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Orientation:
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Dashboard as an action plan: how to reach the target population

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Abstract

This study presents a case of Aidan College. The research focus is on the amelioration of web content to recruit students. Interviews, observations, analysis of the second sources, blueprint analysis and benchmarking techniques contributed to the identification of major Internet problems that may negatively influence potential students. The research is based on scientific articles. Main topics include prospect theory, students-choice model, choice overload and human cognitive system, influence of promotional material on tourists.

Through the analysis one of the main problems was identified, which is registration procedure is. Its optimization became one of the main objectives. The complex and complicated procedure was optimized with the use of blueprint technique. Another problematic zone according to research results is a list of 103 courses to provide liberal arts choice. Large array of courses was modified to simplify the search process.

The main findings are simple online registration; programs developed instead of lists of courses, and simplified web page for better navigation.

Key Words: student needs, salient attributes, decision-process, motivational factors, web content, choice overload

1. Introduction

Higher educational institutions are used to communicate with students in an established way developed through many years of experience. Well-managed practices consist of structured curricula vitae, robust administration, and admission systems that have an integrated knowledge base for good education.

More recently, communication and education trends are changing. Information and communications technology (ICT) have changed private lives, businesses, and education systems. However, there are still some universities that have not been able to integrate recently developed tools, such as social networks or mobile computers, into their learning environment. Thus, they do not take advantage of new ways to attract and recruit students. Their concern is the negative impact on the environmental and learning outcomes; that is, that the new technologies will change the entire knowledge body and education standards. Normal reaction to changes is resistance and denial.

Utilization of resources available through the Internet, especially among young adults, varies widely. An institution that does not keep up with technological progress will not be able to effectively recruit students, and thus will not be competitive.

This thesis will focus on the students' needs in terms of private higher education. The ability of colleges to respond to consumers' demand will be analyzed. The primary focus is on web content of institutions.

Education institutions analysed in this paper are colleges providing an Academic Bridge Program (ABP). ABP is designed for students who did not achieve the necessary level for the direct university entry, or for those who could not follow or finish their college degree. ABP is an intermediary between college students of 16-19 years and universities.

This thesis is conducted with the cooperation and in the context of Aidan College located in Switzerland.

1.1. Describing the enterprise

Aidan College was founded in 2011. There are three main programs, which aim to improve students' academic, art design, and personal development skills.

There are five people on the management board with Richard McDonald as a founder and chairman of the board and Véronique Bertrand Bouffard as founding director.

The features that stand out the most are:

- Tailor-made programs
- The large palette of courses from which to choose

The large array of courses is offered to find the best match to any kinds of demand, whether it is intensive classes of spoken German for the summer or sustainable development for a term. Classes with maximum three students imply personalized attention and assistant. Tailor-made programs are aimed to develop a unique combination to minding and filling in the knowledge gap.

There are many subject areas to choose from: social science, creative arts, mathematics, photography, collage, SAT preparation, and many others. Students have an opportunity to find a perfect match regarding their own preferences. The College has thirty rooms to accommodate students, a kitchen, classrooms for lectures, a computer room, a TV room, and a fitness room with modern equipment.

Aside from provided learning environment, there are extra-school activities, such as trips, hiking, visits to museums or festivals, sport activities.

The college is located in the quiet village of Lavey in canton Vaud, close to Montreux. Costs can vary depending on the chosen program and its duration. The minimum fees are about 28,100 CHF per term (2,5 months approximately) including tuition and registration fees, deposit, accommodation at the campus and no additional courses or extra-activities. Tuition fees per term in the Academic Bridge Program requires 12 hours as the mandatory minimum.

Aidan has a partnership with private schools in different countries. It includes countries such as Australia, Canada, India, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and many others. By using this network, it becomes possible to practice marketing on the international level. The purpose is to attract students who are studying at private colleges and need additional help with academic skills. Counsellor at these schools may recommend Aidan College to students who need to bridge their knowledge gap. However, it is hard to verify the effectiveness of such partners.

As noted earlier, this study focuses particularly on the Academic Bridge Program.

1.2. Research Objective and Question

The research topic for this thesis was developed in cooperation with Véronique Bertrand, Director of Aidan College. Aidan uses several ways to promote itself and its programmes: schools counsellors, college fairs, flyers, brochures, and social networks. Due to the limitations associated with the nature of this paper, it will focus on the web content of the official website. According to research, content can be a crucial factor in the decision-making process for students (see Chapter Two, Literature review, for further analysis).

According to the Aidan College website statistics and other available tools, it is a clear starting point where students become interested in the college's services. However, not many of them apply for a program. The College is quite new and was only founded in 2011. As it is young, there has not been enough time to build a strong local, national, or international reputation and brand. This is probably one of the reasons applications are low at this time.

It is important to understand why students become interested in programs and what the reasons are that stop them from submitting their application form. It is possible that the registration is too complicated or that the tuition fees are too high. The aim is to identify potential reasons why students do/do not choose Aidan College and then develop an appropriate solution in the context of website content.

- The research objective is: to develop the best communication strategy to attract prospects through the use of the official website.
- The research question is: *"What is the most effective communication strategy to reach the target population via the website?"*

To achieve the final objective there are few sub-topics that need to be researched first. In order to develop the most effective communication strategy, this analysis should identify the gap between *students' expectations* and *perception of Aidan College website deliverables*. The process is the following: there are students' expectations that are conceived in a certain manner by Aidan College. The services then are delivered and perceived in a particular way by students. Further analysis aims to understand the gap between the expectations and perception of delivered services. Some other additional questions will help to shape the further research:

- *What does a potential student want to see on the website?*
- *What factors influence their final decision?*

- *Is the registration too complicated?*
- *Are the prices too high?*
- *Is there a courses choice overload?*
- *What makes the difference for students when choosing a college of higher education?*

Website content remains a broad topic. To narrow it down, this research will focus on the registration procedure and course choice overload.

The registration procedure is one of the main concerns at the moment. It might have a negative influence on the interested student's final decision because of its complexity. One of the primary objectives is to study if this is the case and to offer an appropriate solution.

The wide array of courses from which to choose has the potential advantage to better match consumers' preferences. However, it might also be confusing to have 103 course options, which is the case at Aidan. The objective is to identify the optimal number of courses to offer that would not confound potential applicants. This is part of an effective communication strategy.

The strategy to communicate effectively with students will be developed in terms of Internet content, once the aforementioned problems are analysed and all necessary information is gathered.

1.3. Scope and Limitation of Study

In order to achieve the outcomes established by the Master's Thesis instructions, it is important to stay focused on the main research topics and reach the desired outcome at each stage of the analysis.

One of the important things is to define the scope of the research and development. As was mentioned earlier, the main goal is to develop a communication strategy for potential applicants via the College's website.

There were three axis identified to achieve this result:

- Analysis of current researchers' achievements
- Interviews with
 - the students who are undertaking programs in the College currently
 - the students who did not apply, but were interested
- Benchmarking of colleges on the international level and further analysis

Each of the axes will help to understand the gap between the students' expectations and the delivered services. The first statement will help to shape the further study. Researchers' achievements were determined through a critical literature review. The main goal is to cover the topics: students' decision process, important components of web content, and the optimal point-of-choice offer. The results will contribute to the understanding of the current state of the web-based communication tools, as well as identification of new directions to research.

Interviews will be mostly limited to current participants of programs at Aidan and to students who did not finalize their choice with Aidan. Interviews with residents will contribute to the understanding of a "student-type" profile, as well as identifying motivational factors around student participation in programmes in this institution. Negative feedback will be used to define key areas for further improvement in managerial practices. Those who accessed the college database, but who did not proceed with the application process, were available only by their mail addresses. As a result, these students might be underrepresented.

It was suggested that parents of current Aidan College students be interviewed, but this was not possible due to confidentiality issues and concern from the school regarding possible negative effects. Students who are in the process of applying or whose applications are currently being considered are also not available. Therefore, the

interview results will be limited to the number of current students and prospective students who did not complete the application process who agreed to be interviewed within the given time frame.

Competitors benchmark needs to be limited to a certain number of colleges. Colleges with a similar profile to that of Aidan where chosen for comparison The objective is to present Aidan's services via the Internet in contrast to others and to identify the strongest and the weakest points. Outcomes will be limited to interpretation of results as they relate to web content and the choice of courses that are offered. The key idea is to identify best practices for further managerial research and improvement.

Aidan College will be the focus and context in this paper and will be taken into account at all stages. The final analysis and results will be based on demand and services offered by Aidan College.

2. Literature Review and Research Proposal

The questions raised in this paper need a critical literature review base. The purpose of the literature review is to achieve a clear point of understanding of the existing research findings, adopted techniques, future propositions, and limitations.

As secondary resources, scientific articles were reviewed covering the following topics: behavioural economics (prospect theory), rational choice theory, social science theory, marketing services, and higher education. The importance lays in identifying current trends. The purpose is to comprehend the existing extent of knowledge on the subject of marketing of higher education. Subsequently, to generate fresh insights and possibilities in the context of Aidan College, it is necessary to avoid methods or attempts that did not lead to useful results. A literature review allows for the identification of key elements related to this study's objectives. Afterwards, the key research findings of the critical literature review will be compared to the ones identified in this paper.

Interviews were conducted, and this research is based on the approach with no preliminary formulated theory frame. Conversely, theories in terms of hypotheses will be formulated after the exploration data is analysed. The literature review will support the phase of analysis and development.

2.1.State of the art

Aidan provides different programs to create a large palette of choice and to better match prospects' and applicants' preferences. The College proposed a Gap Year program to provide students with an opportunity to live and study abroad while taking a break from studies.

The focus of the paper is young adults who are in a period of transition finishing college and choosing a university. However, not all students feel ready to enter adult life and be independent. For that reason these students take a year off to gain some experience and understanding of their future. An article by Andrew King in the *Journal of Youth Studies* "Minding the gap? Young people's accounts of taking a Gap Year as a form of identity work in higher education", King provides insights to the perception students regarding a year off. This article is about the role of the gap year in the lives of young adults.

According to the author, these students are "neither dependent children nor fully independent adults". It is a hard time for them to adjust to changes. The gap year is seen as a means to differentiate oneself. In a highly competitive educational environment, it is necessary to gain an edge over others. Such experience, working or volunteering, often improves a candidate's employment opportunities and chances. Some of the direct outcomes for those who chose to take a gap year find it makes them more mature, independent, and confident for future student life. In their opinion, such qualities are indispensable for their university period.

In the UK, the gap year is "being promoted within government policies as a means of encouraging volunteering and citizenship amongst young adults" (Heath 2007). It is also a well-known social class phenomenon. According to Heath (2007) almost 45,000 students are taking a gap year prior to university entry in the UK.

Recently, Aidan have changed the name of its Gap Year program. It is now called the Academic Bridge Program (ABP). This name better reflects the purpose and the content of studies. UK undergraduates interested in a year off may be considered as potential students of Aidan. This article contributes to the understanding of probable reasons that students take a gap year. It is necessary for understanding students' motivational factors why choosing such programs.

Understanding students' needs is ascertained through their decision-making process and the choices provided by schools are the primary focus of this paper. Selected scientific articles are specifically focused on the cognitive human system: perception and decision, motivational factors, and promotional material via the web content.

We will start the review with the first issue.

The vast majority of research that is conducted seeks to identify how people make their decisions, what their motivators and demotivators are, and other factors that influence their choices.

“Prospect Theory” (Kahneman and Tversky 1979) describes the behaviour of people who are faced with a choice in a situation of uncertainty. The research is based on the analysis of people's attitude to risk and notes that people are risk averse when it comes to gains and risk seeking when they are faced with a situation of loss. Gain can be represented as a self-award. Loss might be perceived as paying a high price for adventure.

One of the key articles of the literature review concentrates on the development of *“A decision-making rule for modeling travelers' route choice behavior based on cumulative prospect theory”* (Hongli Xu et al. 2011), which states that travellers make choices based on rational behaviour. Reality and multiple experiments prove this is not correct. Additionally, there are several influential factors identified in the route choice behaviour model: personality, psychological state, risk preference, and environmental elements. It is clear that the choice is influenced by perception and the assessment of the attributes of a route. The only decision variable was the decision and choice of route.

There are other models that were developed based on the cumulative prospect theory and on the behavioural individual perspective. The key idea is to break down the decision-making process and to demonstrate factors that are influencing a particular part of the model.

The second model would be more appropriate to this analysis. It is less specific to a type of choice and may be more easily adapted to the Aidan context. It has three phases: objective factors (costs, other's experience) which are linked to subjective factors (cognitive and feeling, motivation), and lead to decision-making and activity.

The relationship between this article and the following research is the similarity of a type of choice to make. Choosing a program, a potential student is faced with the choice in an uncertain situation, influenced by his perception and evaluation of Aidan's attributes. Several models may be appropriate for analysis in an effort to see their variety and to realize that there is no unique framework for marketing analysis in the area of higher education.

The article entitled *“A contemporary higher education student-choice model for developed countries”* by Demetris Vrontis et al. presents a student-choice model that was developed through the analysis of several consumer behaviour theories. It comprises behavioural and environmental factors that underlie motivations and subsequently decisional processes. The purpose of this model is to “assist administrators in higher educational institutions to market themselves more effectively to their prospective students”.

Additional, alternative models mentioned by the author

The *Economic model* is based on the following decision determinants: perception of costs and benefits of services of a college. A potential student estimates and compares these and assesses the school that is going to provide the highest value. Shortly thereafter, a student may make a decision. In this model, all the elements must be measurable to create a mathematical model.

The *Jackson model* focuses on the student him/herself. The model consists of three stages before a choice or decision is made. The preference phase describes the social status or academic achievements. The next stage is selection, when a student eliminates some of the colleges on their list. S/he would use the information available, e.g. prices, size, facilities, etc. and form a list of potential colleges. At the last stage, there is evaluation of all the options and their ranking.

The *Chapman model* identifies two stages prior to making a decision: pre-search and search. There are socio-cultural factors that influence the choice of colleges at this first stage: advice of parents or friends, social status of parents, etc. The second stage is influenced by the available information about an institution.

The *Hanson and Litten model* is undoubtedly the most important among all of the models presented here. Similarly to other approaches, there are three stages. The first one considers the actual decision of participating in higher education. In the next phase, the student makes a selective list of potential colleges. Later on, there is an application and enrolment process that constitutes the last stage. Hanson and Litten identify five main processes for a student to reach his final objective (enrolment): college aspiration, starting the research, gathering needed information, sending out application forms, and finally enrolment procedure.

Through identification of key processes and stages, the researchers identified a number of individual and environmental variables that affect decision-making. For instance, cultural background, available college information and programs, and so forth.

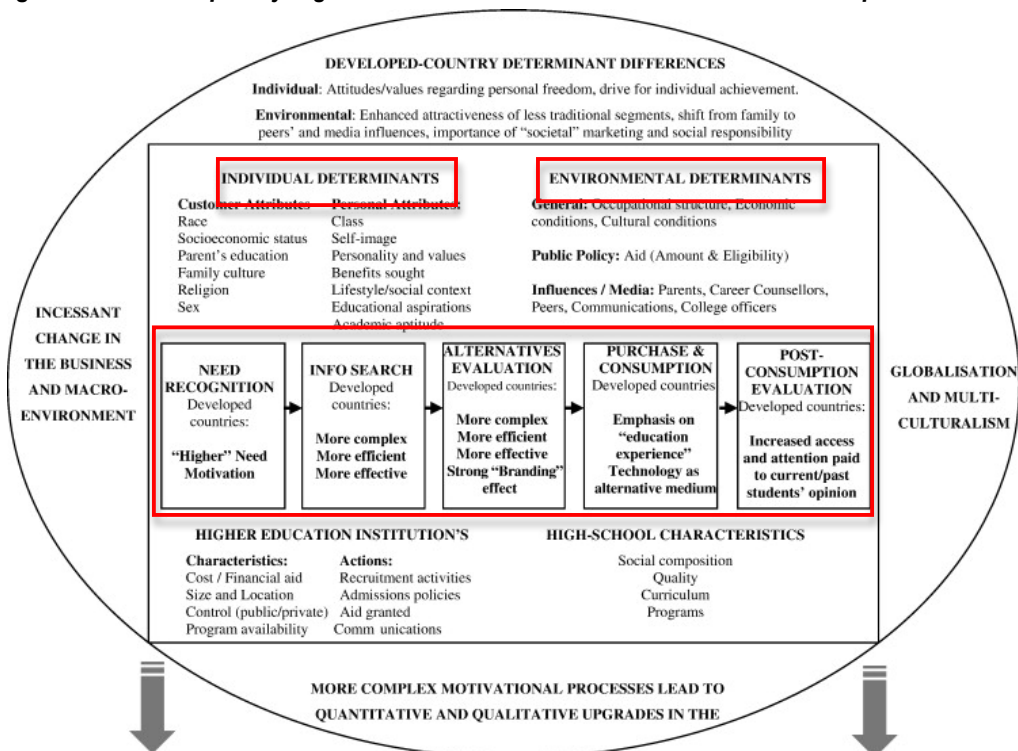
Each of the models presented share and identify similar or the same variables as influencing factors.

According to “A contemporary higher education student-choice model for developed countries”, the current business environment is being shaped by the shift towards the consumer or, in this context, the student. According to Demetris Vrontis et al, in order to survive in this highly competitive environment, it is indispensable to understand customers’ needs and to use that understanding to create a better match to their preferences. The study notes, however, that there is a difference between developed and developing countries, which lie in technological developments, free access to social services, quality of offered services, level of salaries, and freedom of choice and individualization. One of the key findings is that mentioned factors influence change in students’ motivation and decision-making process that becomes more complicated, as it is stimulated by values and beliefs.

The results of the article about the whole concept of customer preference and satisfaction and the idea that the consumer is at the centre of marketing activities is confirmed by the current activities of Aidan. It also supports this paper’s research which aims to analyse students’ or consumers needs and to develop an effective marketing communication strategy.

Figure 1 provides visualization of the model discussed above as it pertains to developed countries.

Figure 1. A contemporary higher education student-choice model for developed countries



Source: Demetris Vrontis et al. A contemporary higher education student-choice model for developed countries. *Journal of business research* 60 (2007) 979-989.

This is the main outcome that can be used to understand the decision-making process of students. The red squares that highlight the most important parts. The primary influential factors are: environmental and individual. These two influences share the same five-step process, which highlights the way students think. This model is going to be applied and compared to the results of this paper Chapter 5: "Analysis and Development". According to the authors of this article, the limit of the model is the fact that it needs to be tested, as it is a theoretical model.

All of these consumer behaviour models give an understanding of the depth of research that concentrates on the decision-making process in similar situations. It also gives insight into the main categories of factors that influence an individual's final decision. It is clear that among those factors are behavioural or personal and environmental factors.

Research about decision-making processes and current research in this area have been discussed and presented, and will be referenced again at a later point in this thesis.

Web content as promotional material

The next topic to cover is the actual web content as promotional material. There are a few main articles that highlight recent progress in understanding the influence of web content in decision-making processes.

"Relationship marketing on the Internet: the case of top- and lower-ranked US Universities and colleges" by Michael L. Klassen proposes an integrated five-step Kotler's model to evaluate the web content of US colleges and universities.

The primary idea is that marketing through the web is a very practical and inexpensive tool for delivering needed information to a target population. Increasingly, colleges and universities are offering interactive content that differentiates them from their competition. The goal is to create a memory of the experience in the minds of their potential applicants and, ultimately, convince the applicant (i.e. their customer) to apply (i.e. buy their brand). Previous research by Anderson and Reid (1999) identified that the most important information students look for is "information on costs, admission requirements, available majors, and ways to contact the enrolment office". McKnight and Paugh's (1999) research identified six categories of visual and verbal information that students would be interested in. Those categories are:

- Campus landscape
- Campus architecture
- School programs
- Tuition costs
- Outstanding school features
- Prestigious accomplishments by the school

This is one of the most important findings for this paper as it has a straight impact on one of the research objectives. One of the objectives of this thesis is to develop web content as part of a marketing communications strategy. When delivering a message to a target audience, it is essential to understand the needs of one's audience; in this case, students. These categories give a full understanding of the most desired information on the web page of an educational institution. These will be used later in this paper in Chapter 5, "Analysis and Development".

Another important result of the article is the application of Kotler's model. This model is based on the assumption that students and colleges need to develop relationships. Using the list in *US News and World Report*, 120 of the US colleges and universities of different ranks were selected for comparison. Private and public institutions are represented. Each of the chosen criteria is assigned with an appropriate level of developed relationships. Basically, it measures the capability of institutions to effectively respond to students' needs.

Here below, there is an example of evaluation of the criteria "Faculty":

- Basic level – university curriculum vitae is presented only
- Reactive level – an opportunity to contact the faculty via e-mail
- Accountable level – photos of the faculty
- Proactive level – list of faculty and courses

- Partnership level – online syllabi and assignments

The results for Kotler's model are presented in percentages. It gives a global view of types of relationships that institutions were able to establish with their students. According to the findings, top-ranked institutions have more privileges and are better at using new technologies to develop and establish partner relationship with consumers. One of the determinants in top-ranked schools appears to be availability of financial resources.

The five-level model and analysed categories are valuable for further research in this paper and will be useful when comparing and identifying the best international practices in the area of private higher education.

Data have been gathered in a single table, providing a visual representation of a complex analysis (see Table 2 in Chapter 4).

In *"Internet promotional material and conservation volunteer tourist motivations: A case study of selecting organizations and projects"* of Kerry E. Grimm and Mark D. Needham (2012), insight is given into which promotional materials volunteers use when choosing an organization and what exactly captured their attention. Authors define what motivates people to choose a certain organization or a project using a theoretical framework of motivational factors.

For example, one of the theories described by Kerry E. Grimm and Mark D. Needham is called push/pull theory. Authors theorized that there are internal or intrinsic motivators such as stress relief, relaxation, learning, and attributes of a place such as landscapes, location, etc. This shapes a person's expectations and perception of the place to go.

An alternative theory proposes another approach to understanding tourists' motivation. According to Iso-Ahola (1979, 1989) people are either seeking something or escaping from something. They may seek an intrinsic award; for example, to relax or to escape from problems.

Previous research has also identified some additional pull factors that appeal to some tourists. These may include attributes of a country, the unknown, landscapes, an opportunity to learn a language, or a recommendation from a friend (Campbell & Smith, 2005; Simpson, 2005; Söderman & Snead, 2008; Wearing, 2004). Other possible factors that influence a tourist's decision in a choice of a project or an organization cover safety, specific projects, marketing, etc.

A number of studies were aimed at understanding if promotional material influences an individual's final decision, though none of the studies examined specific ways materials influenced a final choice. Research mostly focused on pull factors, trying to identify the content of the promotional material without analysing if it was attractive to tourists.

Some of researchers, like Beerli and Martin (2004), associated motivation with a destination image, again focusing on attributes. The objective was to evaluate "pre and post-visit impression" with use of some images from destinations. The results showed that the destination image motivated people, depending on what they were looking for. For instance, if someone's objective is to find a calm and peaceful place, they are going to be influenced by promotional images of nature.

It should be noted that all of the studies mentioned above did not include analysis of web content. The key findings of the article *"Internet promotional material and conservation volunteer tourist motivations: A case study of selecting organizations and projects"* by Kerry E. Grimm and Mark D. Needham (2012) comprise the type of promotional material that volunteers used, what content was in the promotional material to influence a volunteer's decision-making process, and how it affected their final decision. To gather results, Grimm and Needham interviewed and observed 36 volunteers who chose a certain organization and a project.

Results showed that all of the interviewees used only the Internet to gather their information about opportunities in volunteering. The most common way to search for the information is through Google. Some individuals used the Internet to verify the profile of a project or an organization. Additional web material was used to gather more

information. Social networks, like Facebook, were also used. Most of the interviewees were under 25. For example, pages created on Facebook by former participants were an opportunity to share with others and for others to learn and be updated with the latest information about a project or organization. An important attribute of such pages is interaction. Some of participants mentioned that interactive Facebook pages influenced their decision to participate in a particular project. These types of networks are also seen as an opportunity to stay in touch after a project is over.

Participants also appreciated being given access to YouTube videos, which provide a visual confirmation of pictures and create a clearer image of an organization, landscapes, activities, etc. Online reviews and blogs written by former participants also helped volunteers finalize their decision. Positive reviews may also play a major role in an individual's decision-making process.

Managers, though, noted some limitations with regard to Internet tools. Networks demand a concerted, focussed effort, in terms of time and energy. They need to be updated often and the interaction must be proactively and consistently maintained. Main items that influenced tourists who participated in the research study by Kerry E. Grimm and Mark D. Needham were: the layout, appearance, and content of promotional material. In general, layout included ease of navigation, professionalism, and good design. A website is appealing if information is easy to find and it is easy to compare different programs. A well-organized website "appear[s] legitimate" and, consequently, generates trust.

The shared experience of significant others (i.e. friends, family, et al.) normally assures and motivates people to engage with a certain organization or project.

According to this analysis, a picture is the first thing that consumers want to examine, because photos contribute to visualization and begin to form a person's expectations of the place, accommodations, and activities. It creates an image and impression that motivates people. However, it was not a major motivational factor for all participants.

The interviews demonstrated that the most important item is the information about the project or attributes of the organization that interests them. It helps a consumer to make a choice for or against. The most valuable information are details about costs, description of projects and tasks, and place.

Finally, many of these studies note that organizations need to invest in Internet promotion, as it is more effective. In turn, effective Internet promotion makes it possible to achieve broader recognition in a shorter period of time. Web information should be rapidly and systematically updated. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and blogs are some of the current communication and web-based trends, especially among younger population, and should be one of the areas of marketing department attention.

The key conclusion from all of these studies is, that promotional material on the Internet plays a major role in motivation. Interviewees use Google to find information about projects and organizations. Information available online helps form the expectations about destinations, organizations, and projects. The most appreciated information includes a detailed description about the project, its location (place), costs, and photos. It is important Websites must be easy to navigate, look professional, and be well-organized and clearly designed.

To fully cover the research of this paper, one more topic should be discussed: the variety of choice. Again, one of the objectives of this paper is to define a clear strategy of positioning in the context of choice of courses. Currently Aidan provides a list of 103 courses for students to choose from and combine with preferred courses.

Scientific research claims that too many choices become paralyzing and confusing. *"The dark side of choice: When Choice Impairs Social Welfare"* (Simona Botti, Sheena S. Iyengar 2006) presents evidence that proves the concept of choice overload.

Until recently, it has been considered good for society to have a large and varied selection of products and services, especially in developed countries, where independence and freedom of choice and possibilities are highly valued. According to some economic theories, having a choice contributes to the maximization of utility. In

other words, people tend to search for a perfect match for their wants and needs. As a result, there is nothing negative in having a broad choice: it stimulates market competition, improves motivation, and gives people a feeling of control, thereby creating a greater psychological state of mind.

However, these statements are based on the assumption that the consumer is a rational thinker, which means the individual is capable of ranking their preferences and is not distracted by external factors. In reality, this is not the case. These economic theories do not take into account human cognitive system ability, which has a pre-determine capacity or cognitive limitation. Recent studies have shown that at a certain point, the consumer is not able to process information effectively. Because of this, choice overload results in increased time spent (or wasted) on thinking, evaluating, and comparing. This is particularly the case when the costs of the product outweigh the benefits.

When providing consumers with large amounts of information and multiple options, the best way to present it is by categorizing it. Limited categories may present numerous options, which — for experienced customers — may allow them to access more options. For instance, setting more information and choices under a “standard menu” and an “extended menu”.

According to an example presented by Botti and Iyengar, a multiple choice of core options is one of the best ways to present fund options. Those who want to understand their preferences will probably use the standard menu. Those who predetermined their preferences would have more details. An individual's capacity for rational thinking and their personal values will affect their satisfaction with their choices and its outcomes.

Finally, another interesting finding of traditional studies in psychology and consumer behaviour indicates that people would rather make their own choice than have another person prescribe a choice for them. The outcomes of such personal choices are often more satisfying and self-fulfilling and leads to better health and psychological conditions. A set of experiments was conducted by Zuckerman (1978) to prove the positive effect of an individual's own choice on his/her motivation. In terms of education, if a student chooses his/her school, s/he would be more motivated in pursuing their studies.

2.1.1. Conclusion

The studies and articles described above constitute the basis for this paper. There were important results to consider when designing and conducting this research. Here is a brief synthesis of main ideas.

The developed student-choice model identifies main phases of decisional process: need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase and consumption, post-consumption and evaluation. Behavioural and environmental factors affect the process. The model serves to understand students' needs.

Kotler's model is a five-level relationship model. It was used to evaluate and compare the web content of top- and lower-ranked colleges and universities in the US. It reflects the level of relationship established between a college and a student: Basic level, Reactive level, Accountable level, Proactive level, and Partnership level. Institutions were compared based on categories such as application process, faculty, and campus tours. This model is going to be adapted for the similar comparison of educational institutions of this research.

Web content of educational institutions is one of the focuses of this research. According to recent studies, there are certain types of content that may motivate volunteer tourists, who are compared to students in this study, to choose a project or an organization. This includes project and place description, prices, images, videos, etc. Tourists want to deal with a friendly interface and well-organized website. If a potential student's impression of the web page is negative, it may influence their final decision to attend a school.

Finally, if there is too much information in terms of choice it may confuse a prospective consumer. Having a large palette of options stimulates market competition, thereby providing a higher quality of products and services,

greater choice, and lower prices. According to economic theories, consumer seeks to find the perfect match to their preferences. Multiple choice means an higher probability of finding this perfect match.

In hand with this, cognitive capacity is the ability to process a certain amount of information. Recent studies in psychology have identified that too much choice might bring feelings of disappointment and regret. People spend more time and effort on evaluating and comparing items. As a result, cognitive costs become higher than benefits. Ergo, a final decision would not be the optimal one and may entail regret. The outcome of this kind of decision also will be less satisfying. The trigger of dissatisfaction leads to people delaying decisions, as their justification for the choice decreases.

The best way to deliver a large array of options is to categorize the offer or create a menu. A “standard menu” will help to quickly manage a decision-making process for those who do not have a predetermined set of criteria.

3. Methodology

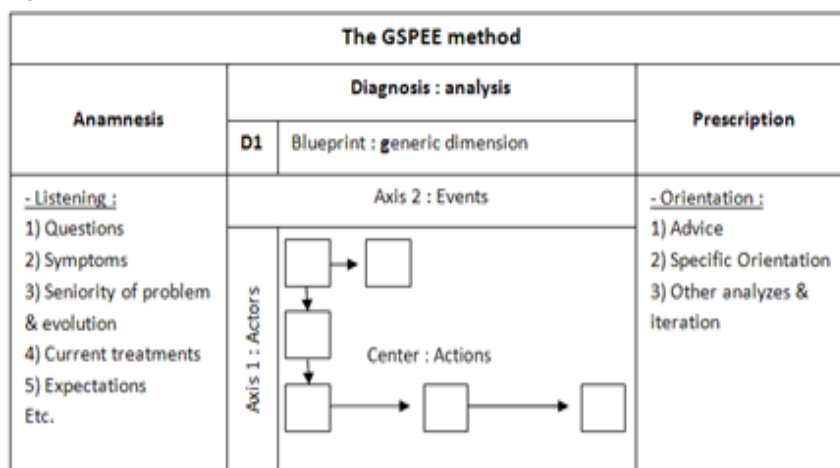
3.1. Research design

The research design for this thesis includes a critical literature review, interviews, and comparing/contrasting web sites for local and international competitors.

The methodology used is named GSPEE and was developed and presented by Silvio Barbieri and Emmanuel Fragniere et al. in the article “*Proposal of a Methodology to Integrate the Human Factor in the Service Blueprint*”. Authors compare this method to a doctor’s examination of a patient.

The method is based on three main steps and is shown in Figure 2. They are: “Anamnesis” where it is necessary to understand current issues by information search including literature reviews and interviews; “Diagnosis” represents the analysis of identified problems by using the main blueprinting tool; “Prescription” is the final phase of conclusion and recommendations as a solution to problems. Figure 2 represents visually the method developed by Barbieri and Fragniere et al.

Figure 2. The GSPEE method



Source: Silvio Barbieri, Emmanuel Fragniere et al. *Proposal of a Methodology to Integrate the Human Factor in the Service Blueprint. Journal of Advanced Management Science* (2013)

According to the authors, the communicative blueprint integrates the human factor (different actors) and is an analytical tool that contributes to better understanding of intangible service procedures. Barbieri and Fragniere claim that the communicative blueprint is a synthesised and simplified representation of complex procedures.

To answer the research question, it is necessary to identify the key needs of the target population – in this case, students currently enrolled at Aidan and prospective students who showed interest, but did not apply. Currently the College is hosting seven students.

The purpose of the first set of interviews was to identify the gap between students’ expectations and perceptions and posed the following questions: How did potential students imagine their life at Aidan College? How different did their experience turned out to be? Such gap is the key to understanding their expectations, which were based on promotional material used before arriving at Aidan, and their perception of the actual services.

The second set of interviews were aimed at those who showed interest in Aidan College's programs, but who did not proceed with the application process. The purpose of these interviews was to identify a reason why they did not apply, using decision process and influential factors, and what may be necessary to change the "gappers".

An interview approach was chosen that would allow the interviewer to observe the participants' behaviour and reaction to questions in an effort to gather qualitative data. It was theorized that interaction between the interviewer and interviewee would help the interviewer to better understand students and their preferences, when choosing a private school, and enhance the reliability of interpretation of the results. Hypotheses would be formulated to draw a general conclusion, which should provide better insight into the students' expectations and perceptions of services and facilities offered by the College, as well as give a general overview of the satisfaction with their life at Aidan.

Once there the study results were generated, it was then possible to research local and international competitors to identify those schools that design and use web sites effectively. The key elements of the literature review and interviews results combined helped to create a global picture of students' expectations and expectations. More precisely, the results will be analysed emphasizing the content of web pages of colleges. The main focus will be on website information or procedures that may influence a student's decision. Results gathered from competitors' web sites and Aidan's web page content will be gathered and evaluated, particularly were oversaturation of choice is apparent.

Ultimately, identifying clear messaging and communication through the use of Internet is the final goal of this study.

3.2.Data collection

There are four data collection components to the research design for this thesis: a critical literature review; interviews with current students of Aidan College; interviews with those who showed interest in the College, but who did not complete the application process; and a comparison of Aidan's web site to that of local and international competitors. The critical literature review was used to develop an evidence-base in support of the information being gathered and analysed. Review of existing literature justifies the research questions and supports the key objectives. The interviews were undertaken to confirm or refute the available evidence and to establish the validity of this paper's thesis statement.

Additions to these four primary components, multiple interviews with the director of Aidan College were also conducted. The aim was to understand college targeting and positioning.

In the first group of interviews, the target population was undergraduate students between the ages of 16 and 18 years of age. At the present time, there are seven students taking different sets of courses at Aidan College. They are the target group for the qualitative research.

The objective of the interviews with current students is to learn about their decision-making processes and their perception of the services offered by the College. The interviews were semi-structured. There were three central axes to analyse, which were developed according to the objectives of this research:

- to understand why students chose Aidan College;
- what they expected to experience versus what they are actually experiencing; and
- their feelings about the application process.

For the second set of interviews, access was given to the database providing contact information for prospective students. These individuals were contacted via e-mail and offered the opportunity to participate in this study. Those who accepted were then invited to an interview using Skype. Skype was used in order to save money, as it

would be costly to contact them by phone since they are in different countries around the world, and to facilitate virtual face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Two or three questions were developed for each of the axis to cover every topic. In total, there were six questions:

1. Why did you want to come to Aidan College? (What were your reasons for coming to Aidan?)
2. How did you find out about the college? (What were the sources of information you read when checking the college's profile? How did you look for information about Aidan?)
3. How did you imagine your life at Aidan College before coming? (What were your hopes and expectations?)
4. How would you describe the registration procedure? (How do you feel about the application process? How was it?)
5. How is this program helping you? (What is the most important thing you have learned through your studies?)
6. What are the most memorable moments while you have been here (positive/negative? How would you describe the best thing that you have experienced here?)

Questions in parenthesis were aimed to help students for whom the original questions were unclear, as well as to gather further details.

A total of 9 individuals were interviewed and included: the director of Aidan College; 7 current students; and 2 prospective students. Questions were adapted depending on a respondent's reaction and answer. Average interview time was 17 minutes. Responses were noted and handwritten using pen and paper. Additional notes were made regarding the interviewer's observations about the interviewees' behaviours, emotions, and time taken to think before answering a question. The creation and evaluation of student profiles were a result of meeting the participants. Names were coded and personal details were kept confidential.

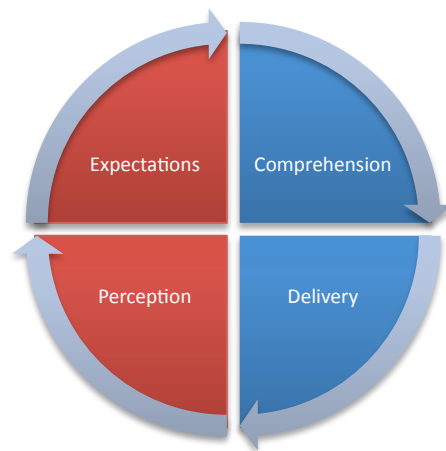
4. Analysis and development

In this chapter, we will analyse particular Aidan's College processes applying the results of the literature search and interviews in an effort to develop synthesised conclusion. The conclusion will serve as recommendation of further strategic changes.

Summarizing, this chapter consists of interviews results and synthesis, benchmarking and of registration process analysis.

Figure 3 below shows the relationship cycle between a client – in this case, a student – and an enterprise. This relationship begins with client expectations; that is, what the client will expect from the enterprise, or institution, from which it seeks information or services.

Figure 3. Client – Enterprise Cycle



Source: Sabine Emad, Geneva University of Applied Sciences.

Figure 3 summarizes one of the first objectives of this thesis, which consists of identifying the gap between students' expectations and their perceptions of delivered services. This cycle was developed by Sabine Emad, a professor of marketing at Geneva University of Applied Sciences.

In the figure, the red quarters represent the client side and the blue, the enterprise side. According to Professor Emad, in the top half of the cycle, expectation and comprehension are the invisible, or "behind the scenes", parts. Expectation includes the ideas and perceptions the client (student) has about an organization and the services it offers. Comprehension is what the enterprise, or institution, understands and interprets about its clients expectations.

In the bottom half of Emad's cycle are perception and delivery. These are the visible parts of the cycle and represent what is happening on a website, in a shop, or in a college. The enterprise delivers its services, while the clients impose their perceptions on certain elements.

As stated previously, the purpose of this paper is to understand Aidan College and the delivery of its services through their website. The ability to communicate the most needed information in students' point-of-view.

The Aidan College community is very small as it only recently opened its doors in 2011. The atmosphere is rather friendly and close. Currently, the College has only three staff: the Director of the College, who manages and directs the school's activities, and two assistants, who execute decisions and report back to the Director. Because of its small structure, the best person who knows the business processes is the Director.

Prior interviews with the director helped to identify and create the student profile, i.e. the target population, for this thesis. The Director of Aidan College was interviewed in order to understand their current positioning and prepare a proper set of questions accordingly.

From the client standpoint, potential students of Aidan College were also interviewed. These participants in the study were characterized as an undergraduate student studying at a private undergraduate college and either wanting to experience other cultures/languages or preparing to take and pass college examinations for admittance to a university.

It should be noted that tuition, registration fees, accommodation, insurance, deposit, and resident permit charges to attend Aidan College total *28'100 CHF* per term. A term is two months. The charges can increase depending on the choice of additional courses and participation to extra-activities and trips.

Questions were developed as if for an average-type student, not taking into account the possible change in the behaviour of young adults coming from wealthy families. The hypothesis was that the current participants made their own choice and actively participated in the registration and application processes.

As the sample was limited to seven participants and all the interviews were conducted in one day. Both genders were represented. All the names were coded. For example, MP01 is a masculine participant number 1. Female participants were coded FP and numbered, as well. All participants were numbered in the order in which they were interviewed; so, MP01, FP02, and so on. The average participant age was 19 years old. Those who were interviewed represented several nationalities: France, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom. The next section will provide the synthesis and analysis of these interviews.

4.1.Synthesis of the interviews

As was stated in the previous section, the questions were aimed at students who chose to attend the school themselves. There were no prior theories formulated concerning students' needs. A theoretical framework will be applied to interviews results.

In addition to transcription of the verbal data, non-verbal communication was considered in an effort to complete the analysed answers. The qualitative research questions can be found in the Appendix I.

The analysis of the interviews was based on conceptualisation and categorisation of answers, as it is qualitative research. Interviews were based on the following axes, or categories, and were used to interpret the data:

- Decision-making process
- Expectations
- Perception

The “decision-making” category explores possible influences on a student's decision whether to complete the application process and attend Aidan College. It also aims to identify reasons to attend certain classes, including test preparation, language courses, and so on.

Under “expectation”, we look at how students describe their hopes, what they imagined would be, and their concerns before arriving at Aidan.

The “perception” category shows the level of appreciation of the students' current experiences and the how that they see and feel about organized events.

Students were also asked what is the “most important thing students have learned”. Answers to this question demonstrate students’ opinion about the added value of courses and teaching methods. A section about students’ “most memorable moment” evaluates the added value from entertainment events, activities, and emotions that stand out from the rest of their experiences. These moments can be positive or negative. The last two questions were asked with the intent to understand students’ perception regarding services.

Table 1 provides a snapshot synthesis of participant responses to the interview questions. The most common answers were presented. To see a full version of participant responses, see Appendix II: Interview Synthesis.

As was mentioned earlier, the synthesis includes analysis of participants’ answers and observation of their non-verbal cues. The latter was included and deemed important as it shows the overall attitude of the students. It should be noted that most of the participants were suffering from a lack of motivation – not only in their studies, but also during the interview process, without fully comprehending the questions they were being asked and not actively thinking about their responses. Of the seven respondents, five displayed this attitude, while two respondents exhibited cues showing they were highly motivated to achieve actual results by the end of their studies.

Table 1. Snapshot synthesis of participant responses

Categories	Participants						
	MP01	FP02	MP03	MP04	FP05	MP06	FP07
Decision-making process: <i>Q1: Reasons for coming to Aidan?</i>							
My choice	x	x			x	x	
Parents or someone else's influence			x	x	x	x	x
To pass tests at home college	x		x				
To take tests to enter university				x		x	x
To learn languages		x				x	x
Decision-making process: <i>Q2: Sources of information about Aidan?</i>							
My college	x		x				
Relatives, friends		x			x	x	x
Expectations: Life at Aidan <i>Q3a: What was expected?</i>							
More students, bigger campus	x		x		x	x	
A more active life	x	x					x
Perception: <i>Q3b: What were the added values?</i>							
One-to-one classes	x	x					x
Family atmosphere				x	x		x
Good environment to work			x			x	
Perceptions: <i>Q4: Registration process</i>							
No response	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Perceptions: <i>Q5: Most important lesson learned?</i>							
How to get focused	x		x				
Courses				x		x	x
Perceptions: <i>Q6: Most memorable moments?</i>							
Trips		x			x		

Source: Emmanuel Fragniere. L'étude de marché en pratique. Switzerland 2013.

It is important to highlight that all of these participants found out about Aidan College through word-of-mouth; either their parents heard about it from friends or the guidance counsellor led them to the College. Half of the students responded that it was not fully their own choice. Considering their self-motivation level, it may be concluded that parents influenced most of decisions.

Three students out of seven attended colleges in Switzerland, but had disciplinary problems: indifference to classes or tests or were expelled. Other disciplinary problems related to these students are not described in this work and are considered confidential. Similar cases of disciplinary problems also happened with several previous residents of Aidan College.

Reasons for choosing and attending Aidan College were related to getting better test results at their home colleges, test preparation to enter a University, or to improve language skills. While some students had a clear goal to achieve, others were not very active in their learning process. The discussion revealed that most students did not look for information about the College as they were not excited enough to get started and look for certain information. There were no concerns before coming that may have bothered them. This result confirms the statement of the lack of motivation and involvement in the decision-making process among participants.

Students were asked to describe how they imagined their life at the College would be. The most common answer was Aidan would be a “normal college” with many students and dynamic life. The actual experience was different. The environment is calm, which is good for studying and concentrating. However, the lack of a dynamic culture and events were negatively remarked among the interviewees.

One of the main intentions of the interviews was to learn about students’ experience with the registration process. This did not give the hoped for results, though, because students did not participate at all in any of the administrative procedures.

Some students noticed that the rules and supervision at Aidan are not strict. For example, MP04 talked about being allowed to smoke. While this is generally discouraged, he is allowed to do this so long as he does it in the presence of the school’s director. MP04 described this as “free behaviour” and talked about the ease with which he was able to do this, which not be possible in other colleges. As a final outcome for Aidan, this is not positive.

Despite these, everyone remarked about how close and friendly the atmosphere is, how open and communicative students are, and how open-minded the College’s director is. Several students from non-European/Western countries especially appreciated the “home” ambiance of the College. These participants came from cultures with high family values, which may form their perceptions about the “home-like” quality at Aidan. Conversely, in Europe people are accustomed to independence at an early stage in adulthood. This sense of independence is characterized by having an active life style (i.e. travelling, volunteer jobs, or internships abroad), which is not the case for current residents.

Responses to the question about the most important thing students learnt varied. For some, it was an opportunity to focus and work hard, concentrate on test preparation, learn ways to better communicate. For others, it resulted in becoming more mature and independent. One interviewee said, she had not learned “much,” and that the time was “just for myself”. This response seemed to demonstrate someone who felt free of problems and worries and was someone who came to the College influenced mostly by parents with no clear objective. In this case, Aidan cannot offer much for students who lack motivation. For the College, this is not the type of student they are seeking.

The final question, “What were your most memorable moments?”, was hard for students to answer. Every one took a lot of time to think. The question had to be asked in many different ways in order to get an answer. Some finally mentioned trips. One participant mentioned her greatest experience was her first time in a bar doing

karaoke, which might not be approved of by her parents. In total, students' answers show that there is no real added value in currently organized activities and the level of appreciation is very low.

Among the things that interviewees appreciated most were: one-to-one classes; the family-like atmosphere and closeness of all the students; and a calm environment in which to study. Personalized classes helped some to reach personal goals. For example, one female respondent needed to learn English and, thanks to a tailor-made program, she succeeded. Few participants were very satisfied with the home and family atmosphere that was created by being in a small group. Students may have found a comfort level for the first time since being away from their families for a long time.

4.1.1. Hypothesis. The residents interview results

Based on the interview results, the next step in the analysis is to formulate hypotheses and the identification of two (or more) variables that depend one on another.

The following statements were derived out of the interviews:

1. Most of the students who participated in the interviews come from wealthy families.
Identified impact of the College's *salient attributes* on *wealthy families*.
2. Most of the students did not participate in the decision-making process because they were not initiators.
Identified impact of *non-motivation* on *decision-making* processes.
3. Most of the students are not motivated to learn or participate in activities, because of the social statuses of their parents.
Identified impact of *social status* on the *lifestyle*.¹
4. Students privileged to belong to the wealthy social class have a lack of understanding about simple "living in community" rules; i.e. how to clean up one's room, how to put used dishes into the dishwasher, how to do laundry, etc.
Identified impact of the *social class* on *habits*.
5. Because students lack motivation, many of them were not able to appreciate trips or extra curricula activities organized by Aidan. Self-motivation had an impact on their ability to appreciate things.
Identified impact of their overall *attitude* towards things on their *perception*.
6. Aidan is seen by parents as a means to deal with bad disciplinary students.
Identified impact of the *perception* of College services by parents on their *decision to bring* their teenagers to the College.
7. Individual approach and tailor-made courses shows a positive influence on learning outcomes.
Identified impact of Aidan's *teaching methods* on the students' *level of knowledge*.
8. A lack of dynamic in terms of ambience is caused by the small number of students.
Identified impact of the *number of students* on the overall *dynamic*.
9. A small number of students creates a family atmosphere.

¹ It may be assumed that students who belong to a particular social status, where their parents wealth and social position have afforded them the opportunity to attend a school like Aidan, often have no clear goals. Many of them feel or may, in fact, have a future that is assured and one in which they will not have to compete in the labour market or elsewhere.

Identified impact of the *number of students* on the *atmosphere* in the group.

10. A quiet atmosphere is conducive to learning.

Identified positive impact of the *quietness* on *the learning process*.

11. Openness of the Director contributes to a non-strict, family-like atmosphere.

Identified impact of the *Director's behaviour* on the overall *ambience*.

12. Students are experiencing a multicultural environment.

Identified impact of a *multicultural environment* on their habits/*way of living* at Aidan.

Now that the variables are defined, it will help to define the overall experience of students, which we will call a blueprint method.

First, a student profile compiled has been compiled. Aidan offers very personalized services and the prices are relatively high. This sets it apart and makes it attractive for people with higher incomes, as confirmed by the interview results.

Based on the first hypothesis, it is clear that most of the students (6/7) come from families with higher socioeconomic brackets. This fact clearly influenced the outcome of all of the interviews. Social statuses also influenced students' behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions. Their future is assured; there are no clear goals they feel they need to set or complete, because there will be little or no competition for them in the labour market or elsewhere. For most students, due to the highly competitive labour environment, individuals seek to distinguish themselves from their peers. Because of this, the "average" person strives to be motivated, chooses well-reputed colleges, internships, and volunteer work abroad, and develops multi-language skills. By contrast, Aidan's students are accustomed to everything being done for them. This, in turn, leads to an overall attitude lacking in appreciation for what is required to compete in the real world. As a result of being financially secure, there is less enthusiasm and motivation to do well. Those who are financially secure are able to access and afford a broader variety of entertainment. This may explain why they are not impressed by activities organized at the College.

Social status was also given as a reason to proceed differently with the application procedure. Students felt there was little need to be involved in the application process and reported that their parents also spent little time on it. Ascertaining how students perceived and experienced the application process was an objective of this study. Unfortunately, due to a lack of participation in the application procedure, this objective could not be met. The goal was to understand how students felt about the registration process, but none of them completed it. By identifying their perceptions of the process, it would have been relevant towards understanding its complexity. In the event the process is highly complex, further analysis would be necessary in order to simplify and improve the process. As there is no confirmation regarding complexity, it stays unclear whether changes are needed.

Second, a comparison between expectations and actual experience was supposed to help to identify gaps in the application process. Despite a lack of active information, it is clear that there is a gap between what students might have learned through the College's website, what their expectations might have been or were, and what they actually experienced. The students expected to see many residents and live and study in a dynamic atmosphere. In reality, it is a very quiet environment as the College is situated in a village and there are few people participating in the program at this time. These are the main gaps, which will comprise part of the managerial recommendations at the end of this thesis.

In the next section, there is analysis of two potentials that were interested in Aidan, but did not apply.

4.1.2. Analysis of prospects interviews

In this section, we will analyse the responses from two individuals who were interested in Aidan College, but who did not apply. These two respondents wanted to share their disappointing experience as related to the College.

The interested participants wanted to come to Aidan to learn about other cultures and increase their knowledge. They found Aidan College through search engines. To verify the College's profile, they visited the school's official website. Feedback from the two students confirms the findings of a study by Karry E. Grimm and Mark D. Needham (2012) as reported in the article *"Internet promotional material and conservation volunteer tourist motivations: A case of selecting organizations and projects"*. According to Grimm and Needham, tourists used the Internet to find out more about organizations. The authors noted similar results when they analysed the influence of promotional materials on tourists.

In the case of Aidan, the students received impression from the official website that the school would have many activities and a dynamic life. Unfortunately, communication through the website is not clear and gave the wrong impression regarding the life and dynamic of Aidan College.

The respondents mentioned three main reasons for not applying: costs are too high; the registration procedure is too complicated; and contact information for former students is not provided. According to one participant's answer, contact information of former students would have provided an actual opportunity to find out more about shared the experiences and to learn real outcomes from attending Aidan.

Although the interviews were short and very focused, the goal for this portion of the study was achieved. Reasons for not choosing Aidan were clearly stated: high pricing and a complicated registration process were factors stopped these students from applying. Subsequently, the registration process is one of the possible disadvantages in the College's effort to recruit students.

4.1.3. Conclusion

For this chapter, two kinds of interviews were conducted. One set was aimed at those who are studying at the College. Another one was prepared for those who visited the website, but were not interested enough to apply. The main objectives were achieved. Both of the data helped to understand students' needs. Person-to-person discussions confirmed the reliability of the data and gave an opportunity to use the observation technique.

It should be noted that the main objectives of the interviews with residents were to understand why participants chose this college, their opinion on the application process, and the difference between expectations and perception of the school.

Primary conclusions from student (resident) interviews: It is a clear point that the students were mostly influenced by others to make this choice and did not make it independently. This might explain their careless attitude toward classes, their final learning objectives, and/or their lack of interest in school-sponsored activities.

Social/socioeconomic status was noted as an influence in the process of admission. None of the participants were involved in the actual application process. As a result, it was **difficult to evaluate the current established process for registering potential students**. None could state whether the process was too complicated or easy. Currently, it is one of the main concerns at the College and it would be valuable to get some data on this topic. The hope was that interviews would provide insight into this matter.

An interesting fact that emerged throughout the course of the interviews is that most of the interviewees **expected to meet a lot of students and for the school to have a dynamic life with many activities**.

Their actual experience was one of day-to-day **routine tasks and quiet lives**. This might be a good solution from the parents' point of view and even a reason why they brought their children to this college. According to those who were interviewed, the only **added value of the College services is a personalized approach and a family-like environment**.

Residence profile, observation comments

Average age 19, family with high incomes, no motivation, and lazy attitude towards everything. On average, students had disciplinary problems. This gives the school a **certain image** (mostly negative) that the College may not want to have.

According to the interview data with prospective students, the College's website **gives visitors the impression** that residents have an **active life**.

An important matter emerged regarding the **complicated nature of the registration process and high costs**. It is assumed that the question of high costs was not a concern for current students in residence. However, prospective student did cost estimations. It is possible that use of their website as a communication tool is not specifically oriented towards young adults from wealthy families. For that reason, people from different social statuses may be attracted to the school based on how the school promotes itself through its website. However, when it comes to costs, prospective students who were interviewed declined applying based on this factor. It is assumed that high costs might be one of the reasons potential applicants refuse to apply. It is also possible this means that **another type of student has been attracted** to the college through the web promotion: those who come from the socioeconomic middle class.

Overall, the interviews resulted in valuable information that may help Aidan College or others interested in academic bridge programmes to proceed with further research.

4.2. Benchmarking of competitors

The next phase in this paper is benchmarking schools and their activities on the international level. Several schools that have activities similar to Aidan will be analysed separately and then compared to one another.

Throughout this paper, the focus has been on the marketing and communication strategy with particular emphasis on the registration process and web content.

In the following context, a benchmark method is used to compare different schools' practices to determine the best ones. The final goal is to understand the private education market. *What or how do others offer their products and services?* Making these comparisons stimulates thought about and development of a comprehensive framework for a marketing and communication strategy.

According to the study results and limitations of the scope, comparative research will focus on the optimization of Aidan's website content, and particularly their optimization of a list of 103 courses and their registration process.

The comparative research begins with identifying, choosing, and creating a list of the most successful private colleges in the world. According to an Internet search, there are a number of such colleges around the world. However, the critical factor that influenced a final selection was whether the school had activities similar to those at Aidan. In order to narrow the comparisons, schools had to offer language programs, bridge programs, or foundation programs.

The Director of Aidan College also suggested some names of comparable schools during the interview.

4.2.1. Comparison with the use of Kotler's model

The five-level Kotler's model adopted in the article *"Relationship marketing on the Internet: the case of top- and lower-ranked US universities and colleges"* by Michael L. Klassen is used as the foundation to evaluate Aidan's web content and to identify and present best practices for marketing and communication in private higher education. Mentioned in the literature review section, this model was used to compare top- and lower-ranked institutions. Schools ability to meet students' needs through use of Internet resources was analysed.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Kotler's model includes the following five levels:

- Basic level – university curriculum vitae is presented only
- Reactive level – an opportunity to contact the faculty via e-mail

- Accountable level – photos of the faculty
- Proactive level –list of faculty and courses
- Partnership level – online syllabi and assignments

In order calculate a final score for every college in the comparison, every level of the model has been assigned a weight from one to five, where five represents the highest and best score, or partnership level. The objective is to create a visual representation of each college's services. The total score based on the weighted models will be used to identify the college(s) that best utilizes its Internet resources as a marketing tool. The final score for each will be the sum of all criteria weights. The weights are as follows:

- Basic level 1
- Reactive level 2
- Accountable level 3
- Proactive level 4
- Partnership level 5

By scoring each college using Kotler's model, we will be able to identify problematic areas that could be further developed for Aidan College. All areas should be integrated into the College's short-term and long-term marketing strategy and goals.

The choice of criteria

In addition to Kotler's model, additional models are highly useful for comparing schools. The criteria being assessed consist of the application process, school programs, location, cost description, use of social networks, and the possibility to connect with former students. These models and criteria were chosen for this paper based on the literature review presented earlier in Chapter 2. Some of the criteria were taken from the Kotler's model (application process), while others were formed according to recent research results. For example, research about the type of information conservation tourists are most interested in when visiting a web page of a volunteer project or organization includes: location, program details, and costs.

It is important to analyse the website content of colleges from the point of view of the student. According to the literature review, there is information that students look for and need when they visit a web page (i.e. costs, course options, and so on) and information they would like to find (i.e. images, past participants feedback). For instance, the importance of Facebook or Twitter is quite high in young peoples' minds. Connecting with former students is another way to learn more about the organization or a certain project.

The choice of colleges

The choice of colleges was mainly based on types of available programs with analysis focusing on the Academic Bridge Programs (ABP) only. It should be noted that there was some difficulty in narrowing the focus to this particular niche of college services. This segment of the analysis will compare ABP Aidan with five similar colleges and programs.

Some institutions that offer ABPs are attached to universities. In the case of European University, it was feasible to conduct the analysis thanks to the transparency of information on their site. Others have limited information on their websites, as the colleges are part of the university. For these schools, it was unclear if the processes they described on their university website were the same for AB programs. Some program prepared only for those individuals who are entering their university. In such cases, these kinds of colleges were excluded from this research.

Another limitation concerns language schools, particularly ESL Language Schools.² Efforts were made to compare Aidan with schools that have ESL curricula. ESL services offer students the opportunity for language studies and cultural immersion abroad and are similar to services provided by Aidan. However, through the analysis it was identified that there are less administrative procedures and the registration process is simplified, as its services are limited to providing language courses only.

It was not possible to frame the schools into the developed score-relationship model formulated by Kotler described in the article *“Relationship marketing on the Internet: the case of top- and lower-ranked US universities and colleges”* by Michael L. Klassen.

The ideal profile represents a college that offers an Academic Bridge Program for any student who wishes to improve business, language, or other skills in order to satisfy university's entry requirements.

Through careful screening the choice was narrowed down to five colleges: European University, Business Foundation program with headquarters in Switzerland; Taylors College, University Foundation Program based in Australia; Kaplan International College, London, University Preparation Courses; Academic Bridge College in Dublin, Ireland; and Academic Bridge Program Qatar (ABP Qatar).

A summary of colleges being compared according to the aforementioned criteria are presented in Table 2 and also in Appendix III.

Table 2. Benchmark of colleges

Criteria/Schools	ABP Aidan College	European University, Business Foundation	Taylors College, Foundation Program	Kaplan International College London	Irish Academic Bridge College	ABP Qatar
<i>Application process (3 parts)</i>	2	4.33	4	4.33	4	2.33
(1)Encourage to apply	2	4	4	4	4	4
(2)Documents transfer	2	4	4	5	3	1
(3)Procedure complexity	2	5	4	4	5	2
<i>Program</i>	3	3	1	1	1	4
<i>Place</i>	3	4	5	5	5	2
<i>Costs</i>	3	3	5	2	1	2
<i>Social Media</i>	4	5	4	4	4	2
<i>Connect with former students</i>	4	4	4	4	4	2
TOTAL SCORE	19	23.33	23	20.33	19	14.33

Source: Michael L. Klassen. Relationship marketing on the Internet: the case of top- and lower-ranked US universities and colleges. Journal of retailing and consumer services 9 (2002).

As was stated previously, the key idea of this portion of the study was to analyse the online services of colleges from the student's point of view. For instance, an Indian student chooses to study at London College in an effort to fill a knowledge gap and to take business classes, while at the same time experiencing a different culture and

² This is the actual name of a school that provides language training in France, Germany, and Switzerland. <http://www.esl-schools.org/en/learn-languages.htm>.

some extracurricular activities. All the information to discover the college was online. What was his experience? Did he find the information he was looking for? Was it hard to find the necessary references?

Through this analysis, based on the five-level relationship model originally developed by Kotler, the highest score — 23.33 points — was achieved by European University. This university may be characterized as being the most transparent, accessible, and clear in terms of the information it delivers through its website. Taylors College achieved almost the same score with the difference of one point. These two colleges have created the most convenient online environment to attract and recruit new students.

The lowest score 14.33 was ABP Qatar College. The evaluation found that ABP Qatar is a conservative institution with less use of Internet tools. As a result, the application process is based on the seven steps long procedure, where prospective students have to print out the necessary documents and then bring it to the school office.

Aidan College has some advantages, however its score is quite low: 19. The general overview of its services reflects their dual image. The College is trying to deliver the message, it is serious educative institution with a great history based on its location and as a rigorous, Swiss learning environment; in other words, it wishes to convey an image of a school with old traditions. At the same time, Aidan makes good use of Internet tools, such as social networks and blogs to attract students, which creates the image of being a modern institution. The problem is, in some significant areas, the two images collide. For example, some of the administrative processes remain old fashioned when they should be adapted to reflect the latest technology and trends vis-à-vis utilizing the Internet. As a result, this can be confusing for prospects.

In Table 2, those cells which are highlighted in yellow represent the highest scored criteria for each of the schools. These areas are where institutions have identified how best to communicate specifics sets of information to prospective students. ABP Aidan College and ABP Qatar did not receive the highest scores (5) in any area and scored very few relevant high scores (4). Across all of the schools, none obtained the highest score for “encourage to apply”, “program”, and “connect with former students”.

Analysis details

Application process: The application process is one of the most important points, as it is one of the key issues being analysed in this thesis. For that reason, these processes were analysed in detail. The analysis included ascertaining how well did colleges stimulate prospective students' desire to apply, what types of documentation did they request, and finally how complicated was the application process, particularly through the school's website.

Application. Encouraging students to apply: According to the article “*Relationship marketing on the Internet: the case of top- and lower-ranked US universities and colleges*” colleges should stimulate a student's wish to apply from the moment they open the school's website home page. The ability to apply should be immediately available. If this is not the case, they are, according to the model used in this analysis, Basic Level 1 institutions. Being able to make a request by e-mail represents a 2, Reactive Level. Being able to request a printed application through the website brings colleges to the Accountable Level (3). Web sites are judged to be at the Proactive Level 4 when it is possible to actually apply online or to download the application form. The Partnership level (5) is achieved when there is an option to check the application status online.

Findings: Compared with its peers, Aidan College takes the lowest position — a 2 — with regards to the application process. The only application possibility, via e-mail through their website, is to request an “applicant code” to get the further access. As a result of having to wait for this code, the application process takes additional time and effort, which makes it less sophisticated and appealing to students.

Both the European University and Taylors College Foundation Programs offer online registration or a form to download. As a result, they each scored 4. Kaplan College and Academic Bridge College both offer online registration. ABP Qatar makes the application form available as a download to print and complete. The ability to apply online or to download an application form makes the process accessible and thus, more attractive for students to apply.

Application. Documents transfer: When a student applies to a college or university, s/he must produce certain documents as part of the completed application form including: a personal motivation statement, passport-size photos, copy of a valid passport, transcripts from previous schools, and so on. This section describes the means by which institutions ask for and acquire the necessary package of documents from prospective students.

Printing and hand-delivering a stack of documents is considered out-dated and inconvenient in today's online, digital world. Colleges that request documents in this manner are considered Basic Level 1 schools. Printing and mailing documents through the postal service is also considered old-fashioned, represents a very limited use of the Internet, and is classified as Reactive Level 2. The ability to send requested documents by post or fax simplifies the process slightly, but again, options are limited. For this reason, these websites are at the Accountable Level (3). Being able to send by post, by fax, or via e-mail brings an institution to Proactive Level 4. The additional ability to upload documents online brings institutions to the Partnership Level (5). Providing prospective students with a variety of options — sending by post, via e-mail, by fax, or online — to match what will be most convenient for them is interpreted as building relationships with students.

Findings: ABP Qatar scored the lowest with a 1, as their method of document collection remains out-dated. Students have to bring documents with them, which is not practical, especially for international students. ABP Aidan requests students send their documents by post, also an out-dated mode. Technologically adept students may not appreciate old-fashioned processes as it may create an impression of a cumbersome and complex process.

Irish Academic Bridge College allows prospective students to send documents by post or fax, which brings it to the Accountable Level with a score of 3.

European University and Taylors College give students the option to send documents by post, fax, or e-mail. Internet use is minimal, giving this school a Proactive Level score of 4.

The only school to score a 5, or Partnership Level, was achieved by Kaplan College, which allows students to upload their documents online. Interestingly, Kaplan does not require its prospective students to upload all of their required documents right away. If students would like, they can provide them later at their convenience.

Application. Procedure complexity: This section focuses on the visual presentation, as found on each schools website, of steps prospective students are instructed to undertake in order to enrol. As soon as the student ascertains the process, it forms an impression for them. This impression may be negative or positive, depending on the number of steps required to complete the application process. The more steps there are, the less positive the impression may be. The fewer steps, the more positive. This factor may become crucial in the student-decision process.

Colleges that describe and require 9 – 10 steps in their application process are Basic Level 1 schools. A Reactive Level 2 school uses 7 – 8 steps. The Accountable Level (3) consists of 5 – 6 steps. At the Proactive Level (2) there are 3 – 4 steps, while colleges at the Partnership Level (5) present the whole process in 1 or 2 steps.

Findings: As compared with all other schools in this thesis, Aidan College requires 8 steps on their web page in order to apply. There are guidelines for approaching and undertaking each step. Every step is very lengthy and detailed, requiring effort and time to understand. Additionally, within those 8 steps, there is also mention of a visa

application procedure. The process is too long and complicated, which may, in turn, be confusing and time-consuming for prospective students.

ABP Qatar presents seven steps and is also long. However, the information is well-structured and easier to understand than Aidan's. Taylors and Kaplan Colleges developed a four step process that is also well-structured and easy. For that reason, they both scored 4, representing the Accountable Level

European University and Academic Bridge College each have a two step process, which places them in the highest score: 5, at Partnership Level. They managed to have the easiest presentation of information. As a reminder, the important feature of any consumer website lays in the way it delivers its message to prospective clients; in this case, to students. European University's two-step process gives users two options each: print out the form, attach the necessary documents and to send it to the admission office or fill out the application form and send the necessary documents. All of the documents that need to be sent do not count as a step, unlike in other institutions' descriptions. The result is, the site gives the impression of simplicity, which may be attractive to many students Irish Academic Bridge College describes its processes in a couple of sentences with only the most important information provided Additional requirements are provided separately.

Program information: Students should be able to get a clear idea of what comprises a program. The more information a school's site makes available about classes and teachers, the more likely it will increase a student's understanding about what the school has to offer. Good information may be the critical motivation factor in determining whether a student chooses a particular program or organization.

The ability of a college to deliver its message about its programs is judged to be Basic Level 1 if there is list of courses only. A list of detailed course descriptions and teachers brings an institution to the number 2 Reactive Level. Websites having a list of professors with pictures or presentations about their background are judged to be at the Accountable Level 3. The ability to contact professors for more information about courses they teach is a number 4 Proactive Level. The Partnership Level 5 is given when there are examples of assignments or tests available.

Findings: Taylors, Kaplan, and Academic Bridge Colleges dispose very limited information at this point. Students are introduced to course titles only. Therefore, these Colleges each score 1.

European University and ABP Aidan College are at the Accountable level with a score of 3 as they both provide lists of professors, courses they teach, and their pictures and/or background information. There is more information available for students.

ABP Qatar provides students with the possibility to contact teachers, which allows students to actively gather more information about what the project or the program is. This also contributes to building a relationship between students and school staff, ensuring the credibility of a school.

No schools provided online assignments. It would make it more convenient (less time and effort) for students as they would not have to get in touch with teachers. It is assumed that a sample of assignments may give prospective students a better understanding about a particular course or impart a more transparent image of a school.

Place: This section will evaluate how well institutions present their facilities, student life, and outside events. The goal is to provide an understanding of the study and leisure environment, and thus to influence a student's final choice of a program or a college. There are several ways to show college facilities: they can be described in words, presented in pictures, or be shown in video.

Basic Level 1 represents colleges that do not demonstrate any visual presentation of place on their websites. However, they may have a description of their facilities and environment in general. Level 2 (Reactive) shows a few pictures for general context. Pictures of students attending lectures, hanging out, engaging in some activities brings a college to the Accountable Level 3. If there are also pictures of conferences, presentations, meetings, classes, and guest visitors provided by the college, it is judged to be at Proactive Level 4. Colleges at the Partnership Level (5) offer a video tour of the campus and services offered. Thanks to this kind of presentation, students can have a global image of the place and try to match it with their own preferences.

Findings: The lowest score among the schools was ABP Qatar. The school's site provides general descriptions of its facilities and student life. However, few images show students and campus buildings.

The third level may be attributed to Aidan College as there are pictures that are mostly focused on students engaging in activities and leisure time.

European University presents a large palette of pictures representing conferences, guest lectures, organized visits, and more. Additionally, there is information about off-campus cafés, museums, art galleries, and other things to discover while studying. This type of information is an advantage for newcomers. There are also many images for prospective students that facilitate further discovery regarding studies with the university, its culture, and students. For that reason the school gets a 4, or Proactive level.

Taylor's, Kaplan, and Irish Academic Bridge Colleges have the highest score, 5. They managed to establish partnerships with their students. The most useful tool they used is a video tour of their respective campuses. The most effective way to attract prospective students is by showing, in video, the advantages of a school's facilities and programs. If there are current students portrayed, it increases the reliability level.

Costs: Recent research shows that costs are among the first things students want to see on an institution's website.

Websites at Basic Level 1 do not provide any price indications. It is necessary to send a request to the school's admissions office. Colleges that mention per semester/per year/per term prices are considered Reactive Level 2 schools. With these schools, prospective students still must contact an admissions office for further details. At the Accountable Level 3, all charges and fees are shown, while at the Proactive Level 4 there is an online calculator. The Partnership level 5 presents a comparison between programs and their costs.

Findings: Academic Bridge College does not show any prices on its website; this information must be requested from the school. Thus, their score is 1.

ABP Qatar and Kaplan Colleges only mention the overall price per year with no further details. Prospective students must contact the admissions office, which may involve additional costs, time, and effort.

ABP Aidan College and European University Business Foundation Program are evaluated as being at the Accountable Level with a score of 3. Both schools provide detailed information about standard charges and fees. However, if a student who is interested in Aidan wishes to combine some courses, the price would be uncertain. For further details, s/he would need to contact the admissions office. Having an online calculator or a program comparison would facilitate the process and be more convenient for the student.

Taylor's College gets the highest score for providing the ability to compare prices and programs.

Social Media: Students nowadays use different social networks and other media to verify a college's profile or to learn more about it. This segment evaluates a college's ability to respond to students' needs in terms of social networking and will look at how prevalent schools use social networks?

At Basic Level 1 are institutions that do not use for their marketing and communication social networks. Websites that were judged to be at the Reactive Level 2 have newsletters or an events calendar. Accountable Level 3 consists of using Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. Colleges that were judged to be Proactive Level 4 write blogs and utilize YouTube, while being a Partnership Level 5 school is signified by the use of podcasts/TV to bring students closer.

Findings: ABP Qatar is Reactive Level with a score of 2, because of their lack of accessibility via social networks. There is a *News and Events* link on the campus' website, but no Facebook page — a medium that young adults tend to use widely nowadays.

Aidan, Taylors, Kaplan, and Academic Bridge Colleges each are Proactive Level 4 schools, because they use blogs and/or YouTube, where students can receive timely updates about the latest campus news and activities.

The highest score is attributed to European University for their use of podcasting. In addition to using social networks — Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, and other — they also have their TV podcasting. All of these tools make the school transparent and accessible for students. A college with their own TV station can have a positive impact on the image of international and big educational enterprise.

Connect with former students: Providing prospective students with the ability to contact former students (those who attended Aidan College in the past) gives a school an advantage. It shows openness and lends credibility to their image. Former students and alumni may share their knowledge and experience with newcomers, thereby influencing their final decision.

Lack of presence in any social network t brings the college to Basic Level 1. Restricting access for former students or limiting access only to the alumni group on the official website may still put prospects in a difficult position, so the level is Reactive 2. The websites at the Accountable Level 3 offer access to the alumni association, while at the Proactive Level 4 there are Facebook or LinkedIn groups that anyone can join and contact a current student or alumnus and learn more about the college. Partnership Level 5 is achieved when there is contact information available for Alumni participants via the school's official website.

Findings: The lowest score is attributed to ABP Qatar whose alumni network is available only to past or current students. The College is at the Reactive level 2. Prospective students cannot contact alumni. Subsequently, there is no experience sharing. Having access to the alumni network would increase credibility for this school and others like it.

Aidan, European University, Taylors, and Kaplan colleges are more open to newcomers in terms of accessibility to the alumni association. These colleges each scored 4 on the Proactive level. As examples, European University provides some contact information through the school's LinkedIn profile, while Aidan has a Facebook page for anyone to join and connect with past and current students.

Conclusion

The school with the highest score — 23.33 points — went to European University's Business Foundation Program. European University is an international organization that has a strong brand image. Their use of the Internet as a marketing tool is impressive. The school offers a broad array of program descriptions and students' services, and photo galleries contribute to the college's transparency. European University's presence on numerous social networks and its alumni association increase the impression of reliability of the college's services. These networks contribute to relationship building with potential, current, and former students. The information is very well-organized, well-structured, and easy to navigate.

European University's registration process is presented in a very simple, two step manner. It is possible to apply online. Required documents for completing the application process can be sent by post, fax, or e-mail. The cognitive costs in terms of time and effort are lower in comparison to Aidan College. All of these factors may play one of the major roles in persuading a student to participate in the University's programs.

Taylor's College, another effective and successful school, reached a high score with 23 points. Information available on their website is very useful and mostly transparent. Innovative approaches to presenting their campus facilities and social networks help to attract new students.

Aidan scored 19 points as well as Irish Academic Bridge College. The registration process seems very complex and long at Aidan. It demands a lot of effort and time to read and understand it. First, students need to request, either via e-mail or through an onsite message, an applicant code. Second, once they have received their code, they then need to enter it into a text field that is not obvious. Third, once prospective students have entered their code (once they find where that needs to be done) and are in the registration area, they receive access to an eight-step process where, instead of key phrases and short directions, there are long paragraphs describing every step in detail, which makes it harder to understand and is not favourable to keeping the user's attention or interest.

Aidan fails to use modern marketing tools as part of creating a corresponding image. The processes for handling required documents remain old-fashioned, which does not reflect a strategic way of thinking. For example, documents must be sent by post and cannot be submitted electronically. To maintain an image of modernity, the school's process needs to be simplified.

In other areas, however, Aidan College uses its social networking tools effectively. There are interactive YouTube videos featuring students, good pictures of the school and its environment, and a Facebook page for prospective and current students and alumni. Students who are interested in Aidan want to better understand the school's ambience and environment before arriving. One of the best opportunities to do so is to connect them with the alumni association so they can learn about others' experiences, gather additional information and knowledge, and give and get advice. It is useful especially when there is interaction from current student. Aidan does a good job of this.

ABP Qatar is a very traditional institution that did not fully integrate novel marketing resources into its website or processes. It received the lowest score: 18 points. While the website is well-organized and easy to navigate, there are some areas that keep it very traditional and less accessible for international students.

The admission process at ABP Qatar is slightly better than Aidan's. Seven steps are required, but unlike Aidan, they are well-structured and easy to follow. Only key terms are used to describe each step. Another good point is, it is possible to download their application form. On the downside, the process for document collection remains old-fashioned, as students are required to hand-deliver them. Again, this limits access for international students.

Costs at ABP Qatar are presented as a per year figure and are given as general information. Students also need to contact the school's admission office, which complicates the application process. Description of what students may expect from campus life and services is provided mostly as text only. A few pictures are available, but they do not provide the applicant with the clear understanding of life at the college.

ABP Qatar does not utilize social media; there are no Facebook or Twitter pages and no possibility to connect with current or former students in order to learn more about the school's campus environment, programs, or events.

Aidan College, European University, Taylors, Kaplan, ABP Qatar, and Academic Bridge College have their advantages and disadvantages. The purpose of this chapter was to compare Aidan College with these schools and to identify the strongest and the weakest points in website services.

The enrolment procedure found in Table 2 will be used as the basis for further detailed analysis later in this thesis. A table showing the differences in offered services may be found in the next section.

4.2.2. Synthesis of services offered

Table 3 provides a simplified overview of the types of services and goods other schools provide as compared to Aidan. These outstanding services or interesting points were chosen as criteria and compared to each other. A more detailed table is provided in Appendix IV and shows each of the colleges different services. The objective is to show what is available at other colleges. It is hoped this will give fresh insight to Aidan and lead to changes in their own services. There are also some services that Aidan provides, but others do not. This table shows Aidan's advantages compared with others.

The short version presented in Table 3 aims to identify only those services that Aidan does not have. The objective is to combine the results from Table 2 with the results in Table 3 in an effort to stimulate thinking. Based on these analyses, it is possible to develop new short-term and long-term goals and, using the full table in Appendix IV, understand the weakest and the strongest points for Aidan.

Table 3. Comparison of offered services

Criteria/Schools	ABP Aidan College	European University, Business Foundation	Taylors College, Foundation Program	Kaplan International College London	Irish Academic Bridge College	ABP Qatar
Entry requirements	None	X	X	X	None	X
Search	None	X	X	X	None	X
Agreements with universities	None	X	X	X	None	X
Courses: Menu	None	X	X	X	X	X
Alumni	None	X	None	None	None	X
Sustainable management as a vision	None	X	None	None	None	None
Hostel	None	None	None	None	X	None
Apartement	None	None	X	X	X	None
Diploma by the end of the studies	None	None	None	None	X	None
Clubs and Organizations to join	None	X	None	X	None	X

Table 3, we can see that other colleges have many services that Aidan does not. For instance, most of the colleges have entry requirements. Usually, they require a minimum level of English and confirmation of skill level by providing an official certificate as verification.

Most colleges have a "search" option on their website. It simplifies the search process for prospective students who may be looking for information about a particular program, activity, faculty member, or service.

One of the most important findings is that all schools, except Aidan, have courses grouped into programs. For example, at Taylors College there are three types of programs: standard, intensive, and extended. At European University, programs are divided into Business Foundation, Undergraduate/Bachelor, Graduate/MBA, Online MBA, Executive MBA, DBA, and International Summer School. Kaplan's site has a list of courses by subject area that includes Business, Law, Social Sciences, Art and Design, and so on. By comparison, Aidan provides a list of

faculty and what they teach, but this may be experienced as unhelpful and unclear with regard to specific programs.

These comparisons confirm what the literature review suggested concerning the theory of choice overload. According to the literature, the best way to offer a large choice is to group them together into categories. The result is less confusing for a consumer; in this case, Aidan's students.

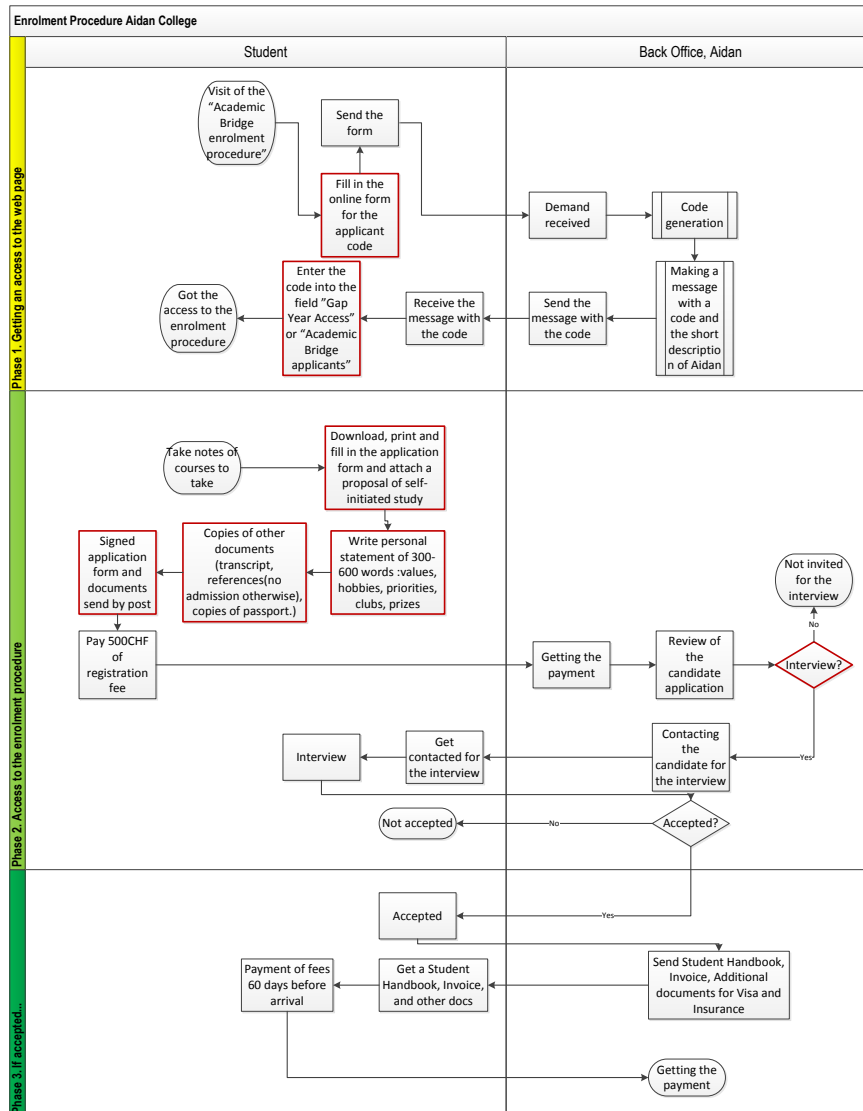
Another important finding is that colleges such as Kaplan or ABP Qatar have agreements with other universities and can give a certain guarantee to their students that they will be granted entry at a university after participating in a program at the college. For example, Kaplan partners with the City University of London, the University of Glasgow, and the University of Liverpool, to name a few.

From the standpoint of social values, it was interesting to note that European University has, as one of its core values, sustainable development. Such a value on the part of the school could influence the final decision of a student who is sensitive about the social responsibility.

European University, Kaplan, and ABP Qatar have student clubs and organizations, which are a good opportunity for students to interact with others and find friends with shared interests. As just one example, ABP Qatar has clubs for community service, debate, model UN, photography, and yoga. Schools like Aidan may want to consider creating similar clubs and organizations.

4.2.3. Analysis of the enrolment procedure

Figure 4. Diagram of the enrolment process



Source: M. Lovelock

The process for online registration through Aidan's website is presented in Figure 4. The "blueprint" tool makes it possible to create a visual representation and, through this visualisation, to identify the problematic areas. The main idea of this representation is to show the complexity and the length of the registration process. The objective is to identify problematic areas that need to be further researched and optimized. The red squares represent exactly the points that might cause problems.

For instance, the applicant code that needs to be obtained in order to gain access to the registration process is problematic. The first step requires students to fill in an online form. This takes time and energy and might negatively influence a student's motivation. If they choose to persist, once they receive their code, they must enter it into a new field. It is unclear, however, where the code needs to be entered. The field is poorly located on the same page where students request the code and it is not immediately visible or apparent that the code will

need to be entered on the same page. As it takes time to receive the code, students are unlikely to assume that they should return to the same page where they requested the code. Even if they do return to the “Academic Bridge enrolment procedure” page, the box where the code should be entered is labelled “Gap Year Access”, which may not be understood by applicants as the place to enter their code to continue the application process.

The College’s reasoning for this set up is, this page is the first point of contact with those who may become interested enough to ask for the code. By completing the request for a code, the administration is able to obtain prospective students’ name, surname, country of residence, and e-mail address. This is information the school can use to contact the student later on. This does little to help the student, however, and it is not obvious where they should enter their code once they have it.

The content of Aidan’s home page has no real added value; it has no specific content or personalized interface. The procedures for registration of other Aidan programs, such as “Art study” or “Lifelong learning” are similar to the “Academic Bridge Program”, though to access them, no code required. This reduces any added value for the registration process at ABP Aidan.

Another process in the enrolment procedure, as highlighted in the diagram by a red square, requires students to print out and fill in the registration form, attach other required documents, and send it all to Aidan by post. This procedure is complicated and long. People are looking for simplicity and processes that save time, energy, and money. This long process may be one of the major demotivators in the decision process.

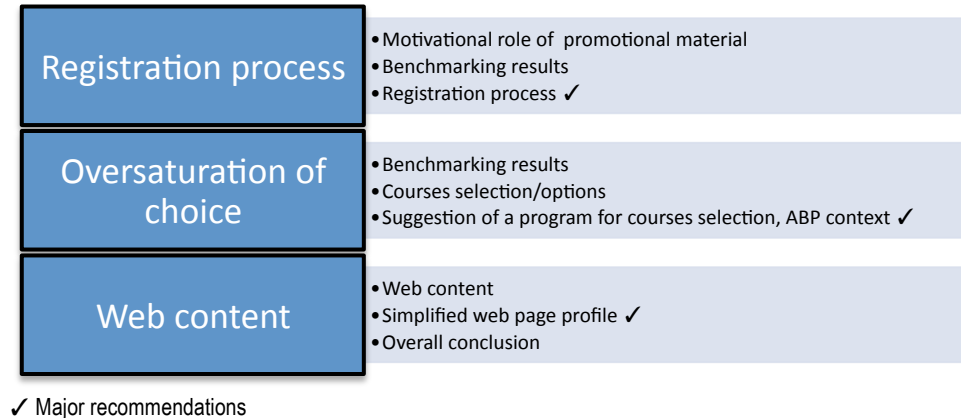
In addition to providing supporting documentation, students are also asked to supply a 300–600 word personal written statement about why they are interested in Aidan. This seems rigorous and unnecessary at this stage of the process. The precise quantification of words as well as a further proposal that students engage in self-initiated study might negatively influence them. Aidan aims to help people find their passion. Even if a student is willing to undertake studies, s/he may not realize what s/he needs, which may make writing such a letter and being self-motivated difficult. Requiring a personal statement, an interview, and self-initiated studies, which are all connected and overlap, may be excessive and, depending on the student’s location, one might replace another.

Based on the blueprint diagram, it becomes clear that the enrolment procedure at Aidan is unnecessarily long and complicated. The process needs to be reviewed and optimised so as to be user friendly and appealing.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This last chapter presents the conclusion and recommendation. The structure is developed around three axes, two of them (registration process and overload of choice) were initially objectives of this research:

Figure 5: Evaluating the role and utilization of the Internet



Items in Figure 5 with a check mark are areas where this thesis will make recommendations to Aidan College and schools like it.

5.1. Registration process

Vrontis et al.'s (2007) model of student-choice in developed countries shows a student decision process and factors that influence it. The process starts with "Need Recognition" and continues through five steps, ending with a "Post-consumption evaluation". Two major factors influence students: individual and environmental. Individual factors are primarily internal and include personal motivation, values, lifestyle, habits. Environmental factors are mostly external and can be parents, friends' opinions, social status.

This model was going to be applied when analysing the interviews results. To achieve the final objective of this thesis — to develop effective online communication strategy — it is important to understand the target population. Interviewing students was one of the means to do that. The questions were formed to identify expectations before arriving at Aidan, perceptions about the difference between what they imagined and their actual life at Aidan, and students' most appreciated moments to see the added value in their experience.

However, the final results showed that students do not entirely represent the target population. They were not motivated initially to participate in Aidan's programs, but were mostly influenced by their parents. Accordingly, they did not search for the information prior to coming nor did they evaluate alternatives, but followed the decision of their parents. They learned about the College not from promotional material, but through their relatives. We cannot estimate why exactly they were attracted to Aidan's services, as it was not entirely their decision. That is why the whole process of decision-making for current students is different from the model developed by Vrontis et al. Another important point is that these students were not involved in the registration process at all. For that reason, they were not able to evaluate its level of difficulty or give any feedback.

Interview findings from a discussion with students who made the choice not to apply to Aidan showed the registration process was one of the reasons that influenced their final decision. This group of students were using

the Internet to search for information and were self-motivated. However, they were pushed away by the complexity of the school's enrolment procedure.

The target population for this group of interviews were students from a higher socioeconomic level (e.g. probably attending private high schools or colleges), but who were purposeful and striving to achieve a better level of knowledge, test results, or additional certificates.

A motivated student would be looking for gap year opportunities or Academic Bridge-type programs. Therefore, this type of student would be an initiator of his/her own studies similar to interviewees who did not come to Aidan College.

This type of student would be more beneficial for the College. According to the article "*The dark side of choice: When Choice Impairs Social Welfare*" by Botti and Iyengar (2006), a person is more motivated and satisfied if the decision was his own. Meaning that people who are told to do something or, in this case, follow the wish of parents to undertake a term or two at the College are less motivated to study or to achieve a goal. And if they do achieve results, they will be less satisfied with those results than if they had made their own decision initially.

Today, the Internet is one of the most common marketing and information tools. It is used to market and sell a product or service, look for all kinds of information, choose and buy, find and spread the latest news, identify a person or an organization, communicate, share and exchange information, and participate in communities and events.

When an international student wants to find a college, s/he is going to use the Internet as the most available, most practical, and inexpensive means. Grimm and Needham's "*Internet promotional material and conservation volunteer tourist motivations: A case of selecting organizations and projects*" confirms this statement. Participants want to see a well-organized, professional-looking, and user-friendly website.

Messaging through websites needs to be simple and clear to minimize students efforts and time to find the information. Research for this thesis has shown that colleges can lose clients, because of bad communication through the Internet.

In Aidan College's case, the information provided on its website, particularly for its registration process, is very complicated: there is a lot of text to read and long phrases constitute whole paragraphs. As it takes a lot of time and effort to read and comprehend what needs to be done to register, there are probably many students who get confused and are pushed away by the process. Interview results with two students who chose not to apply to the College confirm that.

The comparative analysis was developed to confirm the assumption that the procedure is complicated. Table 2 "Benchmark of Colleges" scores and compares six schools. Aidan received one of the lowest scores in the comparison. Each school was evaluated on how open and transparent their respective registration process was. One area that was explored was, how quickly a student could start the registration process. Aidan received the lowest score in this area. Aidan requires additional information in order to receive a code to then gain access to their registration pages.

Aidan also scored in the lowest position, based on its process for submitting supporting documentation as part of the registration process. The only option is to send documents by post, which is out-dated. Some colleges' website make it possible for prospective students to upload or e-mail their documents, which is more practical and less time consuming. On Aidan's website, the registration process is described in eight steps, which is the longest procedure among the six schools that were compared. And again, in each step, there are long paragraphs to read and understand. As a result of these three criteria — encourage to apply, documents transfer, and procedure complexity —the enrolment procedure for Aidan College was given the lowest score.

The literature review analysis, interview feedback and comparative analysis helped to identify and determine that one of the reasons the site might push away potential students is Aidan's complicated enrolment procedure.

One of the major outcomes of this research is to make recommendations about optimization of registration procedures. The blueprint method was used to analyse every stage of Aidan's process. Several potentially problematic points were identified, such as the need to request an applicant code or the need to print out, fill in, and send registration forms and supporting documents. First, it is not clear what an applicant code is. Second, the code does not give access to any specific information or to a personalized profile. And, third, it is not clear or obvious to the applicant, once they have the code, where they need to enter that code. As a result, there is no added value for the applicant in requesting and acquiring a code. They are asked to take time to fill in the request form, then await a response, and finally enter the code in a field that is not well-situated in an obvious place.

Several other steps could be removed from the registration procedure, which may be unnecessary as part of the application process. For example, Aidan asks its prospective students to submit a proposal for self-initiated study as a part of the enrolment procedure. For students who may not know what they want to study, this might negatively influence their decision. Aidan's role is not only to provide personalized assistance and the means to achieve better test results, but also to help students, who do not know at what they want to study, discover their interests and seek out a university where they can continue their studies. Most students applying to or attending bridge programs often are not able to propose a self-initiated study plan as they are not able to imagine or identify what courses they need to take.








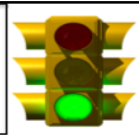

Another step that may be considered for removal is the request for a personal statement of 300-600 words. Writing a statement takes time and effort that most students may not be interested in committing. This, too, may scare off potential applicants.

A copy of the student's passport is also requested at the time of application, but is needed only for the visa application. This is a step that is unnecessary for the application process itself and could be requested only if the student is admitted to Aidan.

In an optimized procedure, these steps would be removed as unnecessary. As part of the enrolment process, an face-to-face interview could eliminate two requests: the personal statement and the self-initiated study proposal. A conversation with the Director of the College or a member of the admissions committee could help the school understand a prospective student's motivation. Self-initiated study could be developed with each student when main courses start.

The main objective of this study is to develop recommendations for a process that will be easy for Aidan College and its students to understand and follow, as well as utilizing and taking full advantage of Internet communication tools, especially its website, to gain the edge over their competitors. The focus needs to be on simplification of the procedure.

Table 4. Optimization of the Communication Blueprint

Blueprint		Process : registration "online"					
Aidan College		Phases of service					
		Phase 1: Program choice		Phase 2: Price calculation and enrolment			
		Phase 3: Personal information and confirmation					
Actors	Student	Choose - program - courses - duration - accommodation - insurance - extras		Summary with Price AB Program 5.10-5.12.2013 - Standard Menu: 18'000 CHF - Accommodation: 5'500 CHF - Registration fees: 500 CHF TOTAL: 24'000 CHF		Submit - Personal information - Address - Contact information - Obtained degree (or later) Agree with conditions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Submit	
	Aidan	Provide choice - programs - courses - duration - etc.		Generation of summary and calculating the price		Confirmation -Generation of the letter of all the entered by students information	
	Partners: parents of the student	Decision Participate in the decision-making process"		Price awareness and confirmation		Getting the confirmation letter Waiting for further contact	

Source: Silvio Barbieri, Emmanuel Fragniere et al. Proposal of a Methodology to Integrate the Human Factor in the Service Blueprint. Journal of Advanced Management Science (2013).

Table 4 presents a recommended optimized enrolment procedure for Aidan College. This procedure consists of three phases that are easy to understand, interpret, and complete online, thereby economising time.

In Phase 1, Aidan College provides a choice of programs, courses, insurance (if needed), duration of stay, accommodation options, and a list of extra preferences. It is left to a student to click on and make his/her choices. With a single click on "Calculate the price" at the end of the page (Phase 2), the College system will generate a summary of choices and a price. The student may then save a draft draft or exit/quit the process. If the student is satisfied with his/her choices and prices and have received parental approval, s/he may want to continue to Phase 3 and register right away.

In Phase 3, the student would have one more click at the bottom of the page to start the enrolment process. S/He would provide their personal details — name, address, contact information, and whether they wish to obtain a certificate — and submit. In this phase, Aidan could offer students the option to either upload supporting documentation or provide it later in the process (i.e. during the interview; upon arrival at the school).

Another way Aidan could optimize its system is by providing students the opportunity to pay their administrative fees on the same web page. Since payment of the administrative fees is a requirement to proceed with the creation of a candidate file, providing the option to pay online would create convenience for the client. S/He would not need to transfer the money or to login online to his/her bank account. This would also reduce the chance that s/he will postpone or forget to do it later.

At the end of the optimized process, Aidan could generate an auto-reply confirmation for the student that summarizes the information they input and let's them know they have successfully completed the online application. The letter could further state that a student will be contacted by the school within 48 hours. In any

business, two or three days response time is the maximum amount of time that should be allowed to pass, because the longer Aidan waits, the more uncertain students may become about their choice. According to Botti and Iyengar (2006), the more time passes, the less students will justify their decision, which may lead to rejection of their initially chosen option.

Aidan's role is to provide course and program options to choose from, generate final prices, and confirm the completion of the online application process. Parents are also part of this process. While few students who mention, either in writing or during an interview, that their parents influenced their final decision in some way, it is reasonable to assume that most of students are financially dependant on their parents at the age of 16-17. Therefore, it is necessary to get parents' approval and financial support.

Based on the scoring in Table 2 "Benchmark of Colleges", Aidan College could achieve a top position with the highest score if it simplified its the enrolment procedure.

The Table 5 illustrates the manner in which Aidan should communicate with prospective students and shows the simplicity of the procedure. The objective is to attract students through proactive communication. This can take place in three simple steps. Keeping the message clear will make it easy for applicants to understand and will give that impression that registration at the College is straightforward. Well-thought out and well-structured online enrolment could become one of the major motivators for students to apply to Aidan College. Appendix IV provides a more detailed breakdown of what the online enrolment process currently lacks compared with other schools.

Table 5. Communication with students

Blueprint AIDAN COLLEGE	Online registration		
	Phase 1: Program choice	Phase 2: Price calculation and enrolment	Phase 3: Submit and confirmation
Student			
	Finalize your choice Example: ABP Program: dd.mm.yyyy – dd.mm.yyyy Standard Menu ✓ Accommodation at Aidan ✓ Insurance ✓ Registration fees ✓ (Non-refundable)	Summary with Price AB Program 5.10-5.12.2013 - Standard Menu 18'000 CHF - Accomodation 5'500 CHF - Registration fees 500 CHF TOTAL 24'000 CHF ENROL ✓	Summary Personal details Agree with conditions ✓ Payment of 500 CHF non-refundable fees SUBMIT ✓ Letter of confirmation received Contacted within 48-72 hours

Source: Silvio Barbieri, Emmanuel Fagniere et al. Proposal of a Methodology to Integrate the Human Factor in the Service Blueprint. Journal of Advanced Management Science (2013).

In addition to a simplified system, Aidan should allow prospective students to register and create a login for those who wish to save their drafts and continue the registration process later.

5.2. Oversaturation of choice

Everyone wants to minimize the time and effort they spend making choices. According to Botti and Iyengar information overload may lead to confusion and rejection. The human cognitive system is limited in the amount of information it can process. This is why people get confused and are uncertain when there is too much to choose from.

Students need a lot of time and effort to read through Aidan's 103 courses, then evaluate them according to his/her preferences, and make a final selection. When the palette of options is large, the prospective student might be uncertain about what to select because of limited cognitive system capacity or they might feel regret about their final choices, particularly if they had to reject an alternative option. Too much disorganized choice may even lead students to make no choice at all to avoid negative feelings or conflict. A young, impatient adult is unlikely to go through a list of 103 classes: it is long, time-consuming, and does not look attractive.

It is also important, when naming/identifying courses, to understand who the target audience is for this information. Some of Aidan's courses are named in an unclear manner. For instance: a course titled "Interpersonal communications along the career path" sounds complicated and young students may not understand what is being offered. As a result, they may not be attracted to this course. These kinds of wordy phrases tend to attract employees, i.e. people of 30-40 years looking for career development and training programs. Young students are looking for simplicity. The best way to deliver a large amount of information, according to Botti and Iyengar, is to categorize it. Instead of 103 courses, Aidan should group its courses into categories or programs.

Most 16-17 years old may not know exactly what they need to study as part of an academic bridge program. For this reason, simply listing 103 courses may be confusing. Students may mistakenly choose options they think are necessary to enter university. A developed and proposed course program can help students avoid this mistake and enable them to choose appropriate courses.

In analysing and comparing other colleges with Aidan, it was noted that many have programs. There are different names and forms for presenting programs, but they exist. Even ABP Qatar, which had the lowest score among the six colleges, has a program breakdown with the following courses: English, math, science, and computer skills. European University offers courses in the following categories: English for business, communication skills, applied computer skills, management basics, and others. Aidan is the only one that does not offer information in categories or programs.

The Academic Bridge Program was created to fill a knowledge gap for students seeking to enter a university. Courses should prepare students for their entrance exams. To achieve this, it is necessary to attract more students to Aidan, facilitate their ability to choose courses easily and wisely, and increase overall satisfaction with the registration process. The following program set for the College's Academic Bridge Program is proposed.

The main idea is to have **Standard Programs**, with additional options, and **Advanced Programs**.

A **Standard Programs** may be based on university departments. Categorizing a program this way allows students, who know what they want to study in the future, to choose based on a simple category. Some categories that might be considered for Standard Programs include: Business & Management, Accounting & Finance, and Music & Media. Within a general category, a set of required courses may then be proposed.

Following are proposed site maps for how Aidan might structure their 103 courses on their website.

Simulation 1: Choosing a program

PROGRAMS -> STANDARD

CHOOSE A PROGRAM THAT SUITS YOU BEST!

- ➔ **Accounting & Finance (click)**
- ➔ Business & Management
- ➔ Music & Media

Clicking on the home page on *Programs* and then *Standard* (Simulation 1), a student will see this kind of presentation with the option to choose from a set of programs based on school or university departments. Accounting & Finance, Business & Management, and Music & Media are just a few examples of how Aidan could regroup and reorganize its 103 courses into a program set.

In Simulation 2, we will have a student choose *Accounting & Finance*. Clicking this link will open another page and present the student with a course structure, including core/required and optional courses, and the possibility to apply online.

Simulation 2: Choosing program courses

PROGRAMS -> STANDARD -> ACCOUNTING & FINANCE

PROGRAM	STRUCTURE	APPLY ONLINE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 term Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certified Business skills Timetable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 hours per week 	<p>-> CORE/REQUIRED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management Principles of Economics Communication Business English <p>-> OPTIONAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language International Management Marketing Sustainable Management Human Resources Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calculate prices Compare programs and prices Check the application status online

Depending on the university a student aims to study at, courses should be personalized and adapted according to his needs. For example, not all of the information will appear automatically. To see the length of a program, the student will need to click on *Duration*. Clicking on *Apply online* will open the previously described online registration process, which consists of calculating prices, comparison of programs, and checking application status online.

The **Advanced Program** is aimed at students who know what they are lacking and want to concentrate on strengthening any gaps. For instance, a student may wish to study economics at university. S/He is aware that the only weak point is mathematics, so s/he would request mathematics classes only. The student would begin with similar steps as were presented in Simulation 1. Simulation 3 illustrates how a student who is interested in an Advanced Program would proceed.

Simulation 3: Choosing an advanced program

PROGRAMS -> ADVANCED

CHOOSE A PROGRAM

Find a course

Choose subject area (Click)

Subject

Accounting & Finance (click)
Statistics (input and enter)

Business & Management

Music & Media

A student will have to click on *Choose subject area* to see narrower categories for a subject area. For *Subject*, the student will type the desired subject they are seeking — in this case, Statistics — and click enter to initiate a search across all courses in the online catalogue.

Simulation 4: Search results (First level)

SEARCH RESULTS

Business & Statistics

Principles of Statistics

Statistics in Accounting (click)

Decision making with Statics

When the student has entered their search word and clicked or pressed enter, they should receive results for their desired subject. In this case, all of the courses related to statistics will be shown. The student may then choose the specific subject they wish to know more about: Statistics in Accounting.

Simulation 5: Search results (Second level)

**PROGRAMS -> ADVANCED -> SUBJECT AREA -> COURSES ->
STATISTICS IN ACCOUNTING**

- Course description
- Apply Online

Once the student has chosen a course, they should then have an opportunity to see the course description. An option to apply online should also be available, which will lead them to the previously outlined registration process.

5.3. Web page content

Grimm and Needham, in the article *"Internet promotional material and conservation volunteer tourist motivations: A case of selecting organizations and projects"*, show another approach from that of Vrontis et al. on motivational factors. Grimm and Needham's article presents a plethora of theories. Push and pull theory is the claim that people are motivated by internal factors, such as a wish to relax, and by external factors that pull them to choose a location for its beautiful landscapes and peaceful environment. Other researchers focused on destination attributes, internal reasons such as seeking time off and escaping the daily routine of life. The article provides an analysis of promotional materials and indicates that these materials influence a tourist's final choice in destination.

According to Grimm and Needham, the most important information for volunteer tourists, when choosing an organization or a project (similar to students who are choosing a college and a program) is a description of the project (tasks, schedules, etc.), an overview of the organization itself, and costs. Pictures and video improve the understanding of environment and may be a crucial factor in a decision process. Social networking is also critical as tourists often verify an organization's profile through its Facebook page, for example. Social networking also makes it possible to keep information updated and timely.

The recommendations for Aidan are based on the results of an extensive literature review and researching schools with a profile similar to Aidan's.

When students visit a web page, there is specific information they want to find. If the most important information includes an overview of the organization, program descriptions, and costs, it is necessary for Aidan to make sure that this information is easy to find. Pictures and videos will help students visually confirm the kind of environment, student life, and facilities the school provides.

Currently, Aidan use pictures on its website. Unfortunately, the photos on the *Academic Bridge* page are low quality, which may make the College appear unprofessional to site visitors. For some students, the impression created by photos or videos could be crucial in their final decision. The managerial recommendation is to supervise the quality of pictures used on the site's cover pages. They should be high quality.

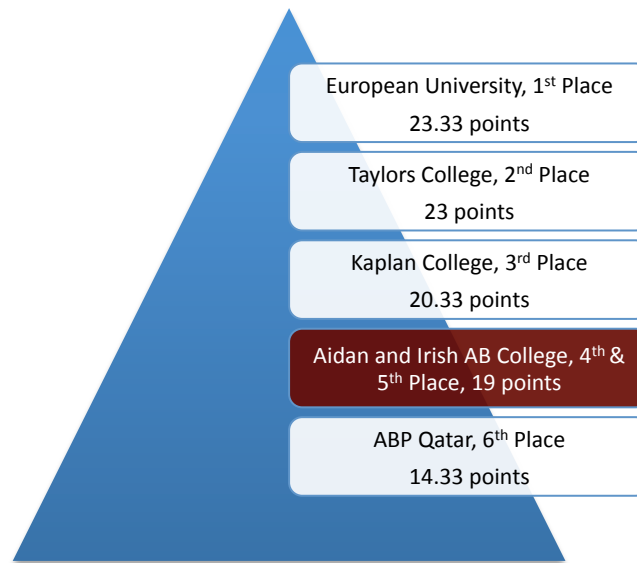
These conclusions are based on Table XX, which presents a comparison of Aidan with five other schools and is based on Kotler's model. Klassen, in *"Relationship marketing on the Internet: the case of top- and lower-ranked US universities and colleges"*, evaluated public and private higher- and lower-ranked universities and colleges in the US. In his study, he used the marketing relationship model developed by Kotler. The model is based on five relationship levels where the fifth level represents the strongest relationship established between a college and its student through the school's website. Each level was assigned a score from 1 to 5 (1 being the weakest and 5 being the strongest relationships). Klassen's goal was to summarize the score obtained by a college for each criterion and to have a visual representation of a school's total use of its Internet resources. The same model and scoring system were used in this thesis.

Aidan and five similar colleges were compared to each other. These other colleges offer similar services and also aim to bridge the gap for students. They are based in Australia, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Qatar, and Switzerland. Some educational institutions were not suitable for comparison. During the interview with Aidan's Director, it was mentioned that one of the desired schools to compare to Aidan was ESL Language School. However, ESL does not have all the processes the other selected schools have. For that reason it could not be evaluated within the developed criteria.

The goal of the benchmarking exercise was to understand the advantages and disadvantages of Aidan College's web content, as well as to identify best practices for recruiting students via the Internet. The analysis of the literature review and interviews helped to determine final criteria for the comparison. They include: application process (i.e. encourage to apply, supporting document transfer, procedure complexity); program information; place/location; costs; social media; and access to past students/alumni. Each criterion was evaluated from a student point-of-view. Information presented online needs to ensure that information searches, enrolment processes, and other procedures are simple and easy to understand and use. The main goal and desired outcome being sought from comparing schools and their websites were to evaluate them for ease of accessibility to information and transparency of an educational institution through its website.

Using Kotler's model and Klassen's representation of the model, Figure6 illustrates the comparison results for the six schools.

Figure 6: Scores for schools using Kotler and Klassen



One of the main findings is that the benchmarking figure shows the schools that have succeeded in the implementation of best practices. The benchmark table 2 in the Chapter 4 can serve as a dashboard of strategic goals. Low scores can be transformed to the highest ones.

According to the results, Aidan College ranks fifth among the six colleges with a score of 19 points. Aidan's low score was a result of its application process and criteria. The College's application form is available by request only, supporting documents must be sent by post, and the description of the entire process on the website is the longest. The school's procedures are rigorous, however Aidan College does not have the status of university. The detailed analysis in Chapter 4 showed that their processes could be simplified to get the highest score or to develop the strongest level of relationship between the College and its students. **To achieve a score of 5, students must be able to see their application status online.**

For program presentation, Aidan scored 3 points. A list of courses and pictures of teachers with their subject area background are provided. However, to achieve the highest score it is necessary to provide contact information for the teachers in case prospective students want to learn more about a specific subject. To achieve a 5, Aidan would need to provide **examples of assignments or tests online**. These materials would create clearer understanding of the learning environment for prospective students.

Some of colleges, such as Taylors College, provide a campus video tour. This was evaluated as the best achievement and scored a 5. Video helps students to visualize the ambience and facilities. Aidan presents a textual description and a few pictures, but this does not give students a full understanding of what the College's environment is like. **A video campus tour** would be attractive to more people and might entice them to apply.

Aidan scored a 3 in terms of providing pricing information to students. A general description of costs per term, for insurance, and extra activities are provided, but students should be able to see the price of a chosen program and compare it with other programs. An **online calculator and program comparison** was presented earlier in this thesis and it is recommended that Aidan develop and integrate this type of tool as part of its application processes.

One area where Aidan scored well was in its active use of its Internet resources. The site uses pictures, YouTube videos, Facebook and Twitter pages, and blogs. Potential students have open access to these sources to learn more about the organization. The credibility of an organization is another important factor. Facebook or Twitter,

for instance, are one of the most commonly used social networks for verifying an organization's profile or to learn more about an organization or even a project. Today's students especially use a lot social networks.

The missing element on Aidan's **Facebook page is the interaction**. Currently, it looks more like an information blog than a format for social exchanges between the school and its students or alumni. Utilization of Facebook would be more effective and popular if current and former students also share news or jokes, or comment on uploaded pictures. Facebook would also be more effective if Aidan would provide students with the ability to connect with and contact alumni through this network.

Other schools in the comparison achieved better, more effective results using these media sources. For example, European University has its own television channel and multiple videos with conferences, classes, trips, and meetings which give students a better understanding of what to expect from studies there. For Aidan to better recruit students, they should develop a **podcasting or television channel** where it is possible to combine blog and video news.

To improve their credibility, Aidan needs to create an **alumni association**. Past students who shared classes, free time, trips and visits should be able to keep updated about Aidan life, share some memories, and participate in events on campus. This would contribute to the College's reputation as a rigorous educational institution. **Contact information for an alumni association representative on the official website** would facilitate and attract new students.

Finally, Table 3 provides a visual representation of the advantages and disadvantages of Aidan College compared to its peers. At some point in the near future, Aidan should create **entry requirements** for incoming students. For example, the College may wish to require a minimum level of English language ability, particularly if a student is not attending Aidan for language courses.

Four out of six colleges have a **Search** field on their web pages. This makes finding program information and researching the school easier. To attract students in the longer-term, the College should consider advantages of creating **partnerships with some universities**. Stable partnerships may help guarantee students entry, based on their test results at Aidan, into a credible university.

Additional information on optimizing Aidan's web pages are available in Appendix V. The look for the website remains the same, but the menu is simplified. It is important that the website is easy to navigate.

Finally, the cost of attending Aidan is the highest among the schools that were analysed. According to Aidan's Director, in order to run the school, the prices could not be any lower. This needs to be more effectively communicated and justified through the school's website; clearly outlining the level of services being provided is crucial and will help to clarify precisely what the student will receive for their tuition and fees.

These are the most important recommendations for Aidan. Additional details may be found in Appendix IV.

Attestation

Je déclare sur l'honneur, que j'ai effectué ce Travail de Master seul, sans autre aide que celles dûment signalées dans les références, et que je n'ai utilisé que les sources expressément mentionnées. Je ne donnerai aucune copie de ce rapport à un tiers sans l'autorisation conjointe du Responsable de l'Orientation et du Professeur chargé du suivi du Travail de Master et de l'institution ou entreprise pour laquelle ce travail a été effectué.

August 13, 2013.

Ekaterina Chirkova

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7. Appendices

Appendix I	Research Questionnaire
Appendix II	Interview Synthesis
Appendix III	Benchmark of Colleges
Appendix IV	Comparison of Offered Services
Appendix V	Online Registration Procedure
Appendix VI	Aidan Website

Appendix I: Research Questionnaire

Qualitative research

“Understanding students needs in terms of private education”

This study is designed for both men and women. The results of this research will be kept confidential and all the participants' names will be coded.

Interviewer: E. Chirkova

Confidential information:

- Number of survey:
- Residence/Nationality:
- Age:
- Gender:
- Occupation:

1. Why did you want to come to Aidan College? (What are your reasons of coming to Aidan?)
2. How did you find out about the college? (What were the sources of information when checked the college profile? How did you look for the information about Aidan?)
3. How did you imagine your life at Aidan College before coming? (What were your hopes and expectations?)
4. How would you describe the registration procedure? (How do you feel about the application process? How was it?)
5. How is this program helping you? (What is the most important thing you have learned through your studies?)
6. What are the most memorable moments while you are here (positive/negative? How would you describe the best thing that you have experienced here?)

Appendix II: Interview Synthesis

MP01 Answers

1. Why did you want to come to Aidan College? (What are your reasons of coming to Aidan?)
This participant needed to improve his knowledge to pass exams at his private school. It was his own choice.
2. How did you find out about the college? (What were the sources of information when checked the college profile? How did you look for the information about Aidan?)
The interviewee said that he found out about the college through the counsellor of the high school.
3. How did you imagine your life at Aidan College before coming? (What were your hopes and expectations?)
He wanted to see a lot more students and have a lot of activities. In reality, it was not like that which evokes his negative emotions.
4. How would you describe the registration procedure? (How do you feel about the application process? How was it?)
He did not participate in the registration procedure.
5. How is this program helping you? (What is the most important thing you have learned through your studies?)
In the opinion of the participant, this program helped him to pass the exams at his high school.
6. What are the most memorable moments while you are here (positive/negative? How would you describe the best thing that you have experienced here?)
The student memorised just studies, as he was very motivated to pass the exams at the high school.

FP02

1. Why did you want to come to Aidan College? (What are your reasons of coming to Aidan?)
The female participant wanted to learn English and understand what she wants to do next in her life. That is why she chose this College.
2. How did you find out about the college? (What were the sources of information when checked the college profile? How did you look for the information about Aidan?)
The resident said that she found out about the college through her relatives.
3. How did you imagine your life at Aidan College before coming? (What were your hopes and expectations?)
She expected to see more students, to have more active life, to learn other cultures, and languages.
4. How would you describe the registration procedure? (How do you feel about the application process? How was it?)
She did not participate in the registration procedure.
5. How is this program helping you? (What is the most important thing you have learned through your studies?)
In the opinion of the participant, this program helped her to learn English. She also understood that she wants to take an e-learning education program in marketing.
6. What are the most memorable moments while you are here (positive/negative? How would you describe the best thing that you have experienced here?)
Many memorable moments, such as trips, birthdays, and visits.

MP03

1. Why did you want to come to Aidan College? (What are your reasons of coming to Aidan?)
The male participant wanted to pass tests at the private college that he attends. However, he was influenced by his parents.
2. How did you find out about the college? (What were the sources of information when checked the college profile? How did you look for the information about Aidan?)
In the private college that this participant attends, there is a counsellor who delivered the information about Aidan College.
3. How did you imagine your life at Aidan College before coming? (What were your hopes and expectations?)
The interviewee thought that it would be a big school with a lot of students. And he did not expect that everyone would know each other.
4. How would you describe the registration procedure? (How do you feel about the application process? How was it?)
He did not participate in the registration procedure.
5. How is this program helping you? (What is the most important thing you have learned through your studies?)
To prepare for tests in the college that he attends/high school. It also helped to get organized and focused on studies.
6. What are the most memorable moments while you are here (positive/negative? How would you describe the best thing that you have experienced here?)
Not a lot, just spending time with other residents.

MP04

1. Why did you want to come to Aidan College? (What are your reasons of coming to Aidan?)
He wanted to prepare for the entrance examination to a university. It was through the initiative of his parents that he enrolled in a program at Aidan.
2. How did you find out about the college? (What were the sources of information when checked the college profile? How did you look for the information about Aidan?)
Through the parents he found out about this College.
3. How did you imagine your life at Aidan College before coming? (What were your hopes and expectations?)
He thought it would be much stricter. He did not expect that everybody would be so close, including the Director.
4. How would you describe the registration procedure? (How do you feel about the application process? How was it?)
He did not participate in the registration procedure.
5. How is this program helping you? (What is the most important thing you have learned through your studies?)
To prepare him for entrance tests to a university and in particular to improve his knowledge in mathematics.
6. What are the most memorable moments while you are here (positive/negative? How would you describe the best thing that you have experienced here?)
Could not think of anything.

FP05

1. Why did you want to come to Aidan College? (What are your reasons of coming to Aidan?)
The interviewee wanted to improve her English and to become more professional in arts and painting. It was partly her decision, partly her parents.
2. How did you find out about the college? (What were the sources of information when checked the college profile? How did you look for the information about Aidan?)
Through her parents.
3. How did you imagine your life at Aidan College before coming? (What were your hopes and expectations?)
She thought the College would be bigger. She did not expect it to have a home-like and friendly atmosphere.
4. How would you describe the registration procedure? (How do you feel about the application process? How was it?)
She did not participate in the registration procedure.
5. How is this program helping you? (What is the most important thing you have learned through your studies?)
The participant said that she did not learn much.
6. What are the most memorable moments while you are here (positive/negative? How would you describe the best thing that you have experienced here?)
Could not think of anything.

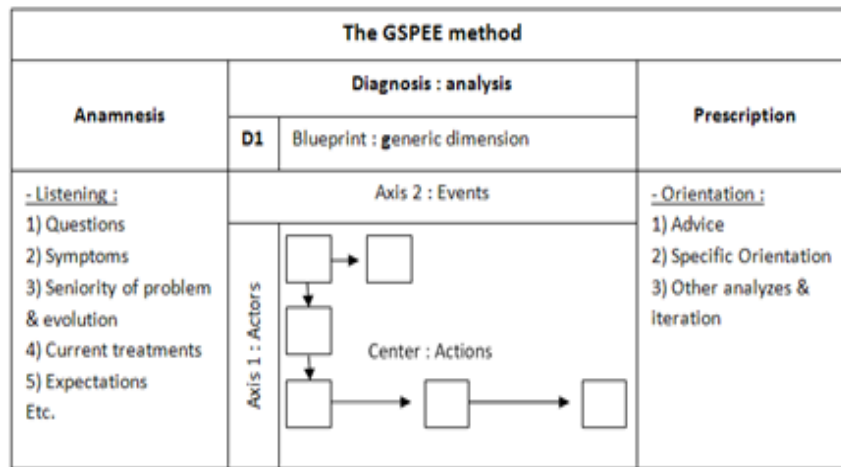
MP06

1. Why did you want to come to Aidan College? (What are your reasons of coming to Aidan?)
The interviewee wanted to improve his English and to prepare for the entrance exams to a university.
2. How did you find out about the college? (What were the sources of information when checked the college profile? How did you look for the information about Aidan?)
Through his parents.
3. How did you imagine your life at Aidan College before coming? (What were your hopes and expectations?)
The interviewee expected to see more students and more boys. Even though it is a calm place, he was still satisfied.
4. How would you describe the registration procedure? (How do you feel about the application process? How was it?)
He did not participate in the registration procedure.
5. How is this program helping you? (What is the most important thing you have learned through your studies?)
The participant said that he learned English and how to organize his timetable. He was able to become more mature through this program.
6. What are the most memorable moments while you are here (positive/negative? How would you describe the best thing that you have experienced here?)
When other male participants arrived.

FP07

1. Why did you want to come to Aidan College? (What are your reasons of coming to Aidan?)
The interviewee wanted to learn English and French and to get advice on what university to enter. She was influenced by her parents to undertake a program at Aidan.
2. How did you find out about the college? (What were the sources of information when checked the college profile? How did you look for the information about Aidan?)
Through her parents.
3. How did you imagine your life at Aidan College before coming? (What were your hopes and expectations?)
The interviewee expected to have more active life and to go to a lot of parties "like in the movies". In reality, it is very calm, the nature is beautiful, it is not that bad.
4. How would you describe the registration procedure? (How do you feel about the application process? How was it?)
She did not participate in the registration procedure.
5. How is this program helping you? (What is the most important thing you have learned through your studies?)
The participant improved her English and communication skills.
6. What are the most memorable moments while you are here (positive/negative? How would you describe the best thing that you have experienced here?)
First time in a bar doing karaoke.

Short version of Interview Synthesis



Appendix III: Benchmark of Colleges

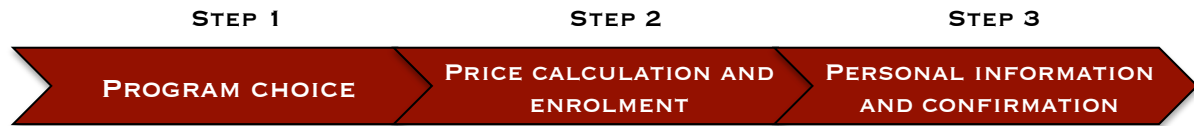
Criteria/Schools	ABP Aidan College	European University, Business Foundation	Taylor's College, Foundation Program	Kaplan International College London	Irish Academic Bridge College	ABP Qatar
<i>Application process (3 parts)</i>	2	4.33	4	4.33	4	2.33
(1) Encourage to apply	2	4	4	4	4	4
(2) Documents transfer	2	4	4	5	3	1
(3) Procedure complexity	2	5	4	4	5	2
<i>Program</i>	3	3	1	1	1	4
<i>Place</i>	3	4	5	5	5	2
<i>Costs</i>	3	3	5	2	1	2
<i>Social Media</i>	4	5	4	4	4	2
<i>Connect with former students</i>	4	4	4	4	4	2
TOTAL SCORE	19	23.33	23	20.33	19	14.33

Appendix IV: Comparison of Offered Services

Criteria/Schools	ABP Aidan College	European University, Business Foundation	Taylors College, Foundation Program	Kaplan International College London	Irish Academic Bridge College	ABP Qatar
Entry requirements	None	X	X	X	None	X
Search	None	X	X	X	None	X
Agreements with universities	None	X	X	X	None	X
Courses: Menu	None	X	X	X	X	X
Alumni	None	X	None	None	None	X
Sustainable management as a vision	None	X	None	None	None	None
Hostel	None	None	None	None	X	None
Apartement	None	None	X	X	X	None
Diploma by the end of the studies	None	None	None	None	X	None
Clubs and Organizations to join	None	X	None	X	None	X
College Counseling	X	X	X	X	None	X
Provide accomodation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Accomodation at campus	X	None	None	None	None	X
Accomodation at host families	X	None	X	X	X	None
Certificates preparation	X	X	X	X	X	None
Financial aid	X	None	X	X	None	X
Testimoials	X	X	X	X	X	None
FAQs	X	None	None	X	None	X
Download a brochure with no registration or	X	X	X	None	X	None
Trips	X	X	X	X	X	X
Extra-activities	X	X	X	X	X	X
Art Studies	X	None	X	X	None	None
Tailor-made program	X	None	None	None	None	None
Personalized attention	X	X	X	X	X	X
Small class sizes	Small class sizes (≤ 3)	X	X	X	X	X (<14)

Appendix V: Online Registration Procedure

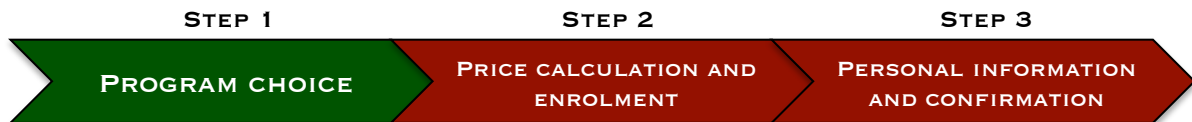
Admissions



- ➔ **START** online registration now

- ➔ Learn more about online registration **(CLICK)**
 - ↓ There are 3 steps only
 - ↓ You will have an opportunity to pay the administrative fees right away
 - ↓ You will get the confirmation document after you submit online application
 - ↓ You can compare any programs you are interested in
 - ↓ You can quit at any moment
 - ↓ You can save a draft at any step

- ➔ What happens after you have registered online? **(CLICK)**
 - ↓ Aidan will review the submitted application
 - ↓ You will be contacted in 48 hours to discuss your choices and further cooperation (arrival details, visa, necessary documents)
 - ↓ If you finally decide to participate a program, you will be send an invoice to pay the full tuition fees



*Program

- ABP

- Standard Program
 - Accounting & Financing
 - Optional courses: NON
- Advanced Program

- Art Study

- Lifelong learning

- Holiday Study

*Duration

- Start date (calendar)

- 5th of October
 - 1 term
 - 2 terms

[\(Click to see more\)](#)

*Accommodation

- At campus

- Host family

*University preparation and counselling?

-Yes

-No

*Insurance (do you need one?)

- Yes

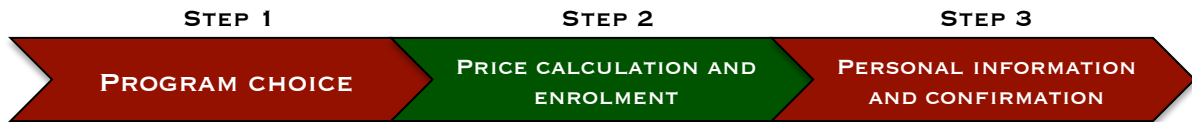
- No

*Extras-academic activities

- Trips

- Excursion...

Compare
Print
Save the draft
Calculate the price



ABP Program: 05.10.2013 – 05.12.2013

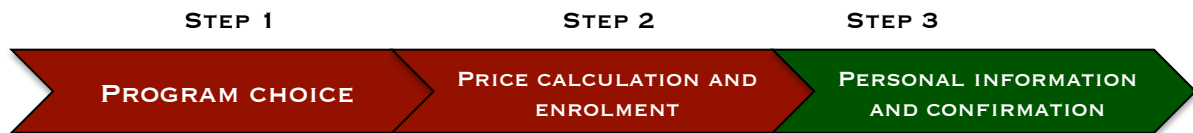
Standard Program (Tuition fees)	18,000 CHF
Accommodation at Aidan	5,500 CHF
Insurance	600 CHF
Registraion fees (non-returnable, payable once only)	2,000 CHF
Deposit (Returnable after final disbursements)	2'000 CHF

TOTAL 28'100 CHF

Compare
Print
Save the draft

ENROL NOW





Personal information

- *Name, Surname
- *Date of birth
- *Nationality
- *Native language
- *Gender: Male Female

Address

- *Address
- *Postcode
- *City
- *Country

Contact

- *Personal phone number
- *E-mail
- Home phone number

Contact person during your stay

- *Name, Surname
- *Personal phone number
- *E-mail

*Upload obtained degree

Certificates and transcripts of records (can be delivered later)

*Any specific requests concerning health problems or else

*Agree with conditions

Print
Save the draft



(The same web page)

Payment details

*Pay 500 CHF of admission non-refundable fees now

Please, select a payment method

Visa, Mastercard, American Express

Type of card

Mestro/Solo

Mastercard Debit

Mastercard Credit, etc.

Cardholder: Name Surname

Number: 00009283746237

Expiration date: mm/yy

CVV code: XXX

CONFIRM

Admissions Office, Confirmation Letter

Summary

Student details

Stanford Hamilton
British, male
Date of birth 19.08.1995
Native language: English

Address

23, Castony rodes
*234876
*London
*England

Contact

*+ 41 983 0983409
*stan.hamilton@gmail.com

Contact person during your stay

* Rosalina Hamilton
*+41 983 3984306
*Rosalinaha@gmail.com

**Uploaded certificates*

DOC 201

*Transcripts of records will be delivered later

*Non specific requests concerning health problems or else

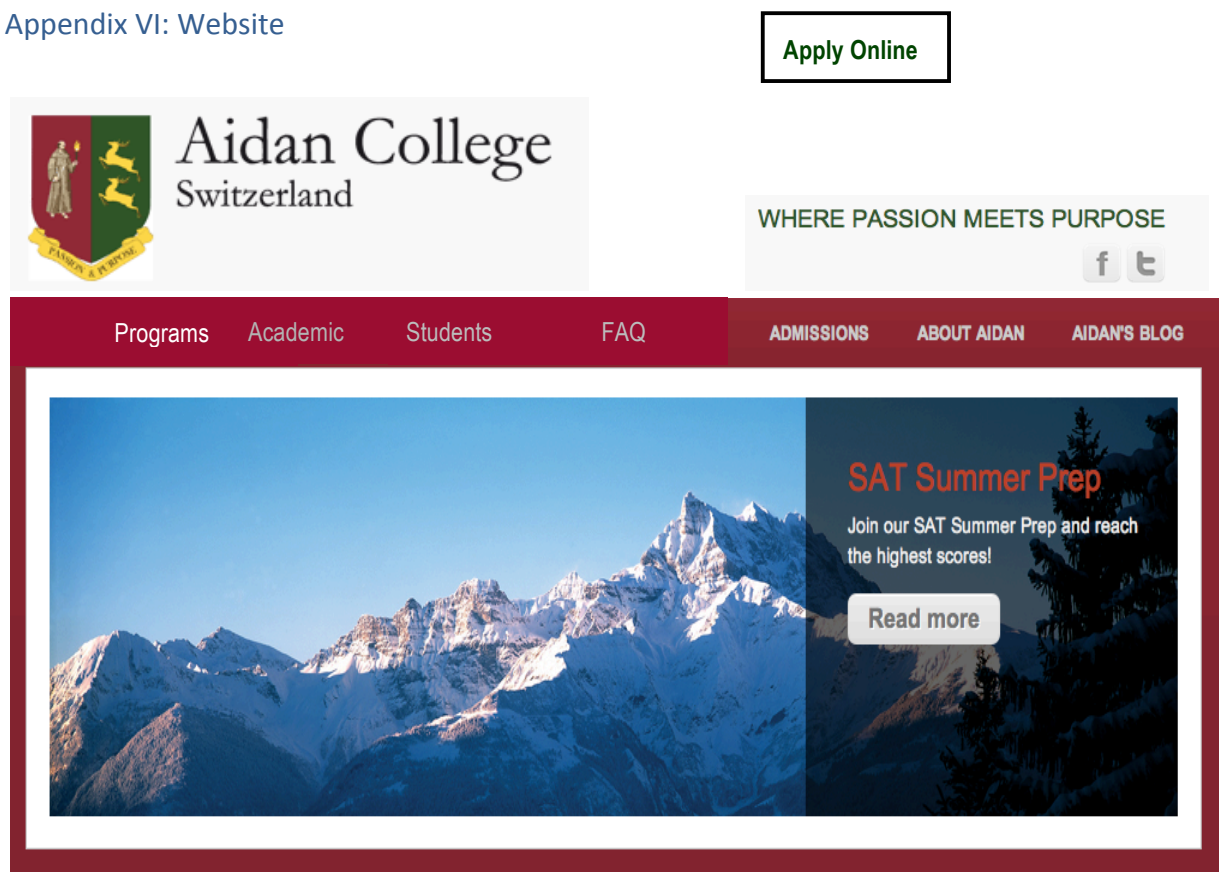
Study details

ABP Program: 05.10.2013 – 05.12.2013

Standard Menu	18'000 CHF
Accommodation at Aidan	5'500 CHF
Insurance	600 CHF
Registration fees	500 CHF
<i>(Non-refundable)</i>	

TOTAL	24'600 CHF
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Thank you very much for your application and interest in joining Aidan College!



What is our Academic Bridge Programme about?

The tailor-made programme offers students the perfect opportunity to strengthen their qualifications, pursue their intellectual passions, broaden their horizons, and gain the confidence they need to reach their goals.

Our Academic Bridge Programme is particularly suitable for students:

- taking a break prior to college or university
- in transition between schools
- applying or reapplying to university
- wanting to further their studies in Switzerland
- in search of a career

Standard Program

Advanced Program

Assignments examples
Extra-academic activities
Dates & Fees
Financial Support

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