

(IJ-02) A Comparative Study of Marketing for Non-Collegiate Flight Schools and General Higher Educational Institutions

Author (Alumna of Alliant International University): Jingmin Jin, DBA

Co-authors (Professors of Alliant International University): Huiyu Qian, Ph.D.; Rachna Kumar, Ph.D.; Rene Naert, Ph.D.

Abstract

Due to the nationwide shortage of airline pilots and fewer pilot sources with military-training backgrounds, civilian flight training providers are bearing greater responsibility in providing a sufficient number of quality pilots. This study fills the gaps in the literature where a very limited number of studies were conducted for understanding student pilot choice behaviors for flight schools and will ultimately assist training providers to effectively recruit students. More specifically, this study examined student pilots' preference criteria of various non-collegiate flight school choice factors (e.g., overall reputation, location, tuition, training program options, quality, and fleet) and preference criteria of marketing promotion approaches (e.g., websites, social media, conventional media, and contact with flight instructors) when they select a school. The study also examined how student pilots valued the influence of people during their school choice process. Lastly, by comparing typical choice factors with other general higher education institutions, this study informed how marketing efforts of general higher education could be generalized to flight schools.

The study data was based on Jin's (2019) (quantitative) research in which 201 valid survey responses were randomly selected. Jin's (2019) study examined student pilot school choice factors for flight schools in California; the survey instrumentation was modified based on literature that met content validity. This present study used descriptive analysis to analyze data.

Findings

The key findings regarding student pilots' preference criteria of flight school characteristics/choice factors indicated that *training quality, availability of flying opportunities, training costs, safety records of the programs, and reputation of certificated flight instructors* were ranked as the top five important factors affected student pilots' selection of a school. With respect to marketing promotion effectiveness, *contact with school flight instructors, contact with school staff, and word of mouth* (categorized as personal based marketing promotion approaches) were rated as the top three approaches that influenced student pilots' school choice decision-making. In pertaining to influence of people, student pilots had a significant impact on their own decision-making, the followed most influential groups were *school flight instructors, current trainee pilots, and family members*.

Furthermore, this study found that the typical choice factors for flight schools which may not be generalized to other higher educational school choice were (1) the student pilots' preference of *school personal based marketing promotion approaches*, (2) the highlight of *the availability of flying opportunities and safety records of the programs*, (3) the underemphasis of the

importance of *financial aid*, and (4) *school flight instructors* and *current trainees* were valued as more influential than *family members* and *friends* during the school choice process. The findings suggested that the marketing and recruitment effort emphasizes to those non-collegiate flight schools may slightly differ from other general higher educational institutions. Based on the study findings, it is recommended that flight schools should modify their recruitment strategies to meet prospective students' expectations and needs.