The March 22 Academic Master Plan (AMP) contribution by retired faculty members notes a decline in the quality of students admitted to Shippensburg University. The authors suggest that changes in the Financial Aid Office might be one way of improving the quality of admitted students. There are other possibilities as well.

Experts (e.g., Hesel, 2004) recognize the campus tour as one of the most important factors influencing the college selection decisions of prospective students and their families. In addition to encountering the campus, tour participants form impressions regarding members of the school's community, with one of the most crucial of those being the tour guide. During the Fall and Spring semesters, Shippensburg University Admissions tours are led by members of a student-run volunteer organization – S.T.A.R.S. (Student Tour Guides and Admissions Representatives at Shippensburg University).

In the Fall Semester of 2007, there was a research project that focused on campus tours at Shippensburg University. Data were collected on three kinds of tours.

- Traditional tours done as they had been done.
- Nontraditional tours that added a new tour route followed by all tour guides and an emphasis on the tour guide having side conversations with prospective students and their families.
- Nontraditional tours (with the same features as item #2) in which the tour guide also demonstrated facilitative levels of rapport-enhancing communication skills.

In the Fall Semester of 2008, enrollment data was collected on the prospective students who had participated in the Fall 2007 project. Here are the percentages of students who enrolled.

- Traditional 24.5%
- Nontraditional 29.4% (a 20% increase over Traditional tours)
- Nontraditional plus communication skills 35.4% (a 44.5% increase over Traditional tours)

The AMP might include using the Nontraditional approach to tours, providing sufficient resources to train and supervise S.T.A.R.S. and other guides in the effective use of rapport-enhancing communication skills, and/or during Summer and break periods using guides who already possess those skills. If the University wants to pursue such options I would be interested in participating in those efforts.

Reference: Hesel, R.A. (2004). Campus visit drives college choice. <u>Student Poll, 5 (5)</u>. Retrieved June 2, 2006 from http://www.artsci.com/StudentPOLL/v5n5/publishers\_note.htm