
Selection, access and widening participation: an organisational perspective

Jeroen Huisman

Ethical Forum “On the purpose, legitimacy and adequacy of university
entry and orientation tests”

Brussels, 12 November 2015



Starting points

- ❑ In current debates on access and selection: much attention to the micro-level: students
- ❑ “Right” target? Proper assumptions?
- ❑ My focus: a more comprehensive approach and ... what can/should higher education institutions do?

Targets and assumptions

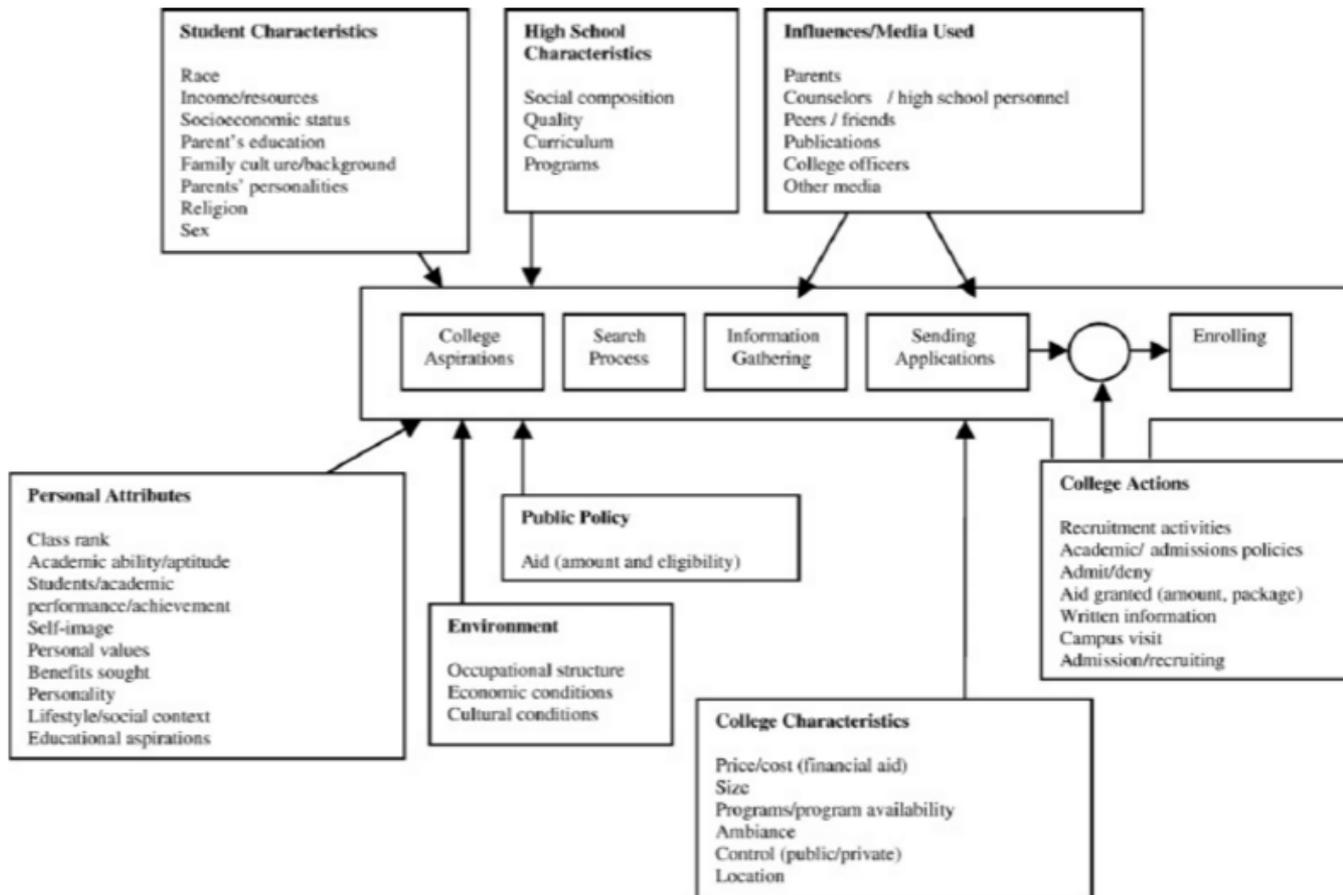
- ▣ Focus on drop-out and retention rates: they signal wrong choices made, “waste of public money”
- ▣ Instead of ... : education is an experience good, focus should be on academic and social integration (see work of Tinto)

Targets and assumptions

- Information is crucial: if we give more information, students will make 'better' choices
- ... AND students are rational (incl. they can be steered through financial levers)
- Instead of ... Choice being a continuous quasi-rational process



Complexity of student choices



Source: Vrontis et al., 2007, JBR



Need for different (policy) approach

- ▣ Broader picture: Not only access and selection, but widening participation, and attention to vulnerable groups of students
- ▣ Knowledge: More systematic analyses of access and participation patterns, life course approach (but see *Steunpunt Studie en Schoolloopbanen*)



The role of higher education institutions

- Excuse 1: “We cannot repair system failures ...”
- Maximally Maintained Inequality hypothesis (Raftery and Hout, 1993)
- Effectively Maintained Inequality hypothesis (Lucas, 2001)



The role of higher education institutions

- ❑ Excuse 2: “We cannot repair what went wrong in primary and secondary education”
- ❑ Cascade system, tracking, teacher expectations
- ❑ Around 25% of secondary education pupils not qualified for HE, a large share of these are from lower SES background (*Steunpunt studie- en schoolloopbanen*)

The role of higher education institutions

Excuse 3: “We have so many other things to do ...”

- ▣ Higher education institutions are often forced by governments to multi-task: excellence in research, high-quality education, and service to society. They cannot be “jacks of all trades”
- ▣ ... but HEIs cannot solely blame governments: they are known for a preference for growth and comprehensiveness in a battle for prestige



Where to look for solutions?

- ▣ Much more scope for institutional profiling, more diversification of tasks and roles, supported by proper national policies
- ▣ ... with explicit rewards for those HEIs that meet agreed targets (that go beyond the instrumental indicators of retention!), not *Aanmoedigingsfonds* approach
- ▣ Increase permeability of the system (further)
- ▣ Involve students as change agents
- ▣ Closer cooperation with schools (see Aimhigher projects UK, see also 2013 ARC network report)
- ▣ First-year experience & student engagement: UK (Yorke) and US (Tinto, Pascarella & Terenzini) literature



Thank you!

Jeroen.huisman@ugent.be

