation?

### Ethical Concerns

There was a chance of potential bias from employees of the university. They might not be totally honest in the description of their problems in their efforts to save face.

Data Analysis

Below is the current schedule of email communication and the operational emails sent with this schedule can be found in APPENDIX C.

Current Schedule of Email Communication

Incoming Graduate Student Summer Communication Schedule							
Date	Topic	Method	Purpose	GSOM	IDCE	SPS	Grad School
1 day after deposit	Preparing for your arrival (FT students)	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
1 day after deposit	Preparing for your arrival (PT GSOM)	Email	Operational	x			
1 day after deposit	Preparing for your arrival (PT SPS)	Email	Operational			x	
4 days after deposit	On-campus housing	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
Every Tuesday	I-20 materials missing	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
Upon I20 Shipping	I-20 shipping/tracking	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
6-Jun	MSA advisor welcome	Email/Skype/Phone	GSOM/Anti-Melt	x			
7-Jun	IDCE SGA welcome/facebook page	Email	IDCE/Anti-Melt		x		
7-Jun	Health insurance	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
13-Jun	MSF prereqs unfulfilled	Email	GSOM/Operational	x			
15-Jun	Immunization Forms due	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
24-Jun	Immunization forms due (reminder)	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
24-Jun	MBA FT advisor welcome	Email/Skype/Phone	GSOM/Anti-Melt	x			
27-Jun	GSOM student council welcome	Email/Video	GSOM/Ant-Melt	x			
27-Jun	IDCE program coordinator	Email/Skype/Phone	IDCE/Anti-Melt		x		
1-Jul	MSF prereq unfulfilled (reminder)	Email	GSOM/Operational	x			
5-Jul	Billing/registration information	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
7-Jul	IDCE welcome from Director	Email	IDCE/Anti-melt		x		
7-Jul	SPS welcome from Dean	Email	SPS/Anti-melt			x	
11-Jul	MSF SEVIS fee not paid	Email	GSOM/Operational	x			
14-Jul	IDCE social change house	Email	IDCE/Anti-Melt		x		
15-Jul	Final transcript not received	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
18-Jul	GSOM student council video	Email	GSOM/Anti-Melt	x			
19-Jul	Orientation reminder	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
20-Jul	MSF advisor welcome	Email	GSOM/Anti-melt	x			
22-Jul	Health insurance (reminder)	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
25-Jul	Final transcript unfulfilled (reminder)	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x
1-Aug	GSOM career management	Email	GSOM/Anti-melt	x			
3-Aug	MBA/MSA PT advisor	Phone	GSOM/Anti-melt	x			
8-Aug	Dual degree student welcome	Email	GSOM-IDCE/Anti-melt	x	x		
12-Aug	Orientation arrival	Email	Operational	x	x	x	x

After looking through the operational emails and examining them for tone and purpose we noticed there was an obvious lack of consistency within tone throughout the emails. There were some that were very welcoming, some that were neutral, and some that had a very demanding tone that could be very off-putting. One of the demanding emails began with “you are required by Massachusetts law...” We also noticed that there was no



consistency between the three enterprises. For instance, SPS does not have their own welcoming email from the Dean.

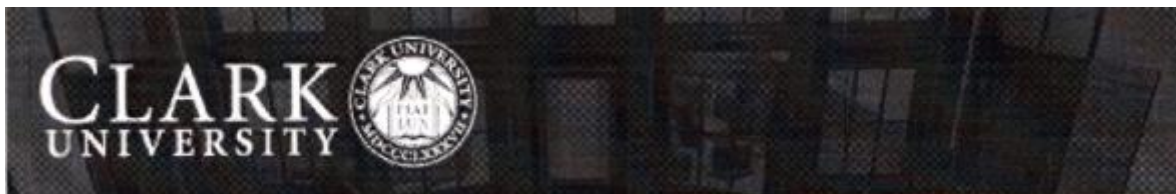
Through our interview with Patty we also found that GSOM has other emails being sent out. These emails were sent out to students between their first day of joining the GSOM population and continued until their 22nd day after joining the GSOM population. These emails can be found in APPENDIX C. We found a lack of consistency in the content and there was no overall theme. Below are the different headers on the emails sent out. Although, this is an example from just one enterprise, it can show the lack of consistency throughout the emailing process.



CHALLENGE CONVENTION  
CHANGE OUR WORLD.



CLARK  
UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF MANAGEMENT



As you can see above, we noticed there were five different formats of background with the symbol of Clark, just like the pictures show above. Overall, the tone of these emails were welcoming. Most emails had good opening and closing sentences: sentences like “I look forward to see you...” are a good way to welcome students. However, some emails either lacked opening sentences and or closing sentences, which made the tone less friendly and less welcoming. We also noticed these emails seemed very lengthy to the point where students may miss some crucial information.

**Chapter Four: Results and Reflection**

### Findings

After allowing our survey to remain open for a period of ten days, we received a total of 97 viable responses from the approximate 660 students representing the three enterprise schools. All of the students that participated in the survey are current students that began taking courses in or before the fall 2016 semester. The survey was designed to gather feedback from both full-time and part-time students. Fifth-year graduate students were also surveyed, but were directed to the end the survey almost immediately. The reason for this differentiation is the fifth-year deposit to orientation process is different from other students. The majority of the questions were quantitative in nature, providing numerical data for analysis. The following section will show selected data and visualizations to display some of our findings.

In order to obtain an understanding of the student population surveyed, the survey began by asking questions related to their demographic information. The age of survey participants is largely between 18 and 34, as over 88% of those surveyed indicated belonging to this age group. Moreover, almost 73% identified as being a full-time student, followed by fifth year students at 15% and part-time students at 12% respectively. Other notable demographic information includes the country of permanent residence of the participants during their application process. The greatest number of participants, 40 in total, were living in the United States during this time period. This is followed by China with 19 participants and India with 4 participants. Further demographic information can be found in Appendix B at the end of this report.

Following the demographic questions, participants were asked about their preferences and experiences about communication they received as an incoming student. Once a student has deposited to attend Clark University, they begin to receive information to prepare them for their arrival to begin their career as a student. In order to understand the communication

preferences of incoming students, participants were asked about the method in which they preferred to receive communication prior to arriving for orientation. Overwhelmingly, participants favored email as their preferred method of receiving communication. Having messages sent to personal email addresses was favored by approximately 61% of participants, followed by their Clark email address at approximately 53% and direct mail at approximately 11%, respectively. The remaining preferences were favored by less than 10% of participants, including Twitter, which was not selected as a preference by any of the participants.

Moreover, participants were asked a series of questions as to their interpretation of the communication that they received from Clark during the period of time from deposit through orientation. The questions asked participants whether they felt that the emails they received were clear, helpful, friendly, consistent in tone, easily understandable and whether they felt supported by the individuals sending the emails. The questions were all on a five point Likert scale and asked participants whether they agreed or disagreed with the questions. The points of the scale were as follows; strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree or disagree, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree. The survey results indicate that the majority of participants agree with the questions they were asked, with over 80% indicating either somewhat or strongly agreeing with these statements.

Furthermore, the next series of questions was a matrix asking participants about the information that they received from specific departments with particular relevance to incoming students. This matrix asks participants to rank the information they received about housing, health insurance, transportation, on campus employment, billing/student accounts, financial aid, curriculum/registration, and career services. The matrix asks participants to rank the adequacy, helpfulness, importance and effectiveness of communication received about these different topics. A ranking scale was used to assess these different areas, in the form of an ascending five-point scale with one being the lowest and five being the greatest.

Overall, some notable information from this section include the mean and mode data of specific areas of the survey. The highest mean score was a rating of 4.5, in the category of receiving important information about curriculum and registration. This score indicates that participants felt that communication of information about curriculum and registration was most important to them. Conversely, the lowest mean score was a rating of 2.7 in receiving adequate information about on campus employment. One can see that this information shows participants felt that the information received about on campus employment was not as adequate as anticipated. Another significant observation is the mode of scores received for all of these categories in the matrix. All but one of the scores had a mode of a 3 rating or better. The lone exception is a 1 rating given to effective communication pertaining to financial aid, meaning that the majority of participants gave this area the lowest possible rating. As the data derived from this section is extensive, further information can be found in Appendix B.

Additionally, a follow-up to this section asked participants to indicate any topic that they wanted to receive communication about that they did not. Financial related communication (financial aid, student accounts, costs and fees, etc.) was what the majority of participants wanted to receive communication about, but did not. Other notable responses include the desire for communication about whether to expect on campus, information about housing in areas other than Worcester and academic advising. A full breakdown of responses is available in Appendix B.

The survey proceeds to ask participants to rate the overall level of communication they received from when they deposited until they arrived for orientation. Moreover, the results of this section show that 37%, or the greatest percentage of participants, indicated the communication they received as being good. This was followed by 27% of participants and 24% of participants indicating the communication they received as being adequate and excellent, respectively. Subsequently, participants were asked if they applied to other

graduate schools and to consider Clark as being a good value for educational investment. A greater percentage, approximately 61%, applied to additional graduate schools beyond just Clark University. Also, over 81% of participants strongly agree or somewhat agree that Clark is a good value for their educational investment. Ultimately, with the exception of an opportunity for participants to provide additional suggestions, this marked the end of our survey. A table of these suggestions is available in Appendix B, as the responses received were lengthy and almost individualized to the participant.

### Salient Issues

For this project we noticed some notable issues pertaining to emails, consistency, and planning. Regarding emails, as mentioned above, there is inconsistency when it comes to the branding and tone of these messages. In addition, these emails include out of date information as well. This can be seen in the Princeton Review rankings as they are from prior years. We also noticed the overlapping of content in the messages. When reviewing the emails, we also noticed many emails to be lengthy to the point where students may miss some crucial information.

Another area in which we noticed some potential issues is in the level of collaboration between the different enterprises and their relationship with Graduate Admissions. For example, reaching a group consensus when setting goals and unifying priorities amongst the enterprise schools. There is also a lack of consistency with the three enterprises in admissions. For example, IDCE and GSOM both send out emails to incoming students from the Dean and a student from the school, whereas SPS does not have either of these emails being sent out to their incoming students. Moreover, when the different enterprises have changes in staff it is important to have a plan in place so that current initiatives can be maintained. An example of this can be seen in managing a social media page; when a staff member leaves it is important that another continues to monitor and post on this page.

Chapter 5: Conclusion



## Recommendations:

Updated Look and Feel

- How beneficial would it be to have an updated look and feel to existing emails by creating new branded templates with a uniform identity?
- Would it be practical to have one standard logo for all of Graduate Enterprises to share or for each enterprise to develop their own unique branded logo to ensure a consistent look and feel throughout all communication messaging?

As noted above, we noticed many different templates being used throughout graduate admissions and the three enterprises. We wonder if having one consistent up to date template that could be used across both graduate admissions as well as the enterprises would help create a more uniform identity. We also think that if each school does have their own unique branded logo then it should be consistent with the others.

Mobile Friendly

- Would it make sense for emails to be mobile friendly?

As we have noted in our literature review, there is a growing trend amongst incoming students that smartphones are the preferred communication device. In order to better meet students where they are at, it is important to design email content that can be put into a mobile template. This will eliminate issues that students have in viewing their emails on a smaller screen. Also, more concise messages complement the movement towards mobile device based communication.

Graduate Admissions Ambassador

- Is there a way to create a Student Ambassador pilot program to build relationships with potential students and helping them through the admissions and matriculation process?

In order to better aid students throughout their application and decision process, a Student Ambassador program would allow for higher touch interactions with current students. Ambassadors would be responsible for communicating with students who have deposited and work with them to prepare them for arrival to Clark. This may include offering them assistance and advice in completing tasks on their checklist or in which classes to take during their first semester. This type of organic interaction will also help incoming students feel connected to the community through the relationship they have built with their Ambassador.

### Videos

- Would it be feasible to have current student volunteers create videos to attract students by discussing their positive experiences as a member of the Clark community?

As we mentioned before, students nowadays desire authentic and personalized communication outreach from people similar to them. As one of the most popular social media methods, video could easily attract students' attention and help convey the message more effectively. For instance, by combining the beautiful campus and the profound history of Clark together to create a video. This video could give students a virtual campus tour, and this is especially beneficial for those who are not be able to visit the school. By adding a personal touch, this could make students realize that they are valued and welcomed by Clark University. These videos would also help them have a better understanding of Clark.

- Is it worth considering creating videos to be used on your websites, social media accounts or embedded into emails?

After meeting with both Ethan and Jeff, we found out that many students have similar questions in terms of how to pay their bill, OPT, and health insurance, etc.. Therefore,

we think it could be beneficial to create how-to videos and embed them into emails to help students solve their inquiries. This in turn, could make the communication with students more effective and straightforward. It could also increase the possibility for students to open their emails.

#### Email Content & Signatures Review

- Is there a way to review all email communications on a Quarterly basis for content accuracy?
- Should it be possible for this review to ascertain that statics are up-to-date, messaging is consistent, and ensure that all email signatures are from current Clark employees?

We wonder if by reviewing the emails quarterly as a group if this would keep the content up-to-date and consistent. This would ensure that the content being delivered to incoming students is the most up to date. Additionally, the email signatory might be someone that could be a potential point of contact for the incoming student. By providing them with inaccurate information, they may feel slighted and to consider options elsewhere.

#### Revision of Graduate Admissions Process

- Should graduate school admissions model themselves more after the undergraduate school in terms of their admissions processes?

In order to foster a sense of community around a shared experience, graduate school admissions may want to consider borrowing some tactics currently being used by undergraduate admissions at Clark and elsewhere. For example, it may be worthwhile to design social media landing pages for students to access once accepted. They will then be able to interact with their peers while gaining an idea of the student experience at Clark. Also, as this page would be administered by staff, it is an

opportunity to have questions answered in a more personal way. It is worth noting that the majority of survey participants indicated that the United States was their country of permanent residence during their application process. This creates an opportunity to invite students onto campus, such as a reception or welcome banquet, to begin connecting with the Clark community earlier on in the process.

#### Re-examination of Current Fee Structure

- Should Clark increase the application fee and the amount of tuition deposit for certain programs?
- Should all programs have a set tuition deposit fee that is the same for all graduate school programs across the board?

A benchmark study conducted by Ruffalo Noel Levitz (Cohen, 2013) found that colleges charging a fee of less than \$35 had a higher yield rate than those not charging a fee. For private institutions the data suggested that prospective students paying a tuition deposit of less than \$200 have the highest yield rates. Perhaps increasing or standardizing the application fee for all programs combined with increasing the amount of the tuition deposit (less than \$200) will result in a lower melt rate.

Appendices

Appendix A: Literature Review References

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Appendix B: Survey Results

## Survey Responses

Q23 - What is your age?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	18 - 24	49.46%	46
2	25 - 34	38.71%	36
3	35 - 44	9.68%	9
4	45 - 54	2.15%	2
5	55 +	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	93

Q1 - Which graduate school do you belong to?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	IDCE	27.66%	26
2	SPS	15.96%	15
3	GSOM	44.68%	42
4	GSOM and IDCE	11.70%	11
	Total	100%	94

Q2 - In which graduate program are you enrolled?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	MSIT	5.26%	5
2	MSPC	4.21%	4
3	MPA	6.32%	6
4	MBA	30.53%	29
5	MSA	6.32%	6
6	MSF	7.37%	7
7	MSM	1.05%	1
8	MBA/MA in Community Development and Planning	4.21%	4
9	MBA/MS in Environmental Science and Policy	8.42%	8
10	MA in Community Development and Planning	5.26%	5
11	MS in Environmental Science and Policy	5.26%	5
12	MS in Geographic Information Science for Development and Environment	6.32%	6

13	MA in International Development and Social Change	9.47%	9
	Total	100%	95

Q40 - In which semester did you begin taking courses at Clark?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Fall 2014	3.19%	3
2	Spring 2015	3.19%	3
3	Fall 2015	31.91%	30
4	Spring 2016	3.19%	3
5	Fall 2016	37.23%	35
6	Other	21.28%	20
	Total	100%	94

Which semester did you begin taking courses at Clark?
Fall 2009
Fall 2012
fall 2012
fall 2012
Fall 2012
Fall 2012
Fall 2012
Fall 2012
Fall 2013
fall 2013
Fall 2013
Fall 2013
Fall twelve
Spring
Spring 2014
Spring 2014
Spring 2014
Summer 2016
Summer 2016

Q3 - What is your current enrollment status?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Full-time student	72.63%	69
2	Part-time student	12.63%	12
3	5th year student	14.74%	14
	Total	100%	95

Q4 - What is your current employment status?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	I am employed full-time	28.75%	23
2	I am employed part-time	33.75%	27
3	I am currently unemployed	37.50%	30
	Total	100%	80

Q5 - Are you a Clark University employee?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	26.25%	21
2	No	73.75%	59
	Total	100%	80

Q6 - How did you first learn about graduate programs at Clark University?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Friends	18.07%	15
2	Website	40.96%	34
3	Advisor	8.43%	7
4	Social Media	1.20%	1
5	Parents	3.61%	3
6	College Fair	3.61%	3
8	Agent/Agency	12.05%	10
7	Other	24.10%	20
	Total	100%	83

From where did you first learn about graduate programs at Clark University?
40 Colleges That Change Lives
AmeriCorps
AmeriCorps
Americorps Matching Institutions website
Being a community member in Worcester-word of mouth
Benefit of Clark employment
Colleagues
During undergrad
IIE
internet
Peace Corps
peace corps
SPS faculty
this little place called google
Work

Q4 - Are you an international student or domestic student?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	International	47.37%	36
2	Domestic	52.63%	40
	Total	100%	76

Where did you obtain your undergraduate degree (State/Country)?
NH
Afghanistan
AP, India
AZ/USA
Boston, MA
California
California
California
California/United States

China
China
China
China
China
China
China
CHINA
china
CHINA
China
China
China
China
china
CT
Egypt
IL, USA
India
India
Indonesia
Indonesia
karnataka/India
Kenya
MA
MA
MA
MA
MA
MA, USA
MA/USA
MA/USA
MA/USA
Massachusetts
Massachusetts
Massachusetts
Massachusetts
Massachusetts, USA
Mexico
Minnesota/United States
MP, India
New Jersey/US
New York
New York

New York / United States
New York in the U S of A
North Carolina, USA
People's Republic of China
Philippines
Rhode Island
Shandong/China
Spain
State
SUNY
Texas/USA
VA
VA/Fredricksburg
vermont, USA
Wisconsin
Worcester MA

Q27 - What was the country of your permanent residence during your application process?
USA
Afghanistan
China
China
China
China
China
China
China
China
China
CHINA
china
CHINA
China
China
China
China
China
china
China
Egypt





USA
USA
USA
USA
USA
USA
USA

Q8 - How did you prefer to receive communications from Clark prior to arriving on campus (select all that apply)?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Clark Email	52.50%	42
7	Personal Email	61.25%	49
2	Facebook	6.25%	5
3	Direct Mail	11.25%	9
4	Twitter	0.00%	0
5	Text Message	8.75%	7
6	Group Messaging Application (Wechat, GroupMe, WhatsApp, etc.)	6.25%	5
8	Other	6.25%	5
	Total	100%	80

Q28 - What method of communication would you have preferred for receiving communication from Clark prior to arriving on campus?
phone call
Email or phone

Q9 - Emails I received from Clark during the process (from deposit to arriving for orientation) were clear?			
#	Answer	%	Count
18	Strongly agree	36.11%	26
19	Somewhat agree	51.39%	37
20	Neither agree nor disagree	4.17%	3
21	Somewhat disagree	5.56%	4
22	Strongly disagree	2.78%	2
	Total	100%	72

Q6 - Emails I received during the process were helpful?			
#	Answer	%	Count
11	Strongly agree	43.06%	31
12	Somewhat agree	43.06%	31
13	Neither agree nor disagree	9.72%	7
14	Somewhat disagree	2.78%	2
15	Strongly disagree	1.39%	1
	Total	100%	72

Q7 - Emails I received during the process were friendly?			
#	Answer	%	Count
11	Strongly agree	66.67%	48
12	Somewhat agree	23.61%	17
13	Neither agree nor disagree	6.94%	5
14	Somewhat disagree	2.78%	2
15	Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	72

Q29 - The messages I received from different Clark offices during the process were consistent in their tone?			
#	Answer	%	Count
11	Strongly agree	47.22%	34
12	Somewhat agree	40.28%	29
13	Neither agree nor disagree	5.56%	4
14	Somewhat disagree	2.78%	2
15	Strongly disagree	4.17%	3
	Total	100%	72

Q30 - The instructions in the emails were clear and easy to understand?			
#	Answer	%	Count
11	Strongly agree	45.07%	32
12	Somewhat agree	43.66%	31
13	Neither agree nor disagree	1.41%	1
14	Somewhat disagree	8.45%	6
15	Strongly disagree	1.41%	1
	Total	100%	71

Q31 - Individuals who communicated with me during the process made me feel supported?			
#	Answer	%	Count
11	Strongly agree	50.70%	36
12	Somewhat agree	32.39%	23
13	Neither agree nor disagree	11.27%	8
14	Somewhat disagree	4.23%	3
15	Strongly disagree	1.41%	1
	Total	100%	71

<u>Adequate</u>											
Question	1		2		3		4		5		Total
Housing	10.00%	5	6.00%	3	28.00%	14	26.00%	13	30.00%	15	50
Health Insurance	7.69%	4	15.38%	8	17.31%	9	26.92%	14	32.69%	17	52
Transportation	10.20%	5	14.29%	7	26.53%	13	32.65%	16	16.33%	8	49
On Campus Employment	19.61%	10	19.61%	10	39.22%	20	9.80%	5	11.76%	6	51
Billing/Student Accounts	10.71%	6	10.71%	6	33.93%	19	19.64%	11	25.00%	14	56
Financial Aid	23.64%	13	12.73%	7	29.09%	16	14.55%	8	20.00%	11	55
Curriculum/Registration	6.90%	4	13.79%	8	31.03%	18	25.86%	15	22.41%	13	58
Career Services	7.41%	4	7.41%	4	22.22%	12	33.33%	18	29.63%	16	54
Total		51		53		121		100		100	
<u>Helpful</u>											
Question	1		2		3		4		5		Total
Housing	17.39%	8	4.35%	2	34.78%	16	15.22%	7	28.26%	13	46
Health Insurance	7.84%	4	21.57%	11	25.49%	13	17.65%	9	27.45%	14	51
Transportation	10.64%	5	17.02%	8	25.53%	12	23.40%	11	23.40%	11	47
On Campus Employment	17.02%	8	14.89%	7	40.43%	19	17.02%	8	10.64%	5	47
Billing/Student Accounts	11.32%	6	13.21%	7	26.42%	14	24.53%	13	24.53%	13	53
Financial Aid	23.08%	12	11.54%	6	28.85%	15	19.23%	10	17.31%	9	52
Curriculum/Registration	7.55%	4	18.87%	10	24.53%	13	22.64%	12	26.42%	14	53
Career Services	6.12%	3	10.20%	5	22.45%	11	32.65%	16	28.57%	14	49
Total		50		56		113		86		93	
<u>Important</u>											
Question	1		2		3		4		5		Total
Housing	21.74%	10	6.52%	3	15.22%	7	19.57%	9	36.96%	17	46
Health Insurance	10.20%	5	4.08%	2	12.24%	6	16.33%	8	57.14%	28	49
Transportation	10.87%	5	8.70%	4	28.26%	13	15.22%	7	36.96%	17	46
On Campus Employment	12.50%	6	14.58%	7	14.58%	7	16.67%	8	41.67%	20	48
Billing/Student Accounts	7.41%	4	3.70%	2	5.56%	3	12.96%	7	70.37%	38	54
Financial Aid	13.73%	7	1.96%	1	13.73%	7	3.92%	2	66.67%	34	51
Curriculum/Registration	0.00%	0	3.77%	2	11.32%	6	11.32%	6	73.58%	39	53
Career Services	4.00%	2	0.00%	0	16.00%	8	36.00%	18	44.00%	22	50
Total		39		21		57		65		215	
<u>Effective</u>											
Question	1		2		3		4		5		Total
Housing	20.00%	9	6.67%	3	28.89%	13	28.89%	13	15.56%	7	45
Health Insurance	10.00%	5	16.00%	8	26.00%	13	28.00%	14	20.00%	10	50
Transportation	13.04%	6	13.04%	6	21.74%	10	30.43%	14	21.74%	10	46
On Campus Employment	19.15%	9	21.28%	10	29.79%	14	21.28%	10	8.51%	4	47
Billing/Student Accounts	9.43%	5	15.09%	8	24.53%	13	22.64%	12	28.30%	15	53
Financial Aid	27.45%	14	13.73%	7	21.57%	11	19.61%	10	17.65%	9	51

Curriculum/Registration	9.43%	5	18.87%	10	22.64%	12	22.64%	12	26.42%	14	53
Career Services	4.08%	2	8.16%	4	22.45%	11	38.78%	19	26.53%	13	49
Total		55		56		97		104		82	

Q33 - What topic did you not receive communication about that you would have found helpful?
I do not remember receiving information on on-campus employment nor do I remember seeing very much on financial aid.
Student Account
What weather to expect when arriving
More information on student life, student expenses, etc
N/A
worcester safety
Career
Fees associated with courses
N.A
Financial Aid
n/a
Specific expected cost for classes before accepting offer. I also would have liked a professor to return my inquiries .
Health Insurance
campus jobs
Auditing courses. Which core courses are exchangeable by other courses. A list prior to my arrival of the courses offered the first semester
Housing, curriculum
Financial Aid
financial aid
Recommendations for funding opportunities

Academic Advising: Which courses to take and when
n/a
Off Campus Housing in towns other than Woo
Basic Information On-Campus Housing
clarity on when we are expected to start (workshops, orientation, etc)
I did not receive any orientation from IDCE which could have been helpful. I received orientation from GSOM which helped somehow though.
GRADUATES AND UNDERGRADUATES IN ONE CLASS AND BEING TAUGHT AS EQUALS!! CLARK IS VERY POOR IN THAT REGARD AND THAT NEEDS TO BE SEPARATED! OR DO NOT FALSE ADVERTISE AS AGRADUATE SCHOOL, PLEASE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
Information Regarding Advising
Students Accounts was very unresponsive.
I would have liked the financial aid process to be much clearer and more efficient. It took more than a month after I was enrolled for me to receive my disbursement of funds, and no one contacted me about it.
Better instructions regarding registration and sooner (hard to plan work schedules when we didn't choose classes until the week before they began)

No
Career services
Financial Aid

Q24 - How would you rate the overall level of communication you received about your graduate program during the period of deposit through orientation?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Excellent	24.29%	17
2	Good	37.14%	26
3	Adequate	27.14%	19
4	Poor	10.00%	7
5	Very Poor	1.43%	1
	Total	100%	70

Q13 - Did you apply to other graduate schools?			
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	61.43%	43
2	No	38.57%	27
	Total	100%	70

Q38 - Clark University is a good value for my educational investment:			
#	Answer	%	Count
11	Strongly agree	38.03%	27
12	Somewhat agree	43.66%	31
13	Neither agree nor disagree	5.63%	4
14	Somewhat disagree	9.86%	7
15	Strongly disagree	2.82%	2
	Total	100%	71

<p>Q11 - Do you have any suggestions regarding the communications you received from the time you made your deposit to Clark until you arrived on campus for orientation?</p>
<p>I recommend informing IDCE students that their academic advisor is not necessarily their research advisor and that this person is not necessarily assigned to us based on interests. I would also recommend reminding students to contact faculty with similar interests while including the disclaimer that faculty may be away for the summer and will not respond until classes resume.</p>
<p>If there is a staff who will help taking students from airport to dorm, it's really helpful.</p>
<p>Some communications felt very impersonal, but I understand they have to send hundreds of emails</p>
<p>There could have been more information given regarding financial aid, on-campus employment and curriculum and career services.</p>
<p>No.</p>
<p>NO</p>
<p>Communications were always late. I would receive notice about important events/orientations very last minute.</p>
<p>No</p>
<p>nope</p>



Registrar's office has done a poor job with communication and has given me very inconsistent information throughout the application process. Basic billing information is important, and Clark's inability to promptly and adequately provide billing information demonstrates incompetence which unfortunately reflects negatively on the whole school!

Including more information about the program on the Clark website would be very helpful!

More internal cross-department communication to avoid miscommunication to students

good!

It was clear early on that different answers would come from different departments, ie admissions, academic department etc. I would suggest that departments communicate better with one another. Also, the website was a clearly under reconstruction and was very unclear, and still is. It was disappointing to know that the registrar was not able to provide up to date and accurate information regarding course offerings and descriptions. I would recommend that each academic department develop a plan to have next semester course offerings with descriptions available to registrar well in advance so that such communication can be posted. Overall, my experience at Clark has been mediocre. To my own fault, I suppose I expected more from a school that sells itself as cutting edge. Our class came in to our department (IDCE) at a time of obvious disarray. I believe people did their best under the circumstances, but many of us feel totally at the brunt of the bad joke that IDCE represented itself as this year.

It would be helpful for the academic adviser to reach out to students to answer any questions regarding which classes to take when. Also, I found it difficult to use my AmeriCorps funds to pay the deposit/tuition. It seemed that there was no case manager to help process the money transfer and check up to see if it went through. I was asked where the deposit was, when I had initiated the transfer from AmeriCorps a month prior. I realize AmeriCorps takes time to transfer the money, but since AmeriCorps and PeaceCorps are highly promoted, there should be someone managing the transfer of money from those scholarship accounts.

Only send important emails to personal non clark email addresses

Graduate Students are somewhat ignored by Clark Administration as a whole. Graduation is the first taste of that, but it does not have to be; making sure that the students are supported by the IDCE and/or GSOM administrators, faculty, and staff can really show the students that someone cares about them, or is at least concerned about more than money. This means replying to emails, being a resource for students when we have problems academically and fundamentally with the way classes are being taught, and listening to students when we provide constructive feedback for the program.

I would wish to have known clearly matters concerning IDCE student and academic support before coming to Clark. I learnt these opportunities after staying a while.

Be nice! Especially student accounts- lara maloney. Answer/reply emails answer/return calls, my goodness! And stop billing us unfairly without communicating to us. Clark university I have regrets coming here as a graduate student. Idce be consistent with communication and have one channel to do so. New professors/visiting professors should be catered to- hospitality. We teach about but the department does not practice it. Communicate to them and students! Orientation across board. What the hell was that? International students still not knowing there is escort service, how to use it when etc.? And walking at night home, struggling with groceries and walking home. And domestic students still confused about little things. Also SA and GSC are not a communication avenue to get to students so re-route that. Undergrads in grad courses...no! And if yes (should be NO) please communicate that to undergrads the caliber expected and to grads that it that caliber will not drop because it has and tell Profs refuse to cater to grads directly and indirectly to stop that. Communicate to Profs and students. We have voiced this out. So I have no suggestions because I already voiced them out.

The course registration process, use and value of advising, and the relevance of orientation were unhelpful. Because I was a commuter from another state, I really only needed to know when/how to register for classes. I took the entire week off from work to attend the orientation, which was largely focused on things that were not relevant or helpful.

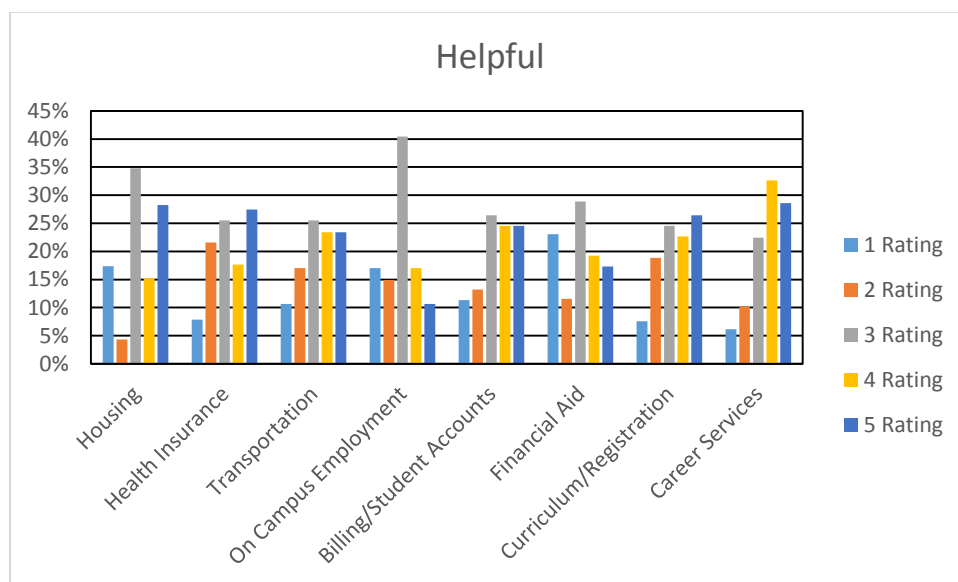
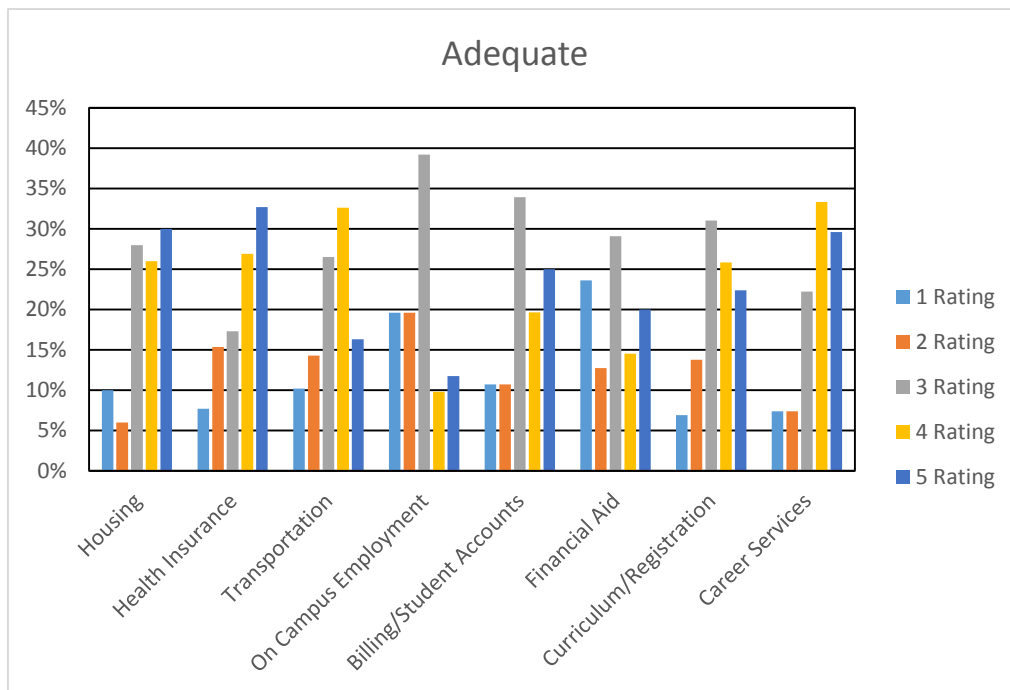
The web site is difficult to use, particularly with regards to finding course listings and navigate to that page. I know it is currently under construction and being addressed.

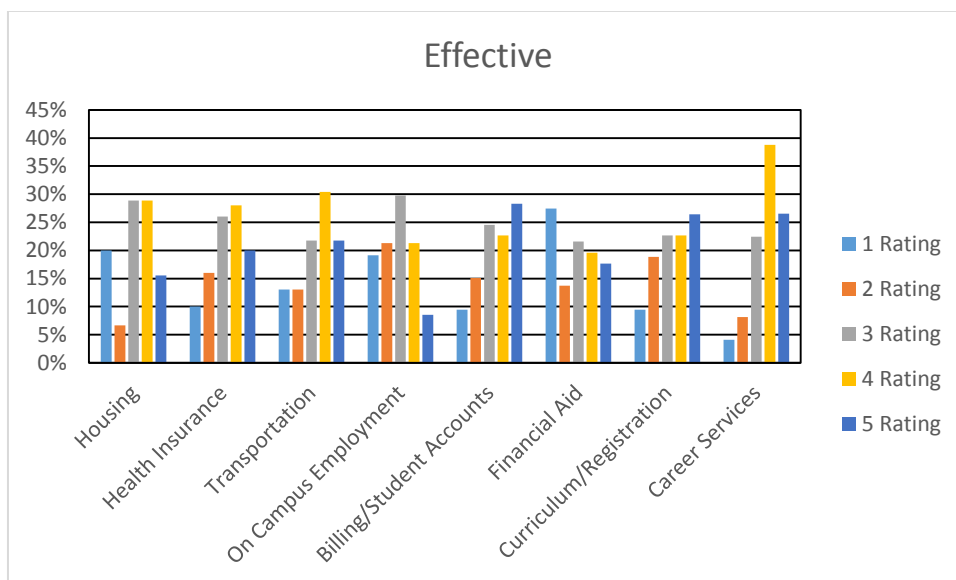
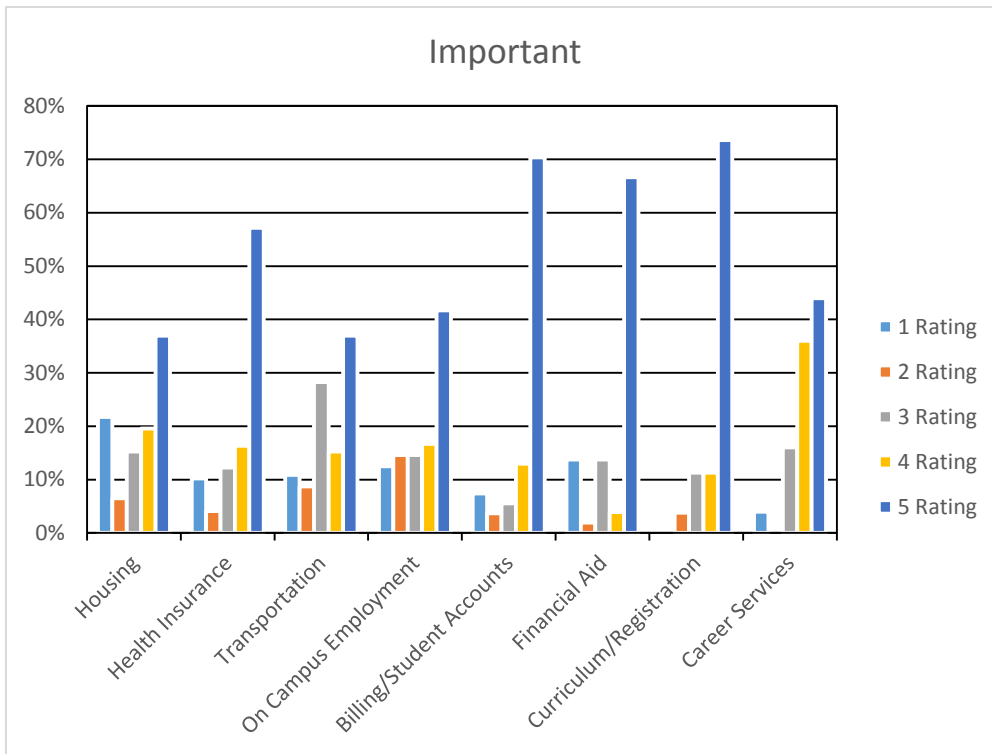
Financial aid was not very clear. See above.

No

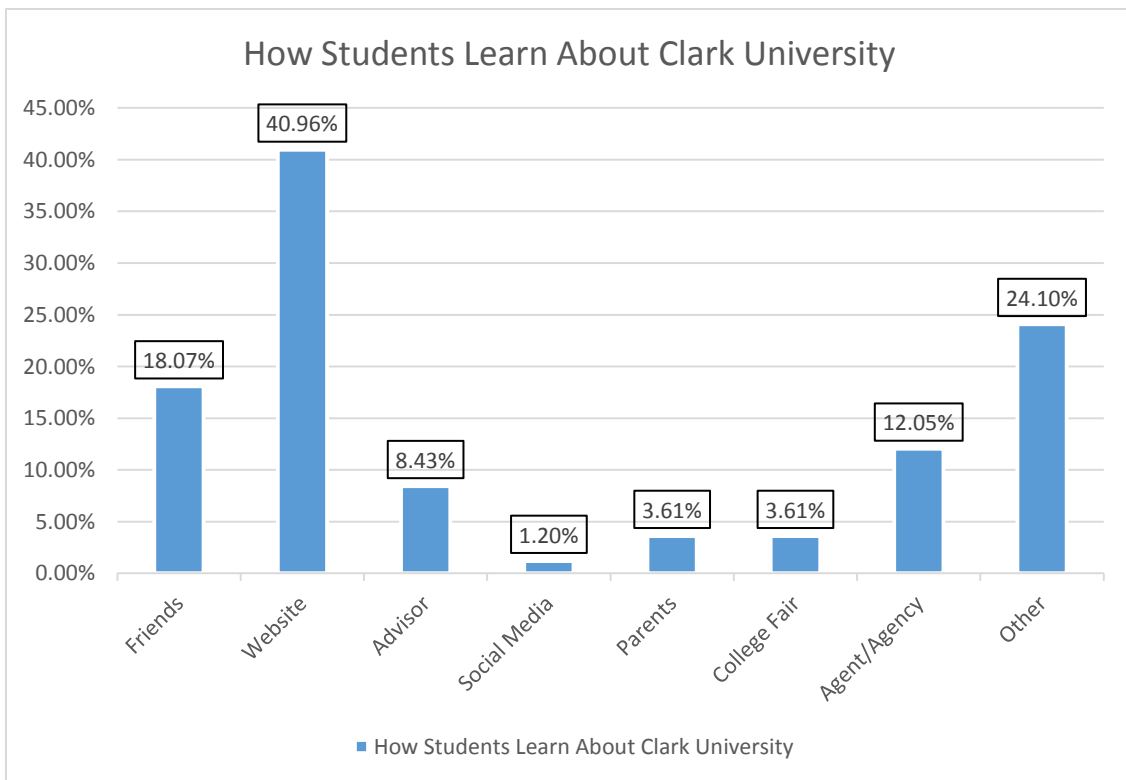
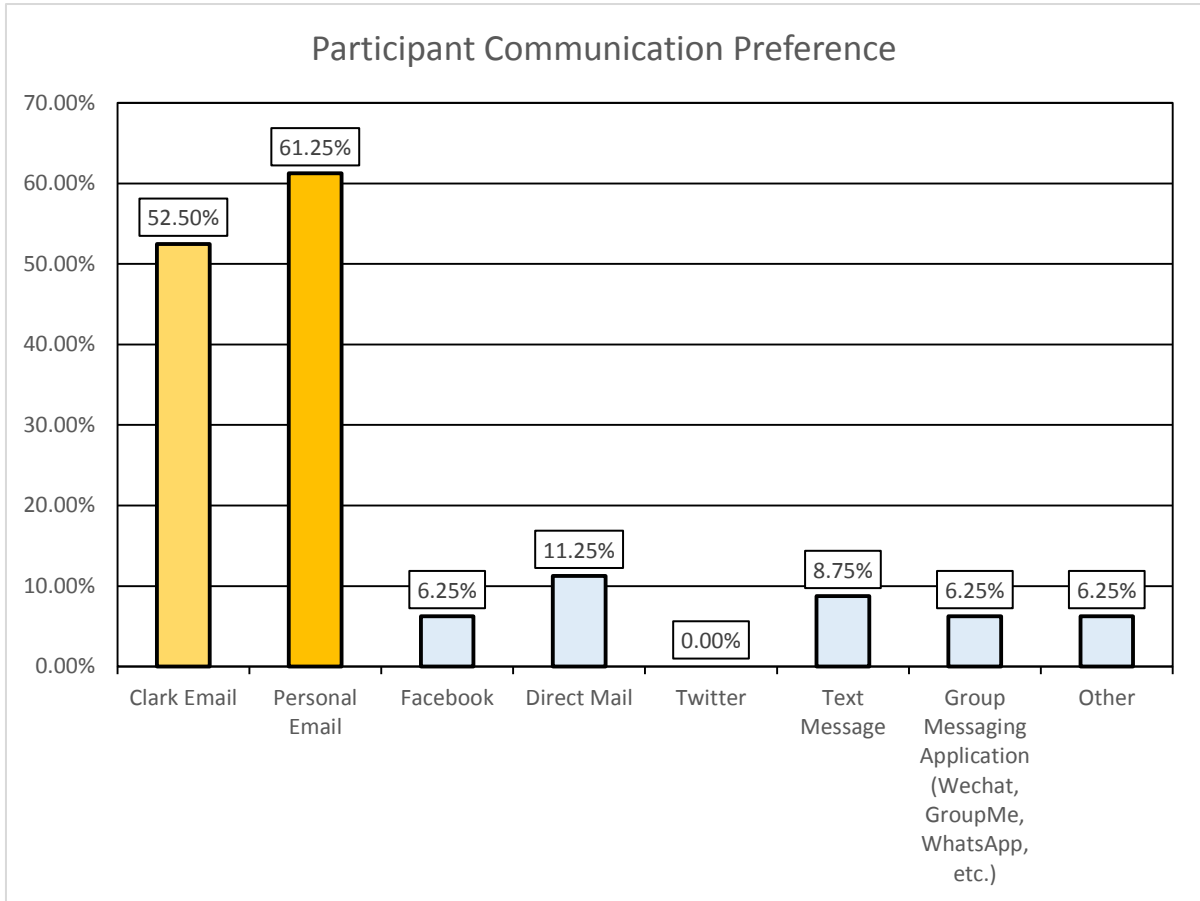
When I was applying it seemed like there was not much information available about the individual programs other than what was on the website. I made my program decision based on my interests, but I may have benefited from additional resources detailing all three part-time SPS graduate programs.

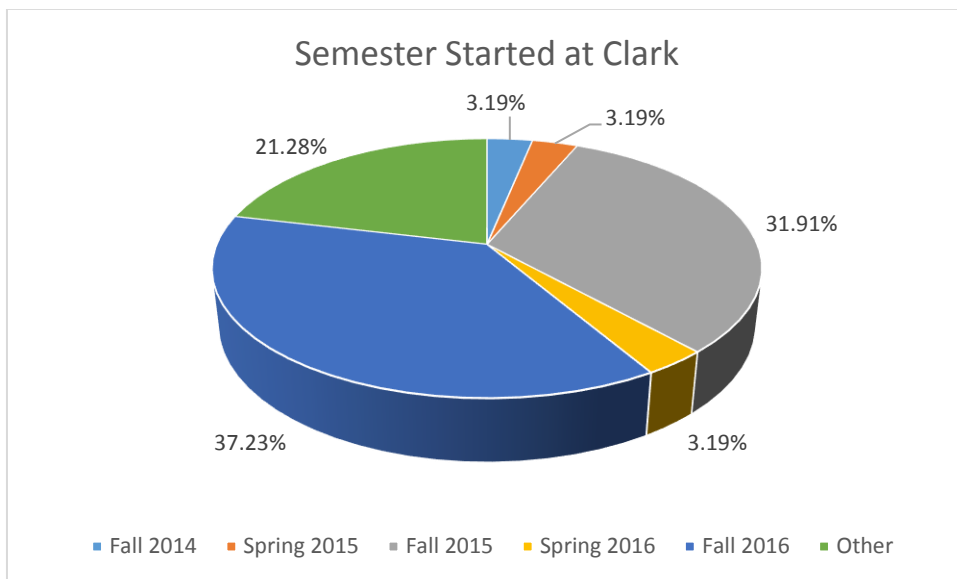
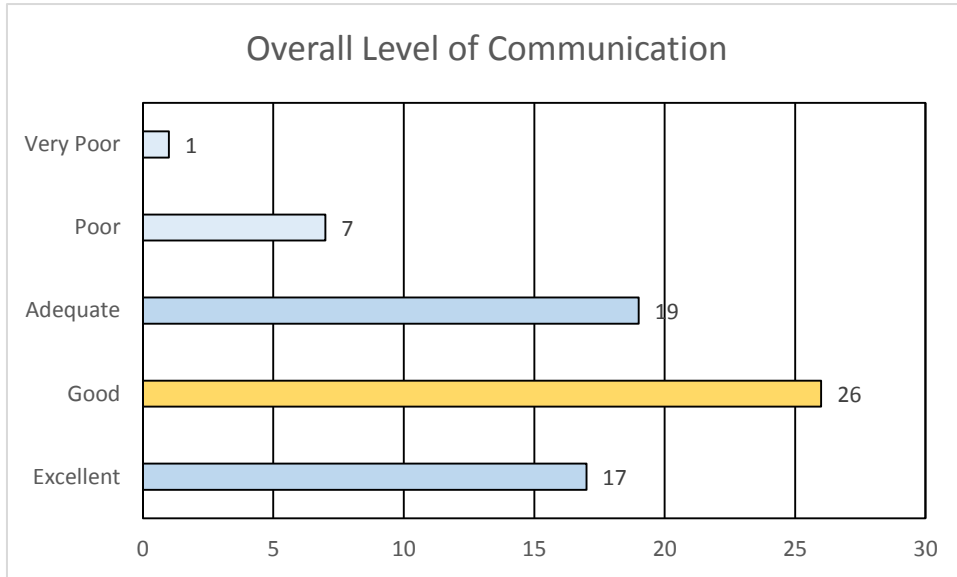
send important emails to both our personal email and clark email.  
highlight important things in the emails.

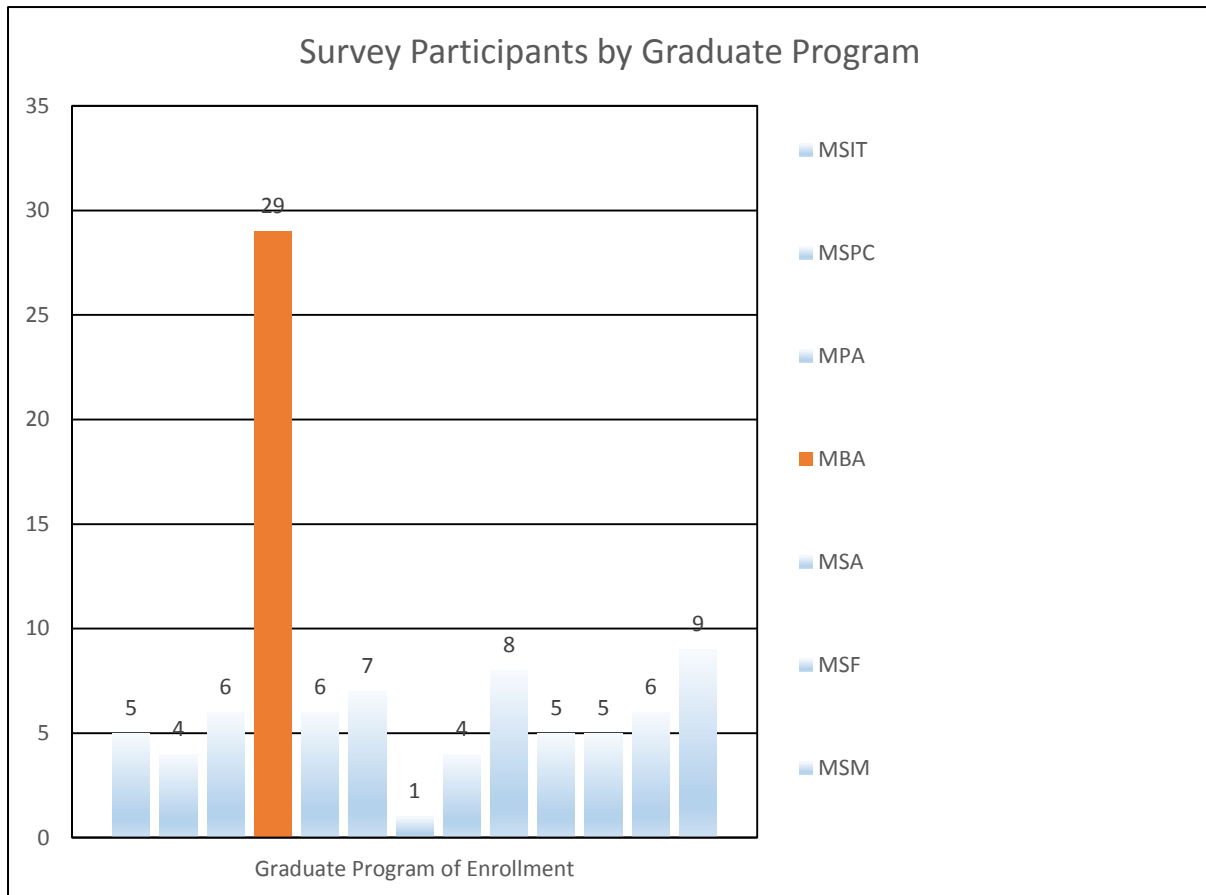












Appendix C: Operational Emails and Scholarly Articles