

## Chapter 46

# A Framework for Profiling Prospective Students in Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

*Before purchasing a higher education program, prospects invest a significant amount of time researching different programs. This chapter intends to provide a conceptual framework to profile prospective students by giving an overview of higher education marketing literature and extracting a theoretical model to analyze different prospect decision-making factors. These decision-making factors are further categorized into prospect profiles based on their contextual relevance.*

### INTRODUCTION

Prospective student acquisition is a prominent issue in higher education marketing. Noel-Levitz (2012) estimated that higher education institutions are losing as high as 75% of the prospects after receiving an inquiry. Another study reported that 80% of the students who decide to apply to a program were influenced by the post-inquiry communications they had received from the higher education institutions (Aarinen, 2012). This chapter attempts to study the underlying concepts from literature and design a framework to extract prospective student profiles and further extend a discussion on how these profiles can be used to address the prospect engagement.

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## BACKGROUND

In general, the consumer buying decision-making process consists of five different phases that drive potential shoppers throughout their purchase process. Kotler & Armstrong (2006) defined the five consumer buying decision-making phases as Need Recognition, Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives, Making a Decision and Post Purchase Behavior. The higher education institutions tackle these consumer buying decision-making phases through the four phases of the admission funnel. The admission funnel primarily consists of the awareness, inquiry, and application and admissions phases as shown in Figure 1.

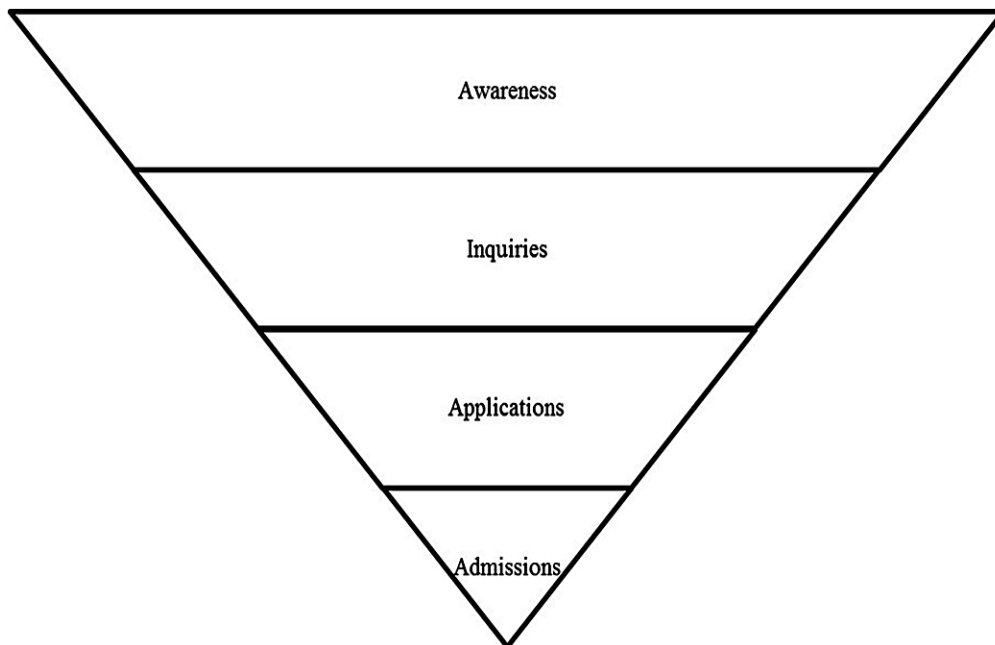
The awareness phase involves different marketing techniques the institutions rely on to reach out to prospects. The awareness phase will address the need recognition and information search phases by providing relevant information on the institutional websites. During the inquiry phase, a prospect tends to look for potential information on the institutional website and makes an inquiry by filling out the inquiry form. The institution responds to those inquiries by sending out different kinds of communications to prospects. These communications play a critical role in helping prospects to make a decision to apply or not.

The inquiry phase primarily targets the evaluation of alternatives and making a decision phases.

In the application phase, the institutions receive an application from the prospect. The cycle ends with the admission phase where the prospect would receive a decision on the application from the Institution.

To better market themselves and increase their student population, higher education institutions are employing different techniques like online (or) pay per click marketing and print media to increase their local and global presence and, social media to increase their social presence as well as brand awareness. Because of this exponentially growing educational market and varying prospective student behavior,

*Figure 1. Admission Funnel*



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