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Identifying Best Practices for a College Admission Counselor Fly-In Event

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Higher Education Program

Merrimack College

Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Master of Education in Higher Education

Degree, Merrimack College

Abstract

As demographic shifts and economic factors have increased the potential pool of college students in the United States, thoughtful, comprehensive admissions strategies matter to the advancement of higher education (Miller, Valle & Engle, 2014). The focus of this study was to examine the best practices for college admission recruitment strategies, which specifically focused on a national counselor college fly-in event at a medium sized comprehensive institution in New England. The impact that secondary school counselors have on college enrollment is not well documented in the literature. In this project, a survey was distributed to XX secondary school counselors who attended a recent counselor fly-in event (CFE) to better understand whether or not this type of recruitment tool is effective in increasing freshman enrollment. In addition, information regarding two other counselor fly-in programs was referenced to compile recommendations for best practice. The overarching findings from this study focus on (a) key college factors, (b) future event recommendations and (c) evaluation of the fly-in experience. The primary recommendations include (a) incorporating diverse representation into the fly-in itinerary, (b) increasing opportunities for more participants to attend and (c) organizing a collaborative college counselor tour with local institutions.

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Introduction

The makeup of American Higher Education has continued to evolve since the founding of the first several colleges and universities during the 17th and 18th centuries. Higher education experienced a tremendous resurgence in the early and mid 20th century. As Thelin (2011) highlighted, “whereas fewer than 5 percent of Americans between the ages of eighteen and twenty attended college in 1917, over the next two decades that figure increased to 15 percent” (p. 205). Since then, the role of the admissions office has adapted to the change in demands and needs from prospective students and families, and this relationship has now become somewhat of a business transaction in the past decade. Since all types of higher education, including two and four year colleges, are facing budget cuts, institutions are left with no choice but to increase their respective enrollments in order to cover operating costs. As a result, enrollment management dictates the responsibilities of admission personnel since they are charged with responsibility of meeting student quotas from their particular recruitment territories. Market researcher who studies trends in student recruitment, Gose (1999) noted that, “these days, if a college is not paying attention to its enrollment planning- unless you’re extraordinarily strong to begin with- you can run on the rocks pretty quickly” (p. 2).

While every institution may not operate in a similar fashion, the idea is that these quotas need to be met, or in some cases exceeded, in order to help financially support the college or university. Thus, the roles of recruitment strategies and events, such as Open Houses or Admitted Student Days, have become vital since they help to generate student interest in a particular institution. For instance, the Admissions Advisory Committee at the University of Rhode Island (2011) found that, “visits to colleges were, by far, the most important factor in a

student's decision about where to apply" (para.1). If an institution fails to modify or revamp particular admissions events, they run the risk of enrolling a smaller freshman class for the following academic year, which could jeopardize the well being of the institution. In this particular literature review, various authors and admissions professionals highlight effective recruitment strategies, current admission trends and lastly areas where practice is being improved upon in certain case studies. These particular themes help to illustrate the profound impact that particular recruitment practices can have when it comes to attracting prospective students.

Thus, it is important to study the effects of recruitment techniques, which includes the campus visit experience, in order to assess whether or not Admission Offices are effectively yielding prospective students. To improve my knowledge of Grisham College's recruitment practices, I have selected a qualitative survey method that has allowed me to gather anonymous feedback from a National Counselor Fly-in event. By collecting data about this specific admission-related event, I have furthered my understanding of the impact that this event had on secondary school counselors since this specific audience can influence future enrollment at Grisham. In order to improve admission practices at Grisham, this type of data collection matters since I will have the opportunity to potentially modify this recruitment tool based upon my collected feedback from fellow education professionals.

Literature Review

Effective Recruitment Strategies

Amongst all the different options that prospective students have in selecting a college or university of their choice, institutions have been forced to remain competitive in more ways than one. Whether investments have been made in new residence halls, student centers or state of the art gym facilities, college administrators need to remain "relevant" during a time when

prospective students have wish lists that have been constantly growing. Furthermore, colleges have resorted to hiring outside consultants to help do a review of their school in order to see how they compare with their competition. By seeking external guidance, admission-consulting companies have helped to develop and implement new recruiting strategies. Gose (1999) described the fact that consulting companies have created predictive modeling software that can help to predict the likelihood that a prospective student will enroll at a certain institution. As a result, admission personnel have had the opportunity to invest more time in these particular students since their “predictive score” highlights their strong interest in that school (Gose, 1999, p.2). For instance, Baylor University hired Noel-Levitz in 1997, a company that specializes in college recruiting, in order to increase their freshman applications. Noel-Levitz’s “predictive modeling service” allowed Baylor’s admissions officers to spend more time with their best prospects, which highlights the importance of relationship managing with prospective applicants (Gose, 1999). That said, Baylor witnessed a 22% increase in freshman enrollment in 1998-1999 and net tuition revenue rose by more than \$5-million, which was a gain of about 6% (Gose, 1999).

While Goss (1999) highlighted the importance of utilizing outside consulting companies, Stonewater (2000) discussed a different recruitment technique, which consists of collaborative admissions practices. By participating in collaborative projects, such as written materials, recruitment events, presentations and joint trips or visits, Stonewater (2000) believed that admissions offices could flourish by working with their peer institutions. For example, one of the easiest ways to develop a collaborative relationship is by creating joint brochures and posters, which has already been done locally with the Colleges of the Fenway in the Boston area (Stonewater, 2000). The biggest advantage of a joint expenditure is the financial benefit since

multiple colleges have easily saved money by creating joint college brochures, for example. This way, a potential student could easily see what institutions exist in their preferred location of interest and furthermore they could obtain the necessary information in a convenient manner. However, some colleges or universities may be more preoccupied with the notion of teaming up with their competition, which may detract from the resources offered at their particular institution.

Stonewater (2000) also discussed the idea of sponsoring a variety of collaborative mini-college fairs, which serves as a popular recruitment event for many admissions professionals each fall and spring. High schools, churches or community centers typically sponsor these types of events, but unfortunately one drawback is the fact that only certain institutions are invited by these outside organizations. Consequently, potential applicants may miss out on meeting an admission representative from a certain college that they could ultimately be interested in (Stonewater, 2000). If institutions work cooperatively with each other, they will be more inclusive of other schools so that the information is more comprehensive for a prospective student. For example, if a student is asking an admission officer about a particular major that they do not offer, the idea is that the admission officer would refer that student to another institution that does in fact offer that particular program, such as pharmacy or engineering. Even if that college or university is not represented at the college fair, the principle of a collaborative relationship is still emphasized.

While some colleges and universities may be attempting to implement collaborative recruitment practices with their peer institutions, Sadler (2002) offered insight on other techniques that would provide admission personnel with the tools needed to effectively recruit prospective applicants. A consortium of colleges and universities in the United Kingdom

participated in a case study that highlighted successful recruiting strategies that are effective abroad, but could also be applied in the United States as well. For starters, many universities in the U.K. have formed partnerships with particular high schools, also referred to as “feeder schools,” which is also commonly practiced in the U.S. The principle behind having a joint relationship is to establish good standing relationships with guidance counselors, which benefits both parties involved. Admission personnel reap the benefit of being able to rely on a heavier flow of applications from a particular secondary school and this is partially due to the guidance counselor having a deeper understanding of the institution. Another benefit would be to engage in joint projects on campus, which would allow the guidance counselors to expose their students to that particular college setting (Sadler, 2002).

Furthermore, Sadler (2002) discussed other key recruiting strategies, which range from utilizing current college students as ambassadors, working with disengaged students, and streamlining the application process itself. Current students can help to brand their respective institution by acting as tour guides, for instance, since they are usually able to better relate with prospective applicants. They are able to showcase their experiences with certain departments and resources, which in return helps a potential student to envision themselves at that particular school. On a different note, some colleges and universities in England are working with local schools to provide a vocational program for high-school students who may have dropped out of secondary school. A certain type of student could benefit from a similar program since it allows them to pursue a certain area of study that is relevant for them and also benefits the institution since they are attracting a new type of audience. Lastly, the idea of creating a universal online application portal was presented in the discussion by Sadler (2002), which would foreshadow the creation of a system, such as the Common Application. Prior to this time, students would often

endure countless hours of filling out forms that would need to be recreated for multiple universities, which often times deter students from applying in the first place (Sadler, 2002).

While Sadler (2002) focused on the needs of the prospective students in her discussion of recruitment strategies, Haines (2012) sought to publish the input of admission personnel who showcased their preferred recruitment practices in a survey. The survey was distributed to 394 member institutions of the Pennsylvania Association for College Admission Counseling (PACAC), which yielded a 56.3% response rate (222 of 394). Admission personnel from all over Pennsylvania were asked to provide feedback on particular outreach efforts, such as college fairs or on-campus programs for prospective students, and whether or not they strongly approved, approved, disapproved, or strongly disapproved these recruitment strategies. From their standpoint, 66% of admission personnel “strongly approved” continuing secondary school visits as the best tool to reach out to prospective students (Haines, 2012). More importantly 91% “strongly approved or approved” on-campus programs for prospective students, parents and secondary school counselors. Thus, it is evident that on campus recruitment events are viewed as invaluable since programs, such as Open Houses help to showcase the multitude of resources that are available at a specific institution. Based on the results of the survey, admission offices “strongly approved” the following admissions practices: high school visits by admission personnel once per year by appointment, providing on-campus programs for prospective students and their families, waiving a normally-required application fee for students with financial need and offering on-campus programming for secondary school counselors (Haines, 2012).

Lastly, 80% of admission personnel strongly approved participating in a national or regional college fair that is sponsored by an organization, such as the New England Association for College Admission Counseling (NEACAC). These particular college fairs provide great

visibility since an extensive amount of institutions attend and more importantly they draw a large crowd of prospective students and families. Additionally, these large-scale fairs are beneficial for students since it allows them the opportunity to speak with a variety of schools in a two-hour block of time. If a particular college or university fails to attend, they could potentially be missing out on meeting qualified students, or students who were hoping to learn more about a specific institution. On the other hand, the results from the survey also showcased admissions practices that were “strongly disapproved” or “disapproved” by admission personnel, such as the 87% of surveyed participants who disapproved conducting high school visits by admissions staff members two or more times per year, without an appointment (Haines, 2012). Furthermore, 90% of the participants did not favor the employment of companies that refer prospective students for a “finders fee” (specific fee for each student who enrolls) and 83% disapproved high school visits by college students (volunteer) without an appointment (Haines, 2012). Thus, admission personnel need to be cognizant of the best and worst practices for college recruitment in order to stand out in the vast field of higher education.

Improving Recruitment Practices

While admission offices seek to remain competitive amongst their peer institutions, they also adhere to new strategies on their campuses as well. Since a large portion of recruitment events take place off campus, such as with high school visits and college fairs, it is vital to modify recruitment techniques as needed on campus. Steinberg (2009) initiated a discussion about the traditional campus tour, which usually consists of a tour guide leading a family around their respective campus while walking backwards and reciting scripted statistics. Steinberg (2009) focused on Hendrix College, a liberal arts institution in Arkansas, in a case study since they are one of several dozen institutions to require their tour guides to turn around and walk

forward on tour. More importantly, they have trained their tour guides to place less of an emphasis on memorizing its college history and to more so share personal anecdotes and stories from their college experiences at Hendrix. As Steinberg (2009) stated, “Driving the overhaul of the campus tour is colleges’ desire to provide visitors a more natural, spontaneous and, ideally, engaging experience” (p.1).

Among the competition between colleges, Steinberg (2009) reported the latest development in recruitment consists of the redesign of the campus tour in order to attract the most talented students. Other institutions are taking it a step further by hiring private consulting firms in order to have their tours “audited” and to also have all other aspects of their campus visit experience critiqued, such as visitor parking and the overall display of the campus welcome center. Since 2006, the number of students visiting Hendrix each year increased by more than 300, or 25 percent, to 1,765 in 2009- with the number of applications increasing by a similar percentage, to 1,625 (Steinberg, 2009). Thus, it is evident that some colleges and universities are remaining competitive by modifying parts of their campus visit experience, which ultimately will alter a student’s impression of a particular institution. If a student leaves with a positive impression of a campus, they are more inclined to apply to the institution, which hopefully will turn into a deposit in the future.

Steinberg (2009) raises a valid point -- that revamping the campus visit experience is crucial in order to attract future applicants; however, it is also just as important to keep up with other emerging trends as well. In addition to improving information sessions and campus tours, for instance, institutions have also incorporated technology when necessary in order to appeal to a larger target audience. In an essay outlining the common factors in students perceptions of utilizing technology in recruitment, Lindbeck and Fodrey (2010) raised the issue that 88% of

prospective students may completely disregard applying to an institution if their website did not meet their expectations (Lindbeck, et. al., 2010). As a result, undergraduate admission offices are expected to strike a very delicate balance between making a prospective student feel welcome and also ensuring that they are providing them with just enough information as well. However, using technology to communicate with students may work to an institution's advantage since it has the opportunity to provide the highest possible return on investment regarding time and effort. That being said, the largest challenge for admission personnel is to utilize social media to funnel and filter information to prospective students in a non-overwhelming manner, but also simultaneously ensuring that an institution is effectively conveying their desired message.

While Lindbeck and Fodrey (2010) highlighted the importance of admission offices utilizing technology as an effective recruitment tool, the Admissions Advisory Committee at the University of Rhode Island (URI, 2011) placed more of an emphasis on the overall campus visit experience. In 2004, the Arts & Science group, a private consulting firm, polled 500 college-bound high school seniors and found that 65% of the students considered campus visits to be very influential sources of information about where to apply and ultimately impacted students' enrollment decisions (Arts & Sciences Group, 2004). Similar to Steinberg's (2009) article that focused on revamping the campus visit experience, admission personnel at URI have recognized that a campus tour and information session are the single most influential sources of information for students in deciding their college choice (Admissions Advisory Committee at the University of Rhode Island, 2011). The report also emphasized that the physical layout and overall aesthetic of a campus, such as curb appeal and ease of finding visitor parking, can also make or break a campus visit experience. As a result, the visitor experience at URI has recently been improved in more ways than one, which included providing an information session in a centrally located area

on campus with ample parking, offering three student-led tours per day and improving the signage at their Visitor Welcome Center. Thus, the report placed a heavy emphasis on individual recruitment strategies, such as showcasing new facilities and increasing the number of daily visitor program offerings, in order to effectively recruit a wider audience of prospective students.

While the Admission Advisory Committee at URI stressed the importance of modifying their on campus visit options, McCoy (2013) sought to better understand the challenges of another type of campus visit experience, which in this case consists of on-campus recruitment events, such as Open Houses. Similar to the conclusions that the Admissions Advisory Committee at URI made, McCoy (2013) emphasized that the recruitment efforts of college admission offices are one of the many factors that can influence a prospective student's decision. That said, McCoy (2013) discussed four primary challenges that exist when admission personnel organize large scale recruitment events: 1.) Scheduling around other on campus events, 2.) Marketing and advertising efforts, 3.) Budgetary constraints and cost concerns, and lastly 4.) Involving faculty and academic department staff (McCoy, 2013). For starters, scheduling around conflicting events on campus can be problematic if there are limited campus resources, such as appropriate venues, transportation, parking and catering. Secondly, marketing and advertising efforts are crucial in order to ensure that prospective students and families are aware that particular on campus events are taking place. Thus, McCoy (2013) advised that admission personnel identify a target audience to reach out to, and then to utilize previous attendance records at past events to determine what type of venue space to reserve.

Furthermore, McCoy (2013) recognized that admission offices play a crucial role in generating revenue through enrollment, thus event planners need to demonstrate the impact of admission events through assessment and by keeping budget records from year to year. These

data allow admission offices to make an informed decision about how to proceed for future on campus events, such as revisiting the format of an event or finding areas to eliminate certain costs (McCoy, 2013). Lastly, McCoy (2013) emphasized that event planners can enhance the participation of faculty and academic department staff simply by communicating the details of the event and by providing meaningful data that demonstrates the impact of faculty and departmental involvement. By adhering to all of these various recommendations, admission personnel can expect to execute on campus recruitment events in a more effective manner, which will help satisfy all parties involved in return.

Emerging Trends in Recruitment

In this particular literature review, various authors and admissions professionals highlight effective recruitment strategies, current admission trends, and lastly, areas where practice is being improved upon in certain case studies. These particular themes help to illustrate the profound impact that particular recruitment practices can have when it comes to attracting prospective students. Many themes have emerged throughout the literature regarding the practices of successful recruitment strategies and techniques. For instance, Kimball (2011) sought to understand the context of college admission in the 20th century and the impact that it had on students over time. Kimball (2011) claimed that the history of college admission has been linked to a growth of a credit culture since World War II. As a result, students have increasingly become more of a commodity, which still proves to be the case today since institutions are constantly competing for these valuable resources. Furthermore, the growth of sophisticated admission techniques and student recruitment is rooted in the passage of the 1965 Higher Education Act and the 1978 Middle Income Student Assistance Act, which marks a period of increased access for higher education (Kimball, 2011). During this time, high school visits and

marketing initiatives became the norm and are still widely practiced as effective recruitment strategies.

Additionally, another recruitment technique that captured the attention of admission personnel was the rise of college rankings in the late 20th century, which are readily available today in the form of a guidebook for prospective students at their local bookstore. As Kimball (2011) noted, “In response to competing enrollment management techniques, a sophisticated culture of college admission guides for students developed; these materials, the publication of which began to climb even more rapidly as access and equity were disassociated from one another, depict college admission as a zero-sum game” (p.22). Clearly, institutions still desire to be highlighted in college rankings and guidebooks since it helps to showcase their respective school in a positive light to the public. However, it is important to note that with the decline of equity-based programs after 1972, students increasingly began to look to college guides to help find strategies that would allow them to compete in an institutionally dominated marketplace (Kimball, 2011). Thus, it is evident that the present day college admission marketplace is reflective of past admission trends, which in this case highlights that prospective students are still eager to learn any inside tips of the admission trade.

Another popular recruitment tool includes making efforts to attract students from underrepresented populations who are not well represented on college campuses. Specifically, admission personnel have strategized to recruit students from certain socioeconomic or ethnic backgrounds in order to diversify the makeup of their respective student bodies. On an admissions standpoint, this motivates institutions so that they are recognized as being a welcoming and hospitable environment for all types of students, which may be recognized in college rankings. In an article published by Cegler (2012), the recruitment of lesbian, gay,

bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student populations in particular is examined as an emerging trend. Historically, the recruitment of LGBT students has been widely ignored in diversity-oriented admissions practices; however, this student population has become more visible over the past several years (Cegler, 2012). As a result, LGBT students are being targeted as a unique recruitment group, yet universities typically do not track data on the sexual orientation of their students. For instance, the Common Application requires students to note their gender, race and ethnicity; however, students are not asked to self-identify their sexual orientation on a widespread basis. Regardless, there is a relatively small number of schools in the U.S. that are participating in the LGBT outreach, thus this particular recruiting strategy is not widely practiced. Some of these passive recruitment techniques consist of showcasing LGBT related services and programs in advertising materials and participating in LGBT-themed college fairs (Cegler, 2012).

Upon reviewing the literature, it is evident that admission personnel can conduct recruitment practices in more ways than one, such as by collaborating with local institutions to create joint college fairs, however, it is vital to target a wide audience when promoting a college or university. To ensure that a college is recruiting prospective students in an effective manner in the 21st century, admission personnel may need to assess their current practices in the event that they can identify more favorable recruitment strategies, which may require hiring an external consulting party. If admission offices seek to promote their college or university to various constituents, it may be worth the time and energy to host counselor events that are available for secondary school counselors or independent college counselors. Since this specific audience frequently works with prospective students, the admission personnel at Grisham College sought

to implement a counselor program in order to establish new relationships with secondary schools from around the country.

Implementation

Implementation Project Plan

In my capstone project, I implemented the counselor fly-in event (CFE) and then proceeded to evaluate the program, which provided an opportunity to assess the results and outcomes of my implementation. In terms of logistics, a majority of the fall semester was spent organizing the CFE, which also consisted of reserving flights to fly in secondary school counselors from around the country for a weekend at Grisham. The purpose of the event was to educate individuals about the resources that are available for students on campus, with the hopes that the participants will promote the institution to their students while they are in the college search process. A secondary school counselor or a college counselor plays a pivotal role in the college selection process since students seek professional advice in regards to the types of colleges and universities that they should consider visiting and applying to. Especially for first generation college students, secondary school counselors in some cases can pave the entire path needed for students to successfully pursue any form of a post-secondary education. In other words, secondary school counselors can be viewed as gatekeepers to a plethora of information regarding what types of colleges or universities offer certain academic programs or additional student support services. Thus, it is invaluable for admission personnel to provide programming that focuses on this specific audience since they will ultimately transmit information pertaining to the institution to their own students (for a full schedule of the CFE, refer to the agenda in Appendix B.

Additionally, the overall flow and goals of the two days were set by the type of itinerary that was designed, which was created in an engaging manner so that the participants could

imagine themselves as current Grisham students. As mentioned, the CFE serves the purpose of educating secondary school counselors about an institution that is somewhat unfamiliar or foreign to them. Thus, a CFE event can increase the interest of secondary schools in Grisham's programs and services for students, which helps to support the development of new relationships with secondary schools that are not in the local area. In terms of drafting an educational itinerary, the first step that was taken was to highlight Grisham's close proximity to a major city that is available for its students. In order to maximize this selling feature, the first day of the event was created for those who were flying in from far locations to have an opportunity to explore the city on their own accord. While this first day of the program was designed to be more recreational than educational, the goal was for the participants to fully immerse themselves in the culture of the local city in order to first hand experience the recreational and professional opportunities that are accessible for students at Grisham. Furthermore, Grisham is a perfect fit for the type of student who wants to have an actual campus to call home, but with a city that is also of disposal as well. Thus, the goal is for participants to reflect upon their time both on campus and in the city when meeting with a student who is looking to have an urban and rural college experience.

Upon finishing the first part of the program in the city, the participants proceeded to spend the remaining two days on campus to hear and see more about what Grisham has to offer. A majority of that next day focused on informative academic breakout sessions, which provided an opportunity for the participants to learn about the various academic programs that are offered at Grisham. The goal of these sessions were to be as engaging as possible, thus the secondary school counselors experienced live demonstrations in two of the four schools at Grisham. Specifically, the secondary school counselors learned more about the Business programs by partaking in a demonstration in Grisham's Bloomberg Markets Labs, which was led

by current students and faculty members. Additionally, the participants learned about the Health Science programs in the actual space where students and faculty members collaborate on projects and other practicums. While Grisham is founded upon a liberal arts curriculum, the secondary school counselors also discovered that the college offers Science, Technology, Engineering and Math based programs (STEM) for students who are looking to pursue a career in one of those areas of interest. The participants also engaged in an academic experience for the School of Liberal Arts and the School of Education, which showcased other types of academic majors and minors that are available for students. Thus, the most important goal was to illustrate that Grisham is a solid fit for particular students who have a certain academic focus that the college readily offers.

Furthermore, the participants finished the day by attending an on campus men's ice hockey game, which was incorporated in order to highlight a portion of the student community at Grisham. The remainder of the weekend revolved around educating the participants about academic affairs, career preparation, first year experience and student life at Grisham. Current students, faculty members and additional staff members displayed various presentations and participated in panels, which allowed the secondary school counselors to ask a variety of questions in a live manner. These specific sessions were tailored to illustrate the types of support services that are readily available for Grisham students, such as tutoring and career development resources. Thus, the itinerary covered various areas that encompass the value of a Grisham education, such as academics, student and residence life, academic support and career preparation. Especially in the age of a costly private college tuition, it was vital to include certain speakers that touched upon the manner in which Grisham is successfully able to retain and graduate students in a timely manner, which was a concern for a majority of the participants.

Upon concluding the event, I observed that a majority of the participants enjoyed their time on campus since they were satisfied with the amount of content they had received from the educational programming throughout the weekend. The goal of the CFE at Grisham was to host an event that was unique, educational and effective, which appeared to be well received from the secondary school counselors. A large portion of the participants had attended previous fly-in programs at different institutions throughout the country and seemed pleasantly surprised by the extent of programming that was made available. Additionally, the guests appreciated the fact that I not only planned the fly-in program, but that I also took the time to sit in on each session with them as well. This demonstrated that it was important to show the participants that the Grisham admission personnel were also going to take time out of their weekend to spend it with the guests during the entirety of the CFE. Based upon my informal observations, my fellow colleagues in admissions were also impressed with the level of organization and thoroughness of the event, which will allow them to use a similar outline for future CFE's. While several recommendations will be addressed later in this study, it is important to constantly assess the impact of the fly-in event at Grisham in order to determine the return that this type of recruitment strategy delivers, such as whether or not a secondary counselor will recommend Grisham to their students based upon attending the fly-in program.

Research Component Description

The population and sample that I utilized consisted of fourteen secondary school counselors from across the nation since they are the specific target audience that attended the Grisham CFE. It was vital that I incorporated human subjects as part of my research since they were able to describe first hand their experiences with participating in the three day long event. Without their feedback, the Grisham admission personnel will be unable to rationally ground any

modifications and improvements of the event for next year. Since I already had access to the counselors' primary contact information, such as their email addresses, I received permission from my supervisor to contact the counselors via email to invite them to take part in my study after they had attended the event. The participants were aware that there was minimal risk or harm involved with my study since they were asked to review my consent form before partaking in the survey. Additionally, the secondary school counselors did not engage with sensitive subject matter or questions.

Furthermore, I highlighted that their responses would be entirely anonymous. As mentioned, I sought to better understand the counselors' interpretations of the event in order to document any successes or failures that they recognized or experienced. For instance, my perspective of the outcome and success of the event may be entirely biased due to my involvement with planning the event, which is different from an individual who simply experienced the fly-in event on their own accord. Upon examining the results of my study, the Grisham admission personnel will be able to assess how the event can be tailored to better suit future fly-in participants. In short, the results will inform the Grisham admission personnel about the meaningful impact that the implementation of the event had on secondary school counselors who had previously never visited Grisham.

Evaluation Plan

The postpositivist paradigm is the most suitable for my topic since it best describes my worldview related to my research. In regards to postpositivism, Mertens (2009) noted, "Postpositivists hold beliefs about the importance of objectivity and generalizability, but they suggest that researchers modify their claims to understandings of truth based on probability rather than certainty" (p.12). My axiology, which Mertens (2009) viewed as the nature of ethical

behavior, emphasizes privacy, consent, and equal opportunity. This is relevant for my topic since I have created an anonymous survey that requires an individual's consent before they can begin the survey procedure. By distributing a survey, I have the opportunity to assess the fly-in event on a concrete scale, which has provided me with direct knowledge from the secondary school counselors, such as their likes, dislikes, and attitudes from the event. The survey was primarily qualitative in design in order to provide an opportunity for the participants to share real sentiments about what they enjoyed or wished that they had experienced during the program. However, a few quantitative questions were also incorporated to better understand the number of actual participants who felt that the event was effective and worthwhile. Thus, the mixed methods survey portrayed feedback that can be utilized by the admission personnel at Grisham to improve upon or keep certain areas of the event that may need to be addressed in the future. As previously mentioned, the population and sample will be a controlled group of fourteen secondary school counselors that participated in the fly-in event at Grisham this past November.

Regarding the postpositivist paradigm, Mertens (2009) highlighted three ethical principles that coincide with the axiology of the postpositivist movement: 1.) Beneficence, 2.) Respect and lastly 3.) Justice. In regards to beneficence, Mertens (2009) outlined the following definition, "Maximizing good outcomes for science, humanity, and the individual research participants and minimizing or avoiding unnecessary risk, harm, or wrong" (p.13). This definition helps to best describe my worldview related to my research since I believe in maximizing good outcomes for the benefit of those involved in my study. More importantly, my topic involves minimal harm or risk for the participants involved in my study, which also benefits those who have taken my survey since they did not experience any negative effects from engaging in my study. Furthermore, by utilizing a survey as part of my research method, I have

aligned with the preferred method that a true postpositivist researcher would incorporate into his or her study.

Research Findings

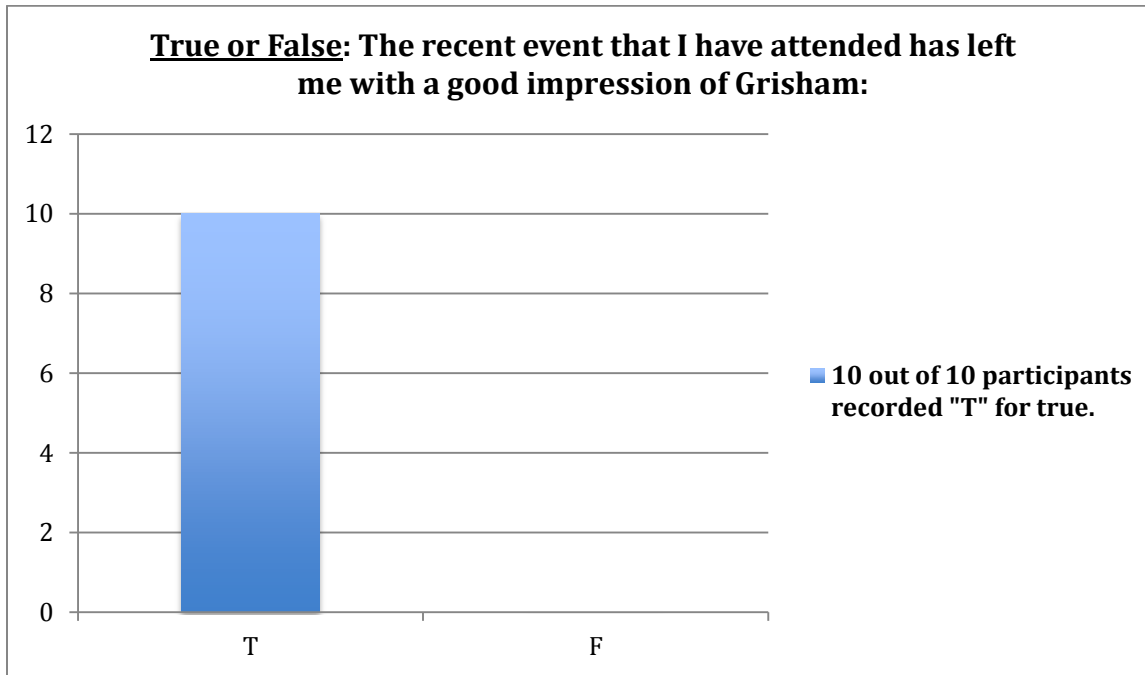
In this mixed methods postpositivist study, I surveyed a predetermined group of fourteen secondary school counselors from across the country in order to learn about the impact that a CFE may have on future enrollment at Grisham College. In the following section, I describe the five thematic findings: (a) key college factors, (b) highlights of visit, (c) deterrent factors, (d) future event recommendations and (e) evaluation of Grisham experience. The first theme focused on what the participants thought were generally important factors when evaluating the significance of a particular college or university. The second theme centered on various highlights from the fly-in event, which analyzes specific aspects that left certain school counselors with a positive impression of Grisham. The third theme encompassed challenging aspects of Grisham that may deter a secondary school counselor from recommending the school to their respective students. The fourth theme emerged with various recommendations, which offered suggestions to help improve the event in the future. The last theme drew attention to specific quantitative questions that alluded to the impact that the fly-in had on the attendees. However, the first section will address the quantitative evaluation of the Grisham CFE, which will subsequently be followed by the qualitative themes that were concluded from this study.

Evaluation of Grisham College Experience

As shown in the following quantitative results, the participants were asked a series of questions that specifically asked for their evaluations of the CFE. The various visuals below help to illustrate the level of impact that the event had on the secondary school counselors when they departed campus. The subsequent figures illustrates that the fly-in event at Grisham left

secondary school counselors with a solid impression of the institution, which suggests that the fly-in helped to present Grisham in a favorable manner.

Figure #1: Did the CFE leave its participants with a good impression of Grisham?



As highlighted in figure #1, it is evident that the participants left Grisham with a better understanding of the different types of resources that are available for students. The program was intentionally designed so that the secondary school counselors could hear from various campus stakeholders, such as the Academic Enrichment Center and the Career Center, in order to depict a holistic perspective of the ways that Grisham students are supported.

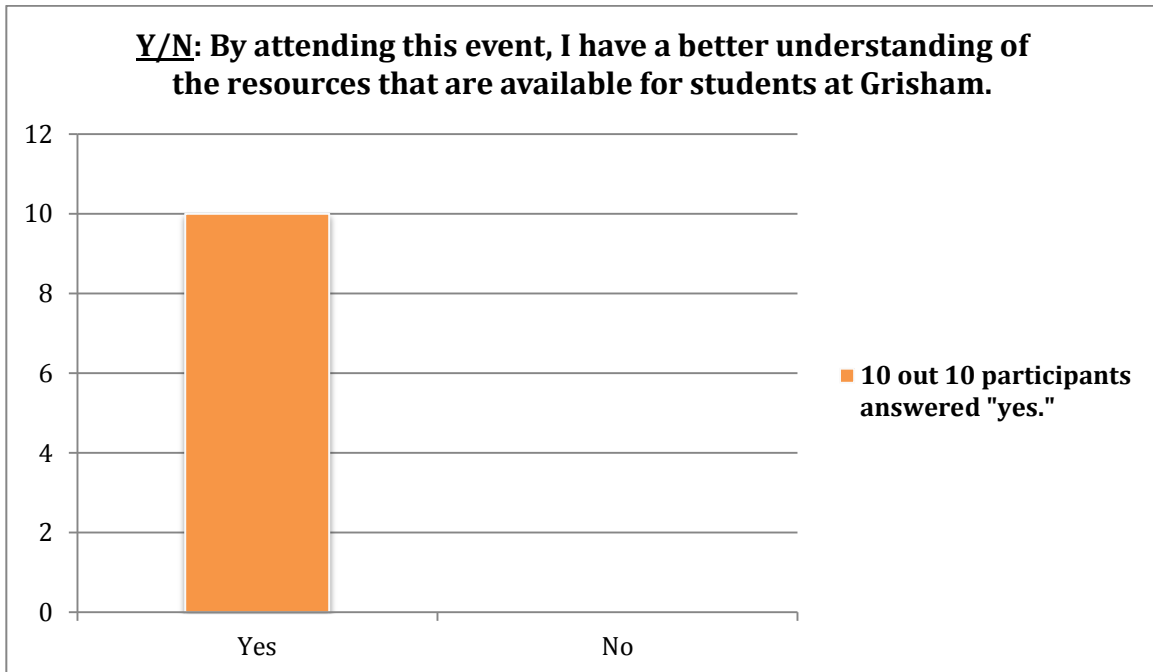
Figure #2: Impact that the event had on better understanding Grisham

Figure #2 documents that a majority of the secondary school counselors felt inclined to recommend Grisham to prospective students after their visit, however, two of the participants noted that they “might” recommend the college. This statistic coincides with the qualitative feedback that one counselor provided, which was that like any school, Grisham is not a good fit for everyone. With that in mind, this suggests that future fly-in events may need to incorporate additional programming that emphasizes all aspects of the Grisham community. Certain programming included in the fly-in, such as an outing to a hockey game, may portray Grisham as merely an athletic driven institution, which would deter non-athletic interested students.

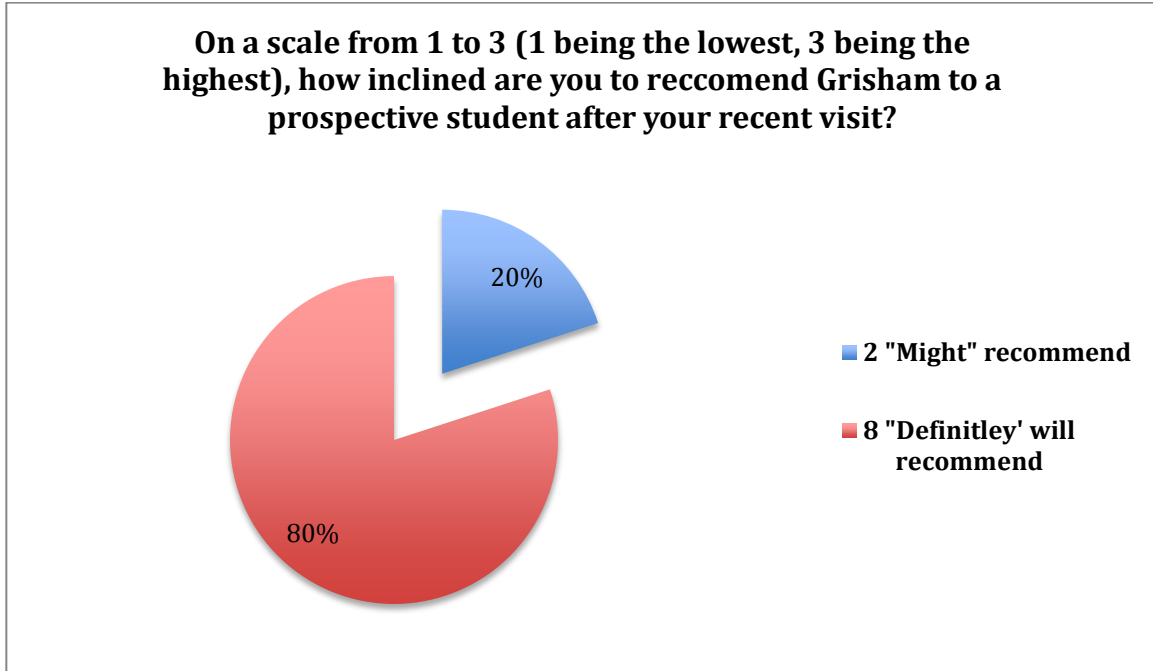
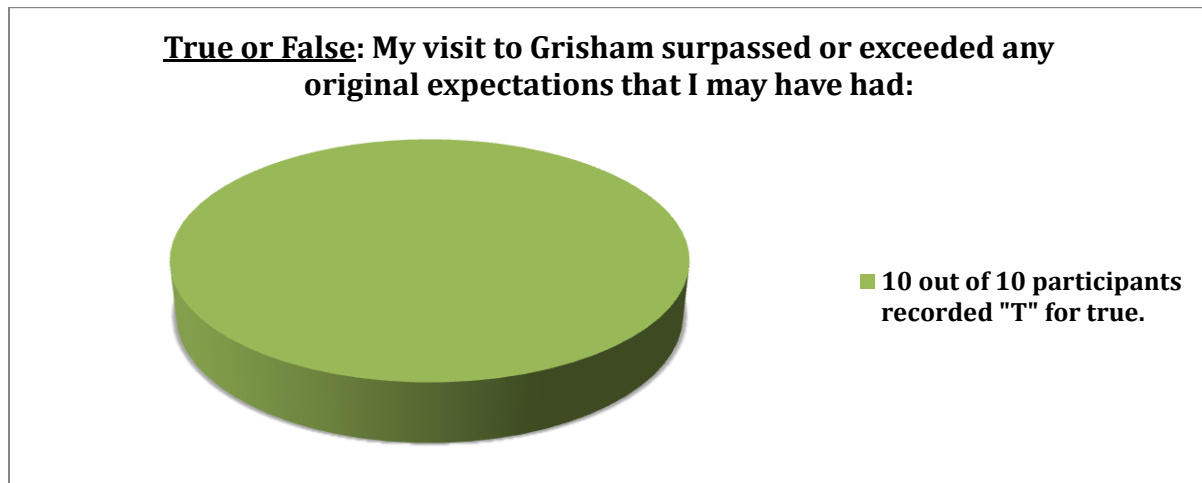
Figure #3: How inclined were the participants to recommend students to Grisham?

Figure #3 demonstrates that the fly-in event surpassed or exceeded the participants' expectations that they had about their visit to Grisham. While this exemplifies that the fly-in was a successful event, it more importantly illustrates that it is worth the time and energy to invest in organizing an event that helps to spread the message about Grisham nationwide.

Figure #4: Did the CFE surpass or exceed any original expectations that the secondary school counselors had?



As depicted in figure #4, those who participated in the fly-in event at Grisham provide an overall excellent evaluation of the campus visit. This suggests that participants enjoyed what they learned and saw during their time on campus, which proves that an effective itinerary can be created in order to maximize a short lived event. Over the course of 1.5 days, the secondary school counselors actively learned and engaged in several of the academic, career and campus life opportunities that are readily made available for Grisham students.

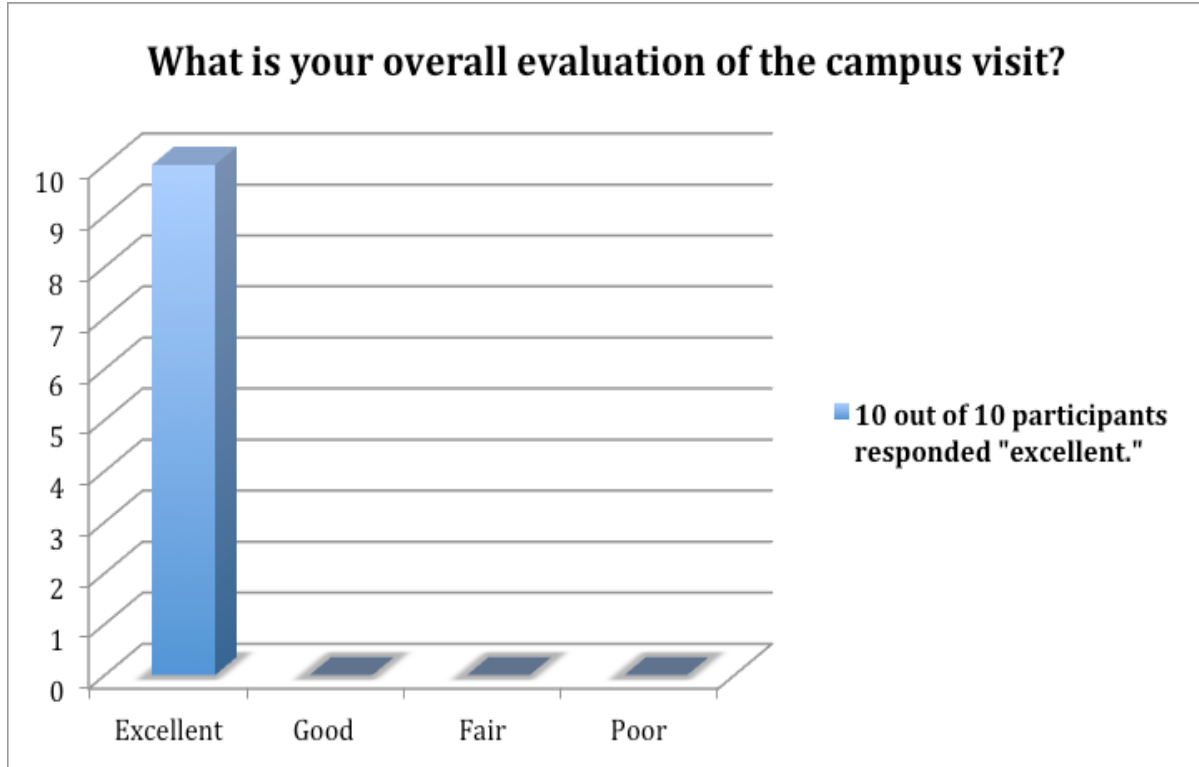
Figure #5: Overall evaluation of the campus visit

Figure #5 illustrates that the secondary school counselors provided an excellent evaluation of the CFE at Grisham College, which is profound since many of the participants had noted that they had previously attended other CFE's at other colleges and universities prior to coming to Grisham. Thus, Grisham admission personnel may consider utilizing a similar format for future CFE's.

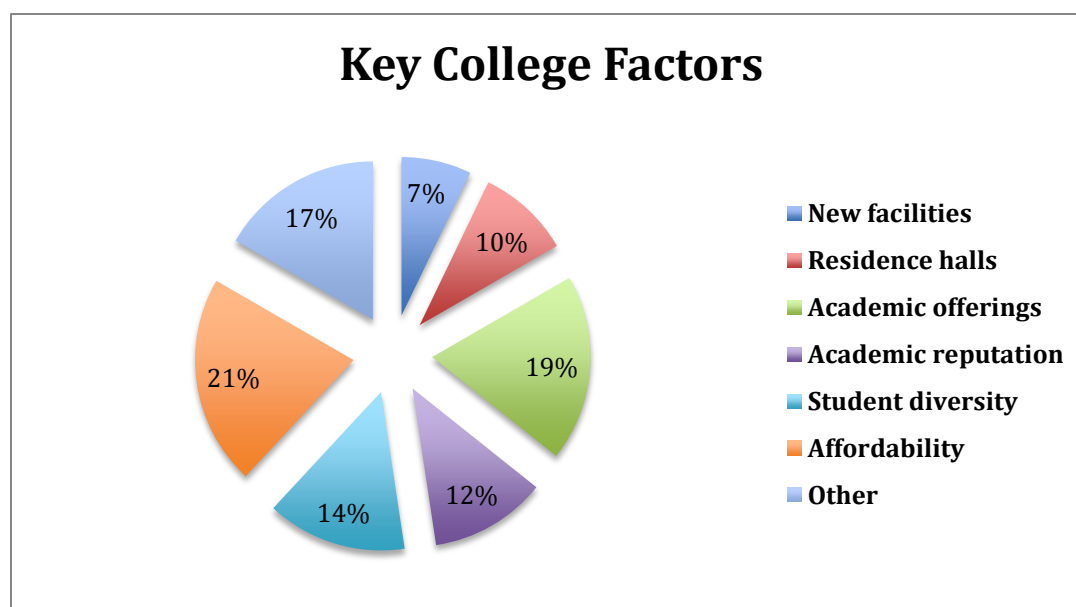
Key College Factors Considered by Counselors

When secondary school counselors were asked about certain factors that they considered when evaluating a college or university, it was evident that there was not a unanimous response that could address the entirety of the question. Participants discussed a variety of institutional elements that they felt were most relevant for all colleges that they assess, including retention and graduation rates, location, class sizes, opportunities for on and off campus employment and a

place that was a good fit for a ‘B’ student. Additionally, some participants repeatedly mentioned access to faculty and the sense of campus life as two important factors that may alter their impression of a particular institution. About Grisham, one counselor in particular commented, “... It was evident that the professors are very passionate about their work and are available to help students identify their interests and truly make it a unique college going experience.”

Furthermore, as shown in figure six, the participants reported other factors being important as well, which ranged from new facilities, residence halls, academic offerings, academic reputation, diversity of the student body and also affordability as also being of importance. While colleges and universities continue to adapt to the ever changing landscape of higher education, it is crucial for administrators to consider these particular factors since they may lead to an increase or decrease in college enrollment. For instance, a student may only be able to attend a private four-year institution based upon the discount that they receive with a scholarship or comprehensive financial aid package. Considering that 21% of the participants indicated affordability as a key factor when evaluating a postsecondary institution, top college officials must constantly reevaluate their financial aid offerings in order to appeal to a wide range of consumers. The following chart illustrates key factors for assessing college value.

Figure #6: Factors labeled important by secondary school counselors



Highlights of Visit

Throughout the course of the fly-in, the itinerary was intentionally designed so that the participants left with a better understanding and appreciation of what Grisham has to offer for current and future students. Recurring themes emerged related to the specific aspects that would prompt secondary school counselors to recommend Grisham to their students in the future, which began with the friendliness of campus and the level of engaging faculty, staff, and students. Several counselors also commented on the range of academic offerings and the substance of certain programs, such as business, engineering and health sciences, as strong selling points for the school. This specific feedback highlighted how surprised some of the participants were that a school of Grisham's size offers as many majors and minors as it does.

For another counselor, the tour of the renovated facilities was the highlight of their visit since it showcased the progression that is being made in order to make Grisham a noteworthy and competitive institution. Given the fact that Grisham is located in an area filled with a number of elite four-year colleges and universities, it is challenging to market the school so that it stands out as medium sized-comprehensive college. As a result, it is helpful to collect this feedback as evidence that it is worth investing in the infrastructure on a college campus in order to appeal to a variety of prospective students. Additionally, one participant focused on the student presenters as a contributing factor that helped to create a positive impression of campus since they were approachable and well-spoken. Furthermore, the support that is available through the Grisham Academic Center for Enrichment impressed a few counselors as being noteworthy since they believed that it would help contribute to student success and persistence. One participant noted,

After visiting the campus, it was clear to me that every effort is made to make students feel welcome and to make them aware that they have access to all of the resources they would need to have a successful experience at Grisham... This is clearly a team of people who want to engage with students and with parents, when that check-in is required to move a student to a higher level of autonomy.

The demonstrated sense of school spirit, close proximity to the local town and a major city, a tight-knit and safe learning environment and a commitment to community service were also several other popular responses that took shape. However, one of the most popular discussions was with regard to Grisham's dedication to supporting 'B' average students. In fact, multiple participants raised this aspect as being the most impressive highlight of the weekend, which was specifically emphasized below:

[Regarding fit for a 'B' student] I love the fact (which was clearly communicated) that Grisham will take a 'B' student and help him/her to develop into the best student he/she can become.

On a similar note, when the secondary school counselors were asked to highlight their favorite part of the campus visit, several of the participants raved about the hockey game that they had attended on campus. A couple of the participants even mentioned that they were not looking forward to attending the game since they did not consider themselves to be avid sporting fanatics. However, the strong sense of school spirit and camaraderie that they witnessed at the event ironically left these counselors with a positive perception of the Grisham community. As highlighted below,

My favorite part of the campus visit was attending the ice hockey game. On most fly-in programs, there isn't typically the opportunity to see the students participating in an activity all at once, so it was great to experience the sense of school spirit and to see how everyone came together to support their school.

That being said, a few participants appreciated having the chance to actively engage in the academic breakout sessions, such as in the Bloomberg Markets Lab, since it showcased the resources and the level of technology that is available for Grisham students. In this capacity, the counselors had the opportunity to physically witness the unique academic support that is offered to students, which directly helps to expand upon their vocational aspirations as well. When asked about their favorite aspect of the fly-in, one participant enthusiastically replied, "Learning about

how well you are guiding and supporting the student! I am excited to recommend students to your program! I really believe in what you are doing!”

Lastly, the genuine and hospitable character that was demonstrated on behalf of the Grisham admission personnel was also greatly appreciated by several counselors since it helped to foster an encompassing sense of community and inclusion throughout the weekend.

Additionally, a different participant was appreciative of simply being able to network with other professionals that worked at Grisham and within the realm of secondary education. These anecdotes were displayed in the following fashion,

The team made us feel that they truly enjoyed the many hours with us... From start to finish, I felt like I was a part of the group and each aspect of the visit was well planned and executed thoughtfully so that the counselors could really come away with an accurate perspective of Grisham and what it has to offer.

This engagement and participation clearly helped to shape the participants’ perspective about Grisham in a positive and meaningful way. Without offering an annual event that draws secondary school counselors from various demographic regions around the country, it would be extremely difficult for Grisham to recruit students outside of New England. The goal of a CFE is to educate secondary school counselors (typically from outside of a college’s immediate area) about an institution with the hopes of yielding students from their respective high schools that extend far across the United States.

Possible Deterrents to Student Interest

While the majority of participants reported a positive experience, a small number expressed concern over certain aspects that they thought may deter particular types of students. A few secondary school counselors in particular brought forth the issue of low student diversity, which they felt was noticeable during their time on campus. On a similar note, another participant associated students who are from distant geographic areas, such as California, with a

designated “minority” label. This specific counselor mentioned that the campus appeared to be “quiet” during their visit and evidently raised a red flag for students who cannot easily access their homes on the weekend. As noted by one counselor,

For a weekend before a holiday break, it seemed so quiet on Saturday afternoon, which gives me pause when I picture a teenager far from home and trying to adapt with his/her class-/hall mates.

On that note, these concerns also touched upon the comment that a couple of participants made about Grisham not being a fit for every type of student. Especially for commuter students, one secondary school counselor alluded to the notion that Grisham would not appeal to this group of non-residential students since the campus is primarily residential. One participant even brought up the concern that there is not enough residential and financial support for undocumented students since they do not qualify for these traditional components, which are typically only offered to U.S. citizens. To synthesize these sentiments, one counselor simply stated, “I would recommend Grisham without hesitation to specific students. Like any school, it does not fit every type of student.”

Additionally, the issue of religion was also raised and whether or not the institution promoted a welcoming environment for students who do not identify as Catholic. Coincidentally, several of the secondary school counselors represented religiously affiliated secondary schools; however, the extent of the religious background at Grisham was questioned by several of the participants. As one counselor asserted,

Unclear on if it’s the place for students who don’t identify with any religion. It seemed like it would be a good non-denominational fit, but the individual student would have to go there and check it out themselves.

Fortunately, the majority of participants favored the Catholic heritage since it coincided with Grisham’s dedication to community service, which helped to re-shift their concerns into a positive selling feature.

Future Recommendations from Participants

After any large scale admissions-related event, it is crucial to capture feedback from those who participated in the event in order to make improvements for the following year. Otherwise, those who help organize the CFE for instance, will be unable to measure if the event was successful, if it had any impact on its participants and more importantly whether or not it is worth the time or energy to execute an event of this caliber. When the secondary school counselors were asked to provide recommendations for improving the campus visit in the future, five counselors highlighted that it was very well planned and did not require any adjustments moving forward.

However, several of the counselors did have suggestions, such as incorporating additional campus stakeholders into the program (President and other faculty) and elaborating more upon the Catholic foundation and its relevance to Grisham. In terms of logistics of the event, one secondary school counselor in particular suggested changing the date of the fly-in since the University of California and California State system deadlines are the week of the Thanksgiving holiday break. Consequently, several of the counselors who were visiting from California had to sacrifice some of their time away from participating in a few of the sessions since they were finalizing letters of recommendations and responding to emails from frantic students and parents. On another logistical note, one participant wished that a comprehensive tour of the entire campus was included since it would have painted a more accurate picture of what Grisham looks like for every-day students. This specific counselor noted,

As a counselor, it is very important to me to accurately frame a college for a student and prepare them for what they might see on their visit etc... Seeing a building or dorm that has not been renovated wouldn't make me describe the college in a less favorable light... If I just tell them that the college is wonderful (based on what I physically saw) I would set them up with unrealistic expectations.

While the CFE continues to evolve, this particular feedback will allow the admissions staff at Grisham to make modifications to the event in order to attract a larger number of participants in the future. As previously mentioned, the purpose of evaluating this event is to research whether or not the November 2015 counselor-fly in will have an impact on future enrollment at Grisham. At the same time, an increase in first year students from out of state will only happen if the admission personnel continues to develop new relationships with secondary school counselors from outside the New England area. Thus, something as simple as altering the date of the event can be significant in order to attract a greater number of secondary counselors.

Summary of findings

The findings from the Grisham College CFE highlighted various elements of the weekend that positively impacted the participants, which ranged from having the opportunity to attend a sporting event to meeting with current faculty members and students. Additionally, the secondary school counselors also noted how passionate the professors were and how the campus overall felt friendly and nurturing. The participants were also greatly impressed by the breadth of academic majors that are offered at small institution like Grisham, which had a specific connotation with the STEM programs. More importantly, the quality of support services were also touched upon in the participants' evaluation of their campus visit since they felt it was clear that Grisham helps to promote a sense of autonomy for their students.

On the other hand, some of the secondary school counselors raised certain aspects that they felt may deter them from recommending Grisham to certain students. One participant in particular noted that the campus felt quiet for a weekend before a major holiday, which was worrisome for students who geographically may be unable to access home easily. This sentiment illustrates that a majority of students at Grisham are from the New England area and those who

are from further geographic locations may feel isolated as a minority. Secondly, some secondary school counselors expressed that they were unsure whether or not Grisham would be a good fit for all types of students since the campus appears to attract a particular type of a student. Specifically, Grisham's identity as an Catholic institution was questioned by a couple of participants since it was unclear whether or not Grisham promoted a feeling of inclusivity for students who do not identify with Catholicism or any religion for that matter. Furthermore, several other participants mentioned that the lack of student diversity and the fact that Grisham is very much a residential campus may be off putting for some particular target audiences, such as students of color or commuter students. Consequently, the secondary school counselors may be limited in who they can recommend Grisham to in the future.

Implications & Discussion

From this study, it is clear that secondary school counselors left the CFE with a better understanding of Grisham College; however, it is evident that several recommendations and implications need to be addressed moving forward. The following recommendations serve as five specific best-practice models that were drawn from the entirety of the literature review and study. While there may be additional suggestions that can be made, these recommendations outline a set of strategies that can be utilized to improve upon an existing recruitment strategy, which in this study has focused on a secondary school CFE at a private four year institution located in New England. Several of the recommendations addressed specific improvements that can be made to bolster the itinerary, such as incorporating additional student life programming in order to portray a more holistic view of the student body. The issue of determining whether or not the college would be a good fit for certain student populations was the primary reasoning

behind a few of the recommendations, which will hopefully dispel any concerns regarding student fit post future fly-in events.

Furthermore, the final two recommendations are somewhat interchangeable since they both address the timing and formatting of the event in order to increase attendance moving forward. Ultimately, the most significant recommendation is to ensure that secondary school counselors do not stereotype the college into one specific category or for one particular student population. Therefore it is in the best interest of the admission office and college administration to consider how these recommendations can assist in portraying the institution in a more welcoming and inclusive manner. The recommendations that will be discussed are: Incorporate additional student life programming into the fly-in itinerary, address the issue of ‘fit’ for certain student populations, include a comprehensive campus tour, increase opportunities for more participants to attend and organize a collaborative college counselor tour with local institutions.

Recommendation #1: Grisham College admission personnel should highlight a wider variety of student life experiences during the fly-in.

During future fly-in events, the proposed itinerary needs to frame a more comprehensive image of the private four year college in order to showcase the different facets of student and academic life. Several secondary school counselors commented on the low diversity among students, which can be improved by incorporating additional programming into the itinerary that highlights some of the more diverse aspects of the college. During the 2015 CFE, the only student life program that was incorporated was an on campus hockey game, which contributed to the participants notion of there being little to no student diversity. Consequently, this specific social outing depicted the college as predominantly an athletic-driven institution and only highlights one specific student population that is attracted to this type of collegiate setting.

Looking ahead, future fly-in events need to incorporate greater student programming from other student divisions, such as the Asian, Latino(a), African, Native American Affairs (ALANA) chapter or the Interfaith Alliance student organization. Thus, scheduling the fly-in program when these groups are hosting events for the community will be pivotal in depicting the diverse aspect of Grisham. Additionally, another suggestion would be to host a diverse student panel of tour guides to talk about their personal experiences regarding diversity at Grisham, and or incorporating faculty who teach in the social justice program (among other topics) to best illustrate a full range of diversity on campus. The purpose of this recommendation is to combat any concerns about student diversity and to resolve any skepticism that the college may not be a good fit for certain types of students, such as students of color or students who are simply disinterested in athletics. If the annual fly-in only includes one type of student programming, admission personnel will run the risk of stereotyping their institution in a specific manner or category. As previously mentioned, fly-in programs are designed with the goal of having its participants recommend a particular college or university to their students upon return to their secondary schools. Thus, these types of events may reflect whether or not admission personnel are focusing part of their recruitment strategy on increasing the percentage of multicultural students on their campus.

Recommendation #2: Include the college's president, and the perspectives of religiously affiliated members of the college community

On a similar note, additional stakeholders, such as religiously affiliated members of the college community, the college's President and staff members who oversee other religious-based organizations on campus need to be a part of the event in order to address the religious component at the institution since some participants questioned the level of religious inclusivity

on campus. However, McCoy (2013) discussed particular challenges of on campus recruitment events, such as involving academic faculty and staff since their schedules may not always align with the event that is needed, which may be true for the fly-in since it is typically hosted during a weekend. To counteract this challenge, it is the responsibility of the admission personnel to communicate the importance of incorporating various faculty, administrators and students in order to help represent the majority of the student body as best as possible. Otherwise, future participants may have a difficult time believing any direct anecdotes from the admission personnel since they may be removed from this type of student experience.

Recommendation #3: Grisham admission personnel need to include a comprehensive campus tour in the fly-in itinerary

Additionally, a few participants noted that they would have like to have experienced a full campus tour in order to see the areas of campus that had not been renovated or modernized. While administration may be inclined to only display the areas of campus that are the most aesthetically inviting, future participants would benefit from having a comprehensive perspective of what the college has to offer for all of its students. Otherwise, the participants would ultimately provide misleading information for their own students who are interested in attending or visiting this particular college. The importance of providing an authentic institutional perspective coincides with the first recommendation of consciously illustrating the average student experience, however, limited time constraints may be an implication in this case.

In order to better serve future visitors, Steinberg (2009) highlighted that college administrators have begun to hire outside consultants to improve the campus visit experience, such as in the case of Hendrix College. Doing this at Grisham College would substantially benefit future fly-in programs in the event that the admission personnel at Grisham lacks the

proper time needed to thoroughly evaluate and assess the program. In regards to the fly-in event, a consultant would be resourceful since he or she could provide concrete evidence as to why certain aspects of the fly-in may need to be changed or modified. Furthermore, hiring an outside consultant would be beneficial since the admission personnel at Grisham could collaborate with an individual who does not have any working bias, thus any suggestions for improvement would be valid based upon proper evidence and feedback. The Admissions Advisory Committee at the University of Rhode Island (2011) also placed emphasis on the campus visit experience since 65% of prospective students consider a campus visit to be very influential (Arts & Sciences Group, 2004). In essence, the secondary school counselors who attended the fly-in event in this study act as a gateway to bring future students to visit campus, thus the admission personnel need to ensure that they are continuously improving the overall visit experience as needed.

Recommendation #4: The admission personnel at Grisham need to offer additional fly-in opportunities or consider changing the timing of the event

While a more all-inclusive view of the college experience is at the forefront of recommendations in this study, an additional suggestion would be to consider changing the date of the event in order to yield a higher participation rate. Furthermore, the admission office needs to contemplate whether or not to offer multiple full-scale fly-in programs or if it is more productive to host several scaled back versions of the event throughout the course of a particular season. Several participants who had registered from California were unable to attend the event since the University of California and California State University System had their application deadlines due the following week of the fly-in. Therefore, it is recommended that the admission office considers changing the timeline of the event in order to increase the number of participants who are able to attend. If the college's administration plans to continue growing their

relationships with secondary schools outside of New England, it is vital that they expand upon their visit opportunities as needed in order to best support their recruitment efforts.

For instance, some institutions, such as the University of Tampa, host several CFE's throughout the year in order to appeal to a wide audience of secondary school counselors and private college counselors. While the University of Tampa offers counselor events that last less than 48 hours, they are designed for individuals who are unable to dedicate more than a couple of days at a college or university (University of Tampa, 2016). As highlighted on the University of Tampa's admission visit page, participants are able to partake in similar educational sessions that mirror the CFE that is being examined in this study, but in a more condensed format. In order to thoroughly promote the purpose of campus visit, it is clearly valuable to tailor admission programs that bring as many visitors to campus as possible. As the Admissions Advisory Committee at the University of Rhode Island (2011) had concluded, a significant number of prospective students ultimately decide where they attend college based upon a campus visit that they experienced. From a college admission standpoint, any individual who has a direct impact on a student's decision to attend a college or a university, such as a parent, friend or college counselor, needs to be targeted with specific admission programming. Thus, any admission-related event that is specifically created for secondary school counselors is designed with students in mind since the hope is that the participants will in return recommend an institution to their students based upon their own visit. In order to attract secondary school counselors in an effective manner, the admission personnel in this scenario need to consider how they are strategically reaching out to this population of professionals with the hopes of yielding students from their high schools.

Recommendation #5: The admission personnel at Grisham College should consider developing collaborative counselor fly-in events with local institutions

In an effort to appeal to a wide variety of secondary school counselors, it is imperative that the admission office considers the possibility of organizing a joint fly-in program with local institutions in the New England area. Stonewater (2000) discussed several collaborative admission practices that some colleges and universities are already implementing, such as hosting joint mini-college fairs or creating shared marketing material. The largest advantage of this particular practice is that it addresses any potential financial or budgetary concerns since programming costs would be split between one or more institutions. More importantly, creating a joint fly-in program would benefit secondary school counselors since they would be given an opportunity to visit multiple colleges or universities during the same visit. However, the admission personnel would need to be mindful in who they would seek to partner with since there are similar colleges in the area that are viewed as direct competitors. While competition helps to drive progressive recruitment practices, there may be a conflict of interest if opposing admission offices are attempting to yield the same student demographic.

The New England Sampler College Tour (2015) highlights a model program of three distinct colleges that have created a joint CFE and successfully have done so since they embody different institutional types. This is an effort supported by the New England Sampler College Consortium (NESCC), a collaboration among Wheaton College (Norton, MA), Emerson College (Boston, MA) and Providence College (Providence, RI) (NESCC, 2015). As stated on the NESCC (2015) website,

Our aim is to provide school counselors and independent counselors with the opportunity to "one stop shop" where you can learn about three universities, each with their own

niche, located in the heart of New England. At each institution you will learn essential information about academics and campus life through a variety of programs presented by current students, faculty and administrators.

Based upon their mission statement, it is clear that other colleges and universities can easily adopt this type of programming as a means to develop relationships with new or existing college counselors. Furthermore, a joint college fly-in program would appeal to a wider audience of secondary school counselors due to the level of convenience that they would be granted with this type of event. Marketing this type of event, as having an opportunity to learn about several unique institutions in one trip, would provide a desirable incentive for more participants to attend, which would be a more effective and useful recruitment tool. The admission office highlighted in this study would have benefited had more secondary school counselors been able to partake in the November fly-in event since their institutional message would have reached more individuals. Thus, this final recommendation addresses any concerns about whether or not a CFE is worth the time or energy to execute since it demonstrates an efficient recruitment method that would help grow an invaluable support network.

Upon reviewing these recommendations, it is clear that the admission personnel at Grisham College needs to consider supplementing or modifying future fly-in events with other type of programming in order to promote a more comprehensive image of the institution. While the purpose of conducting a fly-in is to educate individuals about a particular college or university, it is also equally important to create an itinerary that gives the participants a clear sense of what the college offers for a wide variety of student populations. Unfortunately, some elements of the fly-in that were utilized in this study may have depicted the college in a particular manner, which may deter some participants from recommending the institution to their

students. For future fly-in programs, the aforementioned recommendations need to be taken into consideration in order to improve the practice of this particular type of student recruitment strategy.

Conclusion

After a thorough review of the research regarding the best practices for recruitment strategies, it is evident that institutions need to consider the manner in which they communicate their brand to prospective students and families. If a college or university fails to remain current and up to date with emerging student trends, they will be unable to remain competitive in a saturated higher education market. Thus, the three major outcomes of the literature highlight emerging trends in recruitment, effective recruitment strategies and improving recruitment practices as top priorities for enrollment administrators. While a current recruitment trend revolves around the notion of implementing greater levels of diversity on campus, some colleges and universities are more so preoccupied with hiring private consultants in order to improve upon current recruitment techniques, which have increased their respective number of freshman applications. For instance, Gose (1999) interviewed Baylor University's then Vice President for University Relations and noted, "instead of having one or two interactions with vast numbers of people, we were able to concentrate on the ones who were most likely to choose us and the ones that we most wanted" (p. 3). Lastly, some admissions offices are focusing their time and energy on improving recruitment practices on campus, which consists of revamping their campus visit experience, such as in the case of URI.

Additionally, the importance of studying the effects of recruitment practices, such as at Grisham College, are invaluable in order to annually attract a well-bolstered freshman class. Upon reviewing the feedback from the Grisham CFE, it is evident that the participants left with a

better understanding of the resources that are available for students on campus, which was the primary goal of the program. However, the feedback also conveyed several implications, such as not showcasing diverse elements of Grisham, which may have negatively impacted the impression that some of the participants had of the college. Thus, the fly-in itinerary needs to be tailored to provide a more comprehensive image of the institution since some participants commented on the lack of student diversity on campus or felt that they did not experience the entirety of what the college is like for the typical Grisham student.

Moving forward, the admission personnel at Grisham needs to be cognizant of the type of messaging that they are attempting to deliver to secondary school counselors, which is ultimately communicated through the itinerary that is provided during the fly-in. Counselor events, such as the one examined in this study, are significant since they serve the purpose of educating secondary school counselors about a particular institution with the hopes that they promote the college or university to their students. Thus, it is truly vital to showcase different types of student populations during future CFE's at Grisham in order to appeal to a large target audience. The same principle holds truth for other institutions that are seeking to either incorporate or modify any admission-related counselor events on their respective campuses. Furthermore, the fly-in event is an example of an admission recruitment tool that can be utilized to help develop new partnerships with secondary schools across the nation, which is invaluable when an institution is seeking to grow their undergraduate enrollment, such as at Grisham. In this case, it is vital that Grisham assesses their recruitment strategies on regular basis so that they can identify the best practices that will help to promote the growth of the college. Otherwise, if a college or university does not take the time to improve their practices, they run the risk of missing out on talented students that would benefit from attending their institution.

Lastly, a CFE matters to the future of U.S. higher education since this type of recruitment event can help to promote fair access to college for various audiences, such as historically underserved student populations. In order to effectively recruit low-income or first generation students, for example, admission personnel need to increase and improve their admission strategies to help advance higher education since some students may lack the ability to even visit a college campus. As a result, a secondary school counselor could partake in a CFE, such as the one at Grisham College, in order to learn about a college that their students may have interest in. In return, the counselor could then share their account of their visit with a student who may have interest in that college, but is unable to visit due to financial limitations. Thelin (2011) discussed how higher education was originally created for the “elite man” who was able to afford a postsecondary education, which ultimately excluded certain populations of students, such as women. However, in order to change this founding principle in the 21st century, admission personnel need to focus on the types of students who are missing during a typical recruitment cycle. A CFE is one example of an admission-related event that can help to communicate the message of an institution to a stakeholder who has the potential to impact a student’s decision to attend a particular college or university. While admission personnel cannot be solely responsible for this type of change, recruitment techniques nonetheless must continue to evolve and adapt to the needs of students who are desperately seeking to pursue some form of higher education.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Survey questions

The recent event that I have attended has left me with a good impression of Grisham:

- True
- False

By attending this event, I have a better understanding of the resources that are available for students at Grisham:

- Somewhat
- Yes
- No

It is evident that Grisham has added important amenities and modernized the campus in recent years:

- Yes
- No

How would you describe the overall size and layout of Grisham's campus?

- Too small
- Just right
- Too big

Which of the following factors do you consider when evaluating a college or university? Please select all that apply:

- New facilities
- Residence halls
- Academic offerings, i.e. majors and minors
- Academic reputation
- Diversity of the student body
- Affordability
- Other:

On a scale from 1 to 3 (1 being the lowest, 3 being the highest), how inclined are you to recommend Grisham to a prospective student after your recent visit?

- I would not recommend Grisham
- I might recommend Grisham
- I would definitely recommend Grisham

My visit to Grisham surpassed or exceeded any original expectations that I may have had:

- True
- False

What is your overall evaluation of the campus visit?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

What did you see this weekend that will make you recommend Grisham or deter you from doing so?

- Please answer below:

What was your favorite part of your campus visit?

- Please answer below:

Do you have any recommendations for improving your campus visit experience?

- Please answer below:

Appendix B - Counselor Fly-in Itinerary

National Secondary School Counselor Fly-In
Friday, November 20th - Sunday, November 22nd, 2015

Friday, November 20, 2015

"Early Bird" Activities

8:30 AM - 11:00 AM

Airport

AIRPORT PICK UP

- Grisham Admission Personnel will be picking up guests on a continuous loop throughout the morning and afternoon

8:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Hotel

"MEET AND GREET"

- Drop off luggage
- Mingle with Grisham Admission Personnel over a light breakfast in the Executive Suite

1:00 - 3:45 PM

- Free time to explore the city

4:00 PM

Hotel

- Return to the hotel for freshening up before cocktails/dinner

4:45 PM

Hotel

- Meet in the hotel lobby and take Ubers/taxis to cocktail hour

5:00 - 6:00 PM

Restaurant

- Time to enjoy the views of the harbor district over cocktails before dinner

6:00 - 6:10 PM

- Meet outside restaurant to depart for dinner

6:30 - 8:00 PM

Dinner

8:00 PM

- Depart for overnight accommodations

8:35 PM

Hotel

- Check in

National Secondary School Counselor Fly-In
Saturday, November 21, 2015

7:00-10:00 AM

Hotel Restaurant

BREAKFAST

- Available for Secondary School Counselors who checked in on Friday night
 - Breakfast voucher given at check-in

9:30-10:00 AM

Airport

AIRPORT PICK-UP

- Grisham Admission Personnel be picking up Saturday guest arrivals

10:45 AM

Hotel

CHECK-IN/DROP OFF LUGGAGE

- Guests joining on Saturday will be arriving at the Inn

11:15 AM

Hotel

DEPART FOR GRISHAM COLLEGE

- Grisham Admission Personnel will be driving Secondary School Counselors to campus for the remainder of the morning and afternoon

11:30 AM

Student Center
Grisham College

- Light breakfast and refreshments will be served

11:45 - 12:00 PM

Student Center
Grisham College

OPENING

Vice President for Enrollment & Retention

12:05 - 12:10 PM

Student Center
Grisham College

ACADEMIC BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- Alex Zotos (Admission Graduate Fellow) will walk Secondary School Counselors to individual breakout sessions

12:15 - 12:45 PM

Grisham Athletic Complex - Writer's House
Grisham College

LIBERAL ARTS BREAKOUT SESSION

- Dean of the School of Liberal Arts

1:00 - 1:30 PM

Grisham Athletic Complex - Markets Labs
Grisham College

BUSINESS BREAKOUT SESSION

- Dean of the School of Business
- Managing Director of Accounting & Finance Department
- Current Business students

1:30 - 2:00 PM

Grisham Athletic Complex- Innovation Classroom
Grisham College

EDUCATION & SOCIAL POLICY BREAKOUT SESSION

- Director of Student Support
- Current Grisham Student

2:00 - 2:30 PM

Grisham Athletic Complex - Health Sciences Wing
Grisham College

HEALTH SCIENCES BREAKOUT SESSION

- Health Sciences Representatives

2:30 - 2:45 PM

Grisham Athletic Complex- Health Sciences Wing
Grisham College

BREAK/WALK TO NEXT SESSION

- Alex Zotos (Admission Graduate Fellow) will walk Secondary School Counselors to their last breakout session

2:45 - 3:15 PM

Academic Center
Grisham College

SCIENCE & ENGINEERING BREAKOUT SESSION

- Representative - School of Science & Engineering

3:15 PM

Academic Center
Grisham College

CONCLUDE BREAK OUT SESSIONS

- Current Grisham Student Ambassadors will pick up Secondary School Counselors for a brief residence hall only tour

3:30 - 4:00 PM

RESIDENCE HALL ONLY TOUR

- Secondary School Counselors will have the chance to see three different living options for current Grisham students

4:00 - 4:45 PM

Student Center
Grisham College

EARLY DINNER

4:45 PM

Student Center
Grisham College

RETURN TO HOTEL

5:30 - 6:30 PM

Hotel

COCKTAIL & H'ORDERVES RECEPTION

6:30 PM

Hotel

- Depart for Grisham Men's Ice Hockey game

6:40 - 9:00 PM

Grisham Athletic Complex - Hockey Luxury Box
Grisham College

HOCKEY GAME

- Grisham Men's ice hockey game
- Additional food and drinks will be provided in the luxury box

9:00 PM

Grisham Athletic Complex
Grisham College

RETURN TO HOTEL

- Grisham Admission Personnel will drive Secondary School Counselors back to the hotel after the game has concluded

National Secondary School Counselor Fly-In
Sunday, November 22, 2015

8:30/8:45 AM

Hotel

CHECK-OUT/DEPART FOR CAMPUS

- Grisham Admission Personnel will drive Secondary School Counselors back to campus with luggage

9:00 - 9:30 AM

Student Center
Grisham College

BREAKFAST

- Current Grisham Student Ambassadors will be joining for an informal Q/A over breakfast

9:10 - 9:30 AM

Student Center
Grisham College

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

- Director of Center for Academic Enrichment

9:30 - 10:00 AM

Student Center
Grisham College

O'BRIEN CENTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

- Associate Vice President of Career and Corporate Engagement & Director

10:00 - 10:30 AM

Student Center
Grisham College

FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE & STUDENT LIFE

- Residence Life Staff and Current Students

10:30 - 11:00 AM

Student Center
Grisham College

GRISHAM INFORMATION SESSION

- Director of Undergraduate Admission

11:00 AM

Student Center
Grisham College

FAREWELL - Undergraduate Admission Personnel

- Depart for airport