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Understanding the role of social media on a student's college choice process and the implications on a university's enrollment and marketing strategies

Kimberly C. Thornton
Louisiana Tech University

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UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON A STUDENT’S COLLEGE CHOICE PROCESS AND THE IMPLICATIONS ON A UNIVERSITY’S ENROLLMENT AND MARKETING STRATEGIES

by

Kimberly C. Thornton, B.A., M.S.

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

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We hereby recommend that the dissertation prepared under our supervision by Kimberly C. Thornton entitled "Understanding the Role of Social Media on a Student's College Choice Process and the Implications on a University's Enrollment and Marketing Strategies" be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Ed.D. in Educational Leadership.

Byron McCoy
Supervisor of Dissertation Research
Head of Department
Curriculum, Instruction, and Leadership

Recommendation concurred in:

Advisory Committee

Approved:
Director of Graduate Studies
Dean of the College

Approved:
Dean of the Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

With decreasing state funds, a sluggish economy, and increased competition, universities are finding new ways to recruit prospective students to their institutions (Campbell, 2013; Sandlin & Pena, 2014). One way to create relationships and recruit prospective students to a university is through the use of social media platforms (Han, 2014; Joly, 2016). The purpose of this study, using the theoretical framework of Perna’s (2006) Conceptual College Choice model, was to understand how social media impacted student college choice process by analyzing how universities used social media sites to market their universities to prospective students using the qualitative method of content analysis. Sixteen universities, based on the size and setting classification of the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.), were chosen. Their official social media accounts were analyzed during a seven-day period in the month of October of 2016. The results found all universities were active on at least Facebook and Twitter; however, prospective students were using Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube more frequently, thus a majority of the universities studied were missing the opportunity to connect on the students’ social media platforms of choice, which could impact enrollment numbers. The use of popular hashtags and the type of content posted to the university’s social media sites also impacted the number of likes, shares, and comments made by prospective students. The limitation of the study included the use of a stratified purposeful sample and the difficulty of determining profile statuses.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For graduating high school seniors, deciding where to attend college is one of the most important decisions they will make in their lives (Dolinsky, 2010; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Johnston, 2010; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Pema, 2006). Students choose a university or college over others for a variety of reasons (Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Johnston, 2010; Pema, 2006). These reasons or factors include proximity to home, cost, financial aid, scholarships, housing, program offerings, student life, academic reputation, prestige of a university, and athletic programs (Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Johnston, 2012; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012). There are also many different influences impacting first-time freshmen’s decisions on where to attend college. These influences include parents’ opinions, where friends are going, university publications, word of mouth, university recruiters, advice from high school counselors, and social media sites (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Han, 2014; Joly, 2016; Johnston, 2010; Millet & MacKenzie, 1996; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). Enrollment managers’ interest in the reasons why first-time freshmen choose their universities is simple; the desire and need for universities to increase their student enrollment (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Lewison & Hawes, 2007). With enrollment at higher education institutions remaining
stagnant, decreasing state funds, and the intense competition for students, it has become important for universities to understand the considerations or reasons prospective first-time freshmen used to decide where they will spend the next four years of their lives (Casey & Llewellyn, 2012; Han, 2014; Holley & Harris, 2010; Johnston, 2010; Lewison & Hawes, 2007). Universities have been looking for ways to offset the decrease in state funding while increasing revenue (Han, 2014; Holley & Harris, 2010; Johnston, 2010). In recent years, enrollment has become an integral part of the success and growth of a university, which has placed an important role on the marketing strategies of a university and recruitment of prospective students (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Lewison & Hawes, 2007). Understanding the processes and considerations traditional first-time freshmen used when deciding on their chosen university allow university admissions offices to more effectively recruit first-time freshmen to their universities (Han, 2014; Holler & Gallagher, 1987; Johnston, 2010; Perna, 2006). Yugo and Reeve (2007) found the effectiveness of a university recruitment plan to be based on the understanding of the different factors and influences students used when making their college choices. This underscores the importance for universities to understand the processes and considerations first-time freshmen utilize when deciding on their universities of choice (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Perna, 2006; Yugo & Reeve, 2007).

**Background of Problem**

Universities have been steadily losing state funding, facing increased competition, and working to identify opportunities to regain the loss of revenue by increasing student enrollment (Casey & Llewellyn, 2012; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Lewison & Hawes, 2007; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). As a result, universities have begun to look at student
enrollment as the key component in making up the budget deficit while continuing to
grow their campus communities (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Lewison & Hawes, 2007;
Yugo & Reeve, 2007). Universities have become focused on recruiting prospective
college students and increasing their incoming freshmen classes through identifying the
factors influencing students’ college choice decision-making processes and how those
factors affected college marketing and recruiting strategies (Bateman & Spruill, 1996;
DesJardins & et al., 1997; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Han, 2014; Joseph, Mullen, &
Spake, 2012; Lewison & Hawes, 2007; Litten, 1987; Nadelson, 2013; Perna,
2006). Many factors have influenced students’ decisions, including socioeconomic
status, gender, cost, location of a university, ethnicity, racial background, parent’s level
of education, friends’ influences, universities’ publications, word of mouth, scholarships,
a university’s reputation, and the marketing of a university, such as the use of social
media by universities and other prospective students (Bateman & Spruill, 1996;
DesJardins & et al., 1997; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Han, 2014; Joly, 2016; Joseph,
Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Litten, 1987; Nadelson, 2013; Perna, 2006).

Over the years, universities’ target market, prospective students, has become
segmented, because student groups have often been looking for different things when
choosing a university or college (Han, 2014; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011;
Johnston, 2010; Lewison & Hawes, 2007; Perna, 2006). As a result, universities have
started to identify the many different types of students attending their institutions and
their competitors in order to more effectively recruit prospective students to their
universities and colleges (Han, 2014; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Johnston, 2010;
Lewison & Hawes, 2007; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). Different students looked at
different factors when choosing an institution of higher education to attend (Han, 2014; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Johnston, 2010, Lewison & Hawes, 2007; Perna, 2006). Universities must be aware of these different factors and how they affect prospective students in order to create integrated marketing plans that will attract students to attend their universities (Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Johnston, 2010; Perna, 2006). According to Noel-Levitz (2009), private universities and colleges spent on average $2,143 per student on recruiting; public, four-year universities spent $461 per student; and public, two-year colleges spent $263 per student on recruiting. Those universities and colleges with smaller enrollments on average spent more on recruiting students than bigger universities, underscoring the importance of student recruitment to a university and understanding students’ decision-making processes when choosing a university or college to attend (Noel-Levitz, 2009).

Traditional factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, financial aid, location, and cost all played an important part in college choice process (Cox, 2016; Hossler et al., 1998; Hurwitz, 2012; McDonough, 1996; Perna, 2006; Perna & Li, 2006; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Shaw et al., 2009; Smith, 2008). The marketing of a university, its image, reputation, print publications, and campus tours also played a key role in a student’s decision-making process (Copper, 2009; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Joseph, Mullen, & Stake, 2012). However, in the last decade, there is a new form of communication prospective students and institutions of higher education have started to use more frequently (Greenwood, 2012; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2012; Joly, 2016; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). This communication is online and commonly referred to as social media (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2013; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). Social media
is defined as online technology used for the instantaneous exchange of information between people across the world and could be in text form, picture form, or a combination of both pictures and text (Casey & Llewellyn, 2012; Han, 2014; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Johnston, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, Flicker, Pinterest, YouTube, Vimeo, Vine, Tumblr, and Snapchat (Casey & Llewellyn, 2012; Han, 2014; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Johnston, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). This type of online communication is extremely popular among prospective and current college students as well as prospective students (Casey & Llewellyn, 2012; Han, 2014; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Johnston, 2010; Joly, 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). The two most popular social media sites used by prospective and current college students have been Facebook and Twitter (Campbell, 2013; Evans, 2014; Greenwood, 2012; Noel-Levitz, 2014; Sandlin & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). While a majority of prospective students utilize social media in researching colleges to attend, the level of influence of social media on students’ college choice process has been largely unknown; however, this type of communication would be beneficial to universities to utilize when marketing to and recruiting prospective students (Evans, 2014; Greenwood, 2012; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2012; Noel-Levitz, 2014; Sandlin & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015).

Statement of the Research Problem

As competition increases, universities have started looking for insights and recruitment strategies that translate into higher student enrollment numbers (Campbell, 2013; Evans, 2014; Greenwood, 2012; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Noel-Levitz,
2014; Sandlin & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). With the widespread use and popularity of social media sites for prospective students, there has become an opportunity for universities and colleges to use this type of online communication in their marketing of their universities and colleges and the recruitment of students (Campbell, 2013; Evans, 2014; Greenwood, 2012; Joly, 2016; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Noel-Levitz, 2014; Sandlin & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). However, the impact of social media on college choice preference has been largely unknown due to its newness and rapid advancement, and as a result, social media and its impact on university marketing, student recruitment, and college choice process needs to be studied (Evans, 2014; Greenwood, 2012; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2012; Joly, 2016; Noel-Levitz, 2014; Sandlin & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). The purpose of this research study was to understand how social media impacted students' college choice decision-making processes by analyzing how universities used social media sites to market their universities to prospective students.

**Significance of the Research Problem**

This study has contributed to the body of knowledge about the college choice method, specifically focusing on the final stage of the process, choice (Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Litten, 1982; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006, Yan & Slagle, 2006). It has also contributed to the body of knowledge regarding the impact of social media on prospective students or customers, which has marketing implications for universities and colleges (Campbell, 2013: Evans, 2014; Greenwood, 2012; Sandlin & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). It has become important for universities and colleges to determine the most
effective marketing strategies for recruiting college-bound students because of the changing landscape of funding institutions of higher learning and the increased competition they face (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Lewison & Hawes, 2007). Public four-year universities have been losing state funding each year due to budget cuts, which puts an emphasis on increasing enrollment to make up for the shortfall (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Lewison & Hawes, 2007). The tuition and fees paid by college students every year have become more important to keep universities functioning, which increased the need to market a university effectively in order to recruit students (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Lewison & Hawes, 2007). This translates into the burden of recruiting students falling on university admissions offices, and it has become essential for admissions professionals to understand what factors and influences motivated college-bound students to attend their universities of choice and how universities can utilize marketing strategies, such as increasing their use of social media sites in order to increase awareness, build relationships, and recruit more students who they have identified as their target market (Campbell, 2013; Evans, 2014; Greenwood, 2012; Han, 2014; Johnston, Joly, 2016; 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lewison & Hawes, 2007).

Presentation of Methods and Research Questions

This qualitative research study was designed to determine how social media impacted students’ college choice decision-making processes by analyzing universities’ official social media sites in order to understand how they marketed their universities to prospective students. The qualitative method used to determine the level of impact universities’ social media sites had on college choice process was content analysis. A comprehensive content analysis was used to analyze the different social media platforms
utilized by 16 different universities in order to recruit prospective students during a seven
day period in October of 2016. The theoretical framework for the study was the college
choice model or the process students used when deciding on a college or university to
attend (Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher,
1987; Litten, 1982; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle,
2006). Much research has been done on the college choice process, and many models
have been created to determine the factors and process students go through when
choosing a university or college to attend (Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b;
Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Litten, 1982; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006;
Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). This study used the college choice model as
defined by Perna (2006).

The following research questions were identified for this research study:

1. How were universities utilizing their social media sites to connect with and
   recruit prospective students?
2. What impact, if any, did official university social media sites have on students’
   college choice decision-making processes?
3. What trends and/or patterns emerged from this study that will help universities
   more effectively market their universities to students?

By utilizing Perna’s (2006) college choice model as the theoretical framework to conduct
a research design utilizing qualitative research techniques, the level of influence social
media had on a student’s college choice process was explored and explained by
answering the identified research questions using content analysis of universities’ social
media sites. The following chapters explain the theoretical framework further, review the
literature on college choice model and recruiting models, and explain the methods used for the study.

**Definitions of Key Concepts**

Blog – A blog is a webpage or website created and maintained by a person or a group of people. It is usually informally written and allows the writer of the blog to share their ideas and others to post feedback, comments, and follow the blog.

College – A college is defined as an institution of education a student can attend for two or four years and receive a degree in higher learning.

College choice process – A model created by researchers, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) explaining the process students use when deciding to attend college, and if so, what college to attend.

Content analysis research method – A qualitative research method which analyzes text to uncover nuances and meanings related to an organization, its stakeholders, and society.

Facebook – A social media site allowing users to share text messages, pictures, follow people, and become friends with other users. The site is free to join.

Flickr – It is a free photo-sharing online platform allowing users to post pictures to albums, share the pictures, and follow other users’ Flickr accounts. Each account can store up to 1,000 GB of pictures.

Foursquare – It is a free social media app designed for mobile phones to help users see their friends’ locations and post reviews about locations they check in on their phones.
There is an opportunity for users to check into locations to receive discounts and to earn points.

Google+ – A free online social media platform, while similar to Facebook, is used as a place for users to create online communities and virtual meeting places.

Hashtag – A word or words preceded by a # to identify a message on a specific topic on a social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, or Instagram. The purpose of a hashtag is to identify a word or words trending in order to see all of the comments, posts, and pictures about the hash tagged message.

Higher education institution – A university or college offering an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.

Instagram – A free social media platform allowing users to post real-time photos and short videos to their accounts. Users can also share other’s videos, follow other users, and like other user’s photos and videos. Companies have also begun to use this social media platform as a way to advertise their products.

LinkedIn – It is a free social media site for professionals to connect, network, and post resumes, job openings, and news.

Pinterest – A free social media platform allowing users to search and post photos ranging from recipes to college memorabilia to fashion ideas to cleaning products to individual online boards through a process called pinning. Users can like pins, post pins to their boards, create new boards, and share pins with other users. They can also follow other Pinterest users.
Prospective student – A person who has graduated from high school or received a GED and is looking to attend an institution of higher education to receive a college or university degree.

Snapchat – It is a free mobile app designed for users to take pictures or snaps, upload them to the social media site, and share them only with other users they selected. These snaps or pictures are viewable to the selected user for a few seconds and then disappear. If users would like to share snaps to the public, they can use the feature, stories.

Social media sites - Online technology used for the instantaneous exchange of information between people across the world. Social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, YouTube, Tumblr, Vine, Vimeo, Snapchat, and blogs. Most social media sites allow users to create and maintain accounts for free. Social media sites are also known as social networking sites for the purpose of this research study.

Tumblr- A popular social media site allowing users to blog using visual content. It is very popular among teens and young adults.

Twitter – A popular and free microblogging site allowing users to post no more than 160 characters and pictures to their site. When users post their messages to twitter, they are called tweets. Users can follow other users, retweet messages, and like tweets.

University - A four-year educational institution for high-achieving students to gain a specialized degree.

Vimeo – A free social media platform designed for users to post and view videos online; however, most of the videos posted to Vimeo are creative and art-related as compared to the types of videos posted to YouTube.
Vine – A free social media app designed for mobile phones allowing users to post short videos to their accounts. These videos can be embedded into Twitter tweets and are no longer than six seconds each.

YouTube – A popular and free social media platform designed for users to post and view videos online. It is the largest online video platform.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to rising tuition costs, decreased state funding, and increased competition, the marketing of a university and recruitment of prospective students have become very important in the field of higher education (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010). Students have a variety of universities and colleges to choose from to pursue their degrees, and enrollment officers must be strategic in how they market their universities to prospective students (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Kotler, 2003). It is important for universities and colleges to identify and understand the factors prospective first-time freshmen use to decide where they will attend college in order to more effectively market to prospective students and increase student enrollment (Han, 2014; Holley & Harris, 2010; Johnston, 2010; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Southerland, 2006).

In 2012, universities used tuition to cover 44% of their expenditures as compared to using 29% of tuition in 1987 to cover operating costs (Han, 2014). As the tuition costs increase and the competition to attract students continues, there is a need for universities to strategically market their universities to prospective students (Han, 2014). Marketing is defined as identifying and meeting the needs of a customer, and it is important university enrollment managers are aware of the influential student characteristics as defined by students going through the college choice process (Han, 2014; Kotler, 2003). The newest phenomenon of marketing is social media marketing, which can be
defined as online technology people use to communicate with others (Akar & Topcu, 2011; Joly, 2016; Joly, 2015; Stamper, 2015). Popular social media platforms include blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, and Instagram (Akar & Topcu, 2011; Joly, 2016; Joly, 2015; Stamper, 2015). In 2011, social media platforms had over 100 million visits a month, making this form of technology an important marketing tool for universities and colleges (Akar & Topcu, 2011; Joly, 2016; Joly 2015; Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015). In 2010, the majority of people born after 1976 were using Facebook as an alternative to email, making social media an important communication tool for prospective college students (Botha, Farshid, & Pitt, 2011). Understanding the factors influencing first-time freshmen as they are deciding on their chosen university will allow university admissions offices to more effectively market and recruit freshmen to their universities (Han, 2014; Holley & Harris, 2010; Johnston, 2010; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012). This will lead to higher enrollment and growth for a university (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012). The purpose of this research study was to understand how social media impacted students’ college choice decision-making processes by analyzing how universities used social media sites to market their universities to prospective students.

**Theoretical Framework**

Higher education has become increasingly diverse, and the competition for students has become intense (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2012; Joseph, & Spake, 2012). With so many options for students and increased competition, universities have relied on the different college choice models to describe a student’s decision-making process of choosing a university to understand their target market and the influences they considered
in order to develop more effective institutional recruiting policies and marketing plans (Bergeson, 2009a; Bergeson, 2009b; Chapman, 1981; Han, 2014; Jackson, 1986; Johnston, 2012; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yang & Slagle, 2006). The theoretical framework for this study, which was to understand how social media impacted students’ college choice decision-making processes by analyzing universities’ official social media sites to determine how they market their universities to prospective students, was Perna’s conceptual college choice model (Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1986; Litten, 1982; Lopez-Turley, 2009; Paulsen 1990; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006).

Multiple college choice models have been created and used in research studies to examine the decision-making processes students go through as they are deciding to attend an institution of higher education (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Chapman, 1981; Han, 2014; Jackson, 1986; Litten, 1982; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). The earliest college choice model was created by Chapman in 1981 (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Chapman, 1981; Han, 2014; Litten, 1982; Perna, 2006). This model focused on the different factors students felt influenced their decision-making processes and how the different factors were connected to determine a student’s college choice (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Chapman, 1981; Han, 2014). Two types of factors were identified, student characteristics and external influences, to help researchers determine why students chose the universities they did (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Chapman, 1981; Han, 2014). This model,
while effective, has not been used as widely as other college choice models, because it failed to look at the interaction between the different factors, only the connection of the factors (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Han, 2014).

In 1987, Hossler & Gallagher created the most widely used college choice model, which included three stages, pre-disposition, search, and choice (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Han, 2014; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). It is known as a three phase model of college choice process (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Han, 2014; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). This model has become the most well-known college choice model and has produced very useful information for university administrators to use during the student recruitment process (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Han, 2014; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006).

The first stage, pre-disposition, focused on the period when high school students decide whether or not to attend a university after they graduate high school. This stage can happen anytime during kindergarten through eighth grade. It represented the period of time parents help children develop the desire to attend a university or college (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). Sociological factors, such as socioeconomic status, gender, race, and parental education, played a large role in this stage.
The second stage, during which students decided to attend a university, is called search (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). In this stage, they gathered relevant information about different universities (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). This stage typically happened during the first two years of high school (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Southerland, 2006). Students and their parents worked together to determine their needs, values, wants, desires, and limitations as they started the college search process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006). Students took the ACT and/or SAT and started to evaluate their academic abilities during this stage (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). They then matched those factors to several different institutions meeting their needs, which created university choice sets for the students (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Dolinsky, 2010; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). This stage focused on econometric variables, such as students’ family backgrounds, economic factors, and academic factors (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). Parents played an important role in this stage by setting aspirations for their children, providing encouragement, and active support (Bergerson, 2009a; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).
During the last stage, or choice, high school students evaluated the different universities they considered, and they made their final decisions on where to attend college (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Dolinsky, 2010; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006). The choice stage typically happened during the last two years of high school as students began to move away from their parents’ opinions and began to rely on friends, siblings, teachers, high school counselors, and other sources to make their final college attendance decisions (Bergerson, 2009a; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). This stage also relied on econometric variables to describe the factors students used to make their final decision (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Han, 2014; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). Hossler & Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model was created to provide administrators, policymakers, and university officials insight into students’ decision-making processes, and it has proven to be a very powerful student decision-making model (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Han, 2014; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006).

Litten’s (1982) Expanded Model of College Choice Process further defined how race, gender, academic ability, parents’ level of education, and geographical location impacted each of the three stages of the college choice process (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Litten, 1982). It approached the college choice process as funnel, in which a large number of high school students began the college choice process in the pre-disposition stage, but a much smaller number of students completed the process and decided to enroll in a university or college (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Litten 1982). This model examined both the personal and social factors influencing a student’s college choice process by
emphasizing the importance of the pre-disposition stage. In the first stage, it looked at five sociological factors: background, personal attributes, high school characteristics, student performance, and student environment. Litten (1982) argued students then consulted with four additional groups during the search and choice phases to help with their college-decision making process, and those groups included influences, public policy, college actions, and institutional characteristics (Bateman & Spruill, 1996). According to Litten's (1982) model, students making their college choice decisions looked at factors differently based on their unique characteristics (Bateman & Spruill, 1996). Overall, this model provided researchers and admissions recruiters the opportunity to identify specified variables and allowed for further segmentation of student populations based on gender, race, socioeconomic status, ability level, location, and parents' level of education (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Litten, 1982). This model combined sociological and econometric models to create a comprehensive college choice model for university administrators and researchers (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Litten, 1982; Perna, 2006).

While Hossler & Gallagher's (1987) and Litten's (1982) College Choice Models factored in both sociological and econometric factors, other college choice models used one type of variable, sociological or econometric, to explain a student's college decision-making process (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). The Sociological Model of Status Attainment predicted individuals with higher levels of academic preparation and greater achievement received greater encouragement from significant influences, such as their parents and high school counselors, which resulted in higher aspirations for those students (Bateman
Higher aspirations led to the increased likelihood of greater educational and career aspirations (Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Hossler, Braxton, & Coppersmith, 1989; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). This model focused on the socioeconomic background characteristics influencing students' decisions, such as socioeconomic status; race; parent's level of education; and increased emphasis on cultural and social capital (Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). Students first excluded and then evaluated higher education alternatives based on academic considerations, geographical location, and economic factors (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Perna, 2006). Students used the following criteria when evaluating a university or college: students' family background, social context, and academic experiences (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). It is important to understand students consider the economic benefits of attending college versus the costs associated with attending. However, the model did not take into account the lack of access to information students may have experienced or the amount of information needed to make an informed decision about college attendance, important factors, which needed to be considered in the college choice process (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006).

The other model of college choice was the Economic Model of Capital Investment (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). This model assumed students act rationally in a
manner maximizing their choices given their personal situations, tastes, and preferences. Students then considered both monetary and nonmonetary benefits as they weighed the anticipated benefits of higher education (Becker, 1993; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Paulsen, 2006; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). The criteria students considered were family income and academic ability (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). While this was an effective model, there were limitations (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). One limitation assumed when anticipated benefits and costs for attending a college were the same, students made different decisions based on their different preferences, ability to take risks, and fear of uncertainty (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). However, the model did not allow the determination of these reasons as the assumption was the college choice decisions made by students were rational (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Perna, 2006, Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006).

Paulsen (1990) created a college choice model combining both models focused on identifying student and institutional characteristics and examining their interaction to explain a student’s college decision-making process (Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; DesJardins et al., 1997; Han, 2014; Yan & Slagle, 2006). This model suggested to first identify institutional characteristics and then analyze the interaction of institutional characteristics with student characteristics because this interaction played an important role in a student’s college choice process (DesJardins et al., 1997; Han, 2014;
Yan & Slagle, 2006). As a result, this model helped enrollment managers more effectively segment and target the desired student population (DesJardins et al., 1997; Han, 2014; Yan & Slagle, 2006). However, several limitations of this model were identified (Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Han, 2014). This model did not account for race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Freeman 1997). As the college-ready population has grown more diverse and has become more stratified, researchers and college administrators have moved away from using comprehensive college choice models such as the ones created by Paulsen (1990); Hossler and Gallagher (1987); and Litten (1982) to explain the reasons why students choose the institutions they do (Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b). As a result, there was a need to create a new college choice model, which identified and more closely aligned with today’s students’ characteristics (Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Perna, 2006).

Pena (2006) created a conceptual college choice model combining assumptions from both the economical and sociological models because of the belief students’ college choice decisions were influenced by their system of values and beliefs, which defined students’ perceptions, or their habitus (Bergerson, 2009a; Perna, 2006). This model focused on the differences of students’ individual choices and determined the access and type of information students had as they were making their choices by exploring four unique layers (Bergerson, 2009a; Perna, 2006). The layers included habitus factors; school and community context factors; higher education context; and social, economic, and policy context. The first layer or center of the model was habitus factors. They included demographic factors such as gender and race; cultural capital factors, including
cultural knowledge and college attainment value; and social capital factors, which consisted of access to information about higher education and assistance with higher education (Bergerson, 2009a; Perna, 2006). The second level, school and community context, determined the availability of resources; the types of resources available; and the structural supports and barriers students face. The third level of this college choice model was the higher education context. It included the marketing and recruitment of a university or college, its location, and the institutional characteristics students deemed important when making their college decisions (Bergerson, 2009a; Perna, 2006). The last level of the model was the social, economic, and policy context. This level included demographic characteristics such as social forces, economic characteristics such as unemployment rates, and public policy issues such as the establishment of new federal or state educational aid (Bergerson, 2009a; Perna, 2006). This comprehensive college choice model allowed for both the discovery of the reasons why students chose a college when costs and benefits were equal as well as determining students’ levels of access to information sources, making this model very effective in explaining a student’s decision-making process (Bergerson, 2009; Perna, 2006).

However, it is important to note several studies focusing on college choice models had determined students’ decision-making processes were not always rational, which was the assumption of many of the college choice models (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). Therefore, while these college choice models were extremely useful in predicting student college choice process, they could not fully explain students’ decisions when making their final college choice (Han,
Nonetheless, college choice models were strong predictors of students’ college decision-making processes (Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Perna, 2006). Each of the college choice models focused on three distinct stages students experienced during the college decision-making process: pre-disposition, search, and choice (Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown, & Oplatka, 2015; Johnston, 2012; Perna, 2006). However, each model identified and examined different factors or conditions impacting student choice (Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown, & Oplatka, 2015). The Sociological Model of Status Attainment focused on sociological factors, while ignoring the economic factors influencing college choice, which were the only factors Economic Model of Capital of Investment examined, resulting in limitations in both models (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Hossler, Braxton, & Coppersmith, 1989; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). Chapman’s (1981) model of college choice was helpful in identifying both student characteristics and external influences and how they were connected in order to explain a student’s college choice process, but it only looked at how the factors were connected, not how they interacted with one another to affect a student’s decision, thus limiting its ability to completely explain the college choice process (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Hossler, Braxton, & Coppersmith, 1989; Han, 2014; Southerland, 2006). Hossler’s & Gallagher’s (1987) model thoroughly defined the three stages of the student college choice process and identified the sociological and economic factors impacting students’ decision making; however, it did not examine how race, gender, and socioeconomic status affected the student’s process, important factors to
consider (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Hossler, Braxton, & Coppersmith, 1989; Perna, 2006; Southerland, 2006; Yan & Slagle, 2006). Litten’s (1986) Expanded Model of College Choice Process focused on how race, gender, academic ability, and other specific factors influence the three stages of college choice model, but it did not explore the interaction of these factors (Litten, 1982; Perna, 2006). While Paulsen’s (1990) model focused on both student and institutional characteristics as well as the impact of their interaction on students’ college choice model, it did not account for race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic factors influencing a student’s decision-making process, due to the increasing stratification of the current prospective student population (Han, 2014; Perna, 2006). However, Perna’s (2006) college choice model focused on both sociological and economic factors as well as determining the level of access and knowledge available to students as they went through the college choice process. The model identified four detailed layers which took race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors into account along with identifying barriers to higher education access; policy implications; and other important factors such as social and cultural capital (Perna, 2006). This model also clearly defined a university’s marketing and recruiting plans as important factors in a student’s college decision-making process (Perna, 2006). Perna’s (2006) college choice model was the theoretical lens for this research study, which sought to determine how universities utilize their official social media site to recruit students, thus impacting student college choice process (Bergerson, 2009a; Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).
Background

Universities have been struggling financially due to state budget cuts and must rely on increased student enrollment, and as a result, students’ college choice model has become an important tool in the recruitment of students and marketing of a university (Dolinsky, 2010; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Johnston 2010; Yan & Slagle, 2006). Students considered a variety of student and institutional factors when making their decisions to attend their universities of choice (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Han, 2014; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Litten, 1982). They considered location, academic reputation, the university’s image, cost of the university, financial aid packages, and opinions of those closest to them to name a few (Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Johnston, 2010; Lillis & Tian, 2008). Using Perna’s (2006) Conceptual College Choice model, the different factors students used when going through the college choice decision processes were identified, examined, and discussed in great detail.

Student Characteristics

Over the years, students have identified factors having influenced their college choice decisions, and these factors were commonly divided into two categories, student characteristics and institutional characteristics (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Han, 2014; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Litten, 1982). Student characteristics included ethnicity and race; gender; socioeconomic status and cost; academic achievement; and social influences, all of these characteristics falling under the habitus level of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model (Han, 2014; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012). These characteristics were significant in a student’s college choice process (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Dolinsky,
2010; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006). DesJardins et al. (1997), using longitudinal data from the 1995 ACT data and matched it with institutional data, determined the impact of different student and institutional characteristics on students’ decisions to apply to a land grant institution. A student’s economic background was found to be the most important characteristic followed by geographical location, the cost of a university, and personal attitudes (DesJardins et al., 1997). While there was no difference in the factors when students were categorized by gender, there were significant differences when divided by race and ethnicity; age; number of siblings, family income; and distance from home when determining the likelihood of applying to a land grant institution (DesJardins et al., 1997). Similarly, Cho et al. (2008) conducted a survey focusing on the role of gender, race, and socioeconomic status in the college choice process of first generation and non-first generation students. In a diverse sample of 1,339 students surveyed, psychological factors were identified as the most influential for students followed by the university’s academic quality. Students rated a university’s habitus to be important as well, the student’s social and psychological needs fitting with the campus culture, the first layer of Perna’s (2006) college choice model (Cho et al., 2008). Kim et al. (2014), surveying 251 students attending a major university in the Southeastern United States, found institutional characteristics to be the most influential factor followed by student characteristics when deciding where to attend a university. As a result, student characteristics need to be identified and examined by university enrollment managers in order to better target and recruit students to their university (Cho et al., 2008; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; DesJardins et al., 1997; Gyapong & Smith, 2014; Han 2014; Nadelson, 2013; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005). Two
important student characteristics universities should consider when targeting their target market are a student’s race and ethnic background (Cho et al., 2008; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; DesJardins et al., 1997; Gyapong & Smith, 2014; Han 2014; Nadelson, 2013; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005).

**Race and Ethnicity.** How students chose colleges and universities were based on a variety of factors; however, prospective students of different ethnicities and racial backgrounds used different factors when making their college choice decisions (Cho et al., 2008; Hurtado et al., 1996). White, African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian Americans students were the most commonly studied groups, and major differences in how students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds made the decision to attend college, their application behaviors, and college choice behaviors were found (Cho et al., 2008; Hurtado et al., 1996; Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009). Kim, DesJardins, and McCall (2009), analyzing 99,287 ACT scores from students applying to the University of Iowa from 1997-98 to 2001-02, focused on how students from different ethnic backgrounds and income groups responded differently to financial aid packages as they were applying to universities and making their final college decisions. Asian American students were more likely to apply to a higher number of universities based on the level of financial aid they expected to receive from universities as compared to other racial groups (Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009). University enrollment was negatively impacted when African Americans and Latinos expected to receive financial aid packages and did not (Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009). However, White and Asian American students were less likely to refuse to attend a university based on receiving lower financial aid packages than expected (Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009). Overall,
African Americans and Latinos were more likely to attend a university where they received a large financial aid package as compared to their White counterparts, due in large part to their socioeconomic status, an important factor for enrollment managers to understand and utilize to market their universities to these prospective students (Han, 2014; Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009). Similarly, Hurtado et al. (1996), focusing on the difference in college accessibility in the choice stage based on racial and ethnic backgrounds, gathered data on 21,000 students from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 and the Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study of 1990-92. Asian Americans were found to be the most prepared for college, and along with White students, they were the most likely to follow the traditional college choice models (Hurtado et al., 1996). Asian students were also more likely to have taken the ACT and/or the SAT before their senior year and had submitted more applications as compared to White, African American, and Latino students (Hurtado et al., 1996). Overall, there were many differences found between the four different student groups when looking at factors determining college choice (Cho et al., 2008; Hurtado et al., 1996; Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009).

Asian American students were found to use a unique set factors when deciding on a university as compared to other racial groups (Poon & Byrd, 2013). After surveying 409 Asian American respondents and interviewing 10 of those students, five factors were identified as being the most important considerations in their college decisions (Poon & Byrd, 2013). The factors were the institution’s academic reputation, family approval, affordability, parental influence, and career plans with the most important factor being parent’s influence (Cho et al., 2008; Nadelson, 2013; Poon & Byrd, 2013). High school
counselors and teachers also played an important role in Asian American students’ college decisions (Poon & Byrd, 2013). DesJardins et al. (1997), researching students attending elite institutions, found White and Asian American students surveyed came from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, were better prepared academically, and were more likely to attend elite institutions than students from other racial backgrounds, verifying the other studies’ results (DesJardins et al., 1997; McDonough et al., 1997; Poon & Byrd, 2013). Asian American prospective students were also more likely to factor in college rankings by independent sources when choosing a university as opposed to other ethnic groups, as they were planning on studying law or medicine once they completed their undergraduate degrees (Sanoff et al., 2007). It is important for universities to identify and study the factors Asian Americans consider when going through the college decision-making process as they target and recruit Asian Americans to attend their universities and colleges (Han, 2014; Poon & Byrd, 2013; Sanoff et al., 2007).

Latinos were found to be the least college-ready and least likely to have followed a traditional college choice model when compared to White students (Hurtado et al., 1996; Ryan, 2012). Hurtado et al. (1996) found Latino students to have submitted the lowest number of applications and applied to the fewest number of colleges and universities. They also attended two-year colleges at a higher rate than other student groups and were the largest population at community colleges in the United States (Hurtado et al., 1996; Ryan, 2012). Lastly, Latinos were found to be at a greater disadvantage when it came to the likelihood of attending college, due to their low socioeconomic status, and low parental social capital (Perna, 2006; Ryan, 2012).
However, over the next few decades, Latinos will make-up over half of the college-age population, so university enrollment managers will need to understand the reasons behind their college choice process and understand the characteristics they utilized in their decision-making process in order to better target them during the recruitment process to increase their university’s enrollment and diversity (Han, 2014; Hurtado et al., 1996; Johnston, 212; Ryan, 2012).

African Americans also considered a variety of factors when deciding on a college to attend (Cho et al., 2008; Crawford, 2013; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Hurtado et al., 1996). The most common factors African Americans considered were the academic programs offered at institutions of higher education, cost of attendance, and family influences (Cho et al., 2008; Crawford, 2013; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Hurtado et al., 1996). A majority of African American students identified the following factors: a university's tuition costs, location of the university, university's curriculum, its facilities, student activities offered at a university, and the diversity of the university to be important in their decision-making processes (Cho et al., 2008; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; Crawford, 2013; Gyapong & Smith, 2012). Through a survey of 1,339 diverse college freshmen, Cho et al. (2008) identified psychological, academic, and social factors as the most important factors in their college choice processes. Through a survey administered to first-time freshman at a Historically Black College and/or University (HBCU), 55% of students were most influenced by academic programs, 25% were influenced by cost of the university, and 20% were influenced by family members (Gyapong & Smith, 2012). The characteristics they identified as most important included cost of attendance, the university’s location, a university’s curriculum, its facilities,
student activities, and class sizes (Gyapong & Smith, 2012). Crawford (2013) found financial aid funding to be the most important factor in the college choice process as determined by the 431 students surveyed. Confer and Mamiseishvili (2012) analyzed the Admitted Student Questionnaire Plus taken by 283 minorities attending a university and found the amount of financial aid received, diversity, and location of the university to be important. African Americans were also more likely to attend a university or college, if it was less than 50 miles from their home; they visited the campus; felt they fit in with current students during their visit; and received promotional materials from the university. The role of HBCUs, and the impact they had on African Americans students as they made their college choices were the focus of two studies (Crawford, 2013; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005). African American students and their parents were found to be more interested in HBCUs because of a family connection, perceived limited options of available colleges and universities, and feelings HBCUs were created to serve and educate African American students exclusively (Crawford, 2013; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005). Tobolowsky, Outcalt, and McDonough (2005) found students, parents, and their high school counselors interviewed felt HBCUs were friendlier and easier to access than predominantly white institutions (PWIs), which led to more African American students applying at HBCUs. Enrollment managers at PWIs have an opportunity to reach out to African American students through the education of their high schools counselors; on-campus recruiting events for both parents and students; and through recruiting brochures focusing on diversity and the enrollment process to decrease barrier to PWIs and increase the enrollment of African Americans at their universities (Han, 2014; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005).
However, there was one student characteristic students from all ethnic and racial backgrounds identified as a key factor when making their college choice decision, financial aid packages (Millet & MacKenzie, 1996). Millett and MacKenzie (1996) found universities and colleges can increase diversity on campus by increasing the amount of financial aid packages offered to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, because those students were typically Latinos and African Americans. Through increased financial aid, more students from diverse backgrounds were able to attend the university or college of their choosing (Millett & MacKenzie, 1996). This provides an opportunity for enrollment managers to examine the different financial aid packages offered to their students and how distributing financial aid packages would change the diversity make-up of their universities and colleges and well as positively impact enrollment (Han, 2014; Millett & MacKenzie, 1996).

Students of different ethnicities and racial backgrounds participated in the college choice process differently (Cho et al., 2008; Crawford, 2013; DesJardins et al., 1997; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Hurtado et al., 1996; McDonough et al., 1997; Millett & MacKenzie, 1996; Ryan, 2012; Poon & Byrd, 2013; Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonough, 2005). Asian American and White students were found to apply to more institutions, be better academically prepared, and more likely to attend elite universities as compared to their Latino and African American counterparts (DesJardins et al., 1997; Hurtado et al., 1996; McDonough et al., 1997). Asian American students identified academic reputation, family approval, affordability, parental influence, and career plans as the most important considerations influencing their college choice decisions (Poon & Byrd, 2013). African American students identified academic programs, cost of
attendance, and family influences as the most important factors for their decision-making decisions (Crawford, 2013; Gyapong & Smith, 2012). African American students also felt HBCUs were more welcoming and accessible than PWIs (Tobolowsky, Outcalt & McDonough, 2005). Latino students were least likely to attend a four-year university and most likely to attend a two-year college, providing an opportunity for four-year universities to work with high school counselors to inform Latinos of the importance of attending institutions of higher education (Hurtado et al., 1996; Ryan, 2012). All groups identified the expectation of financial aid as an important consideration when attending a university or college, which provides an opportunity for universities to use their financial packages strategically as part of their recruiting and marketing plans (Kim et al., 2009). These racial and ethnic differences are clearly important in student choice process as identified by the first level of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model, habitus. By identifying the different characteristics students of racial and ethnic backgrounds consider in the college choice process, universities will be able to more effectively segment their target market and recruit students based on their racial and ethnic backgrounds and the characteristics they identified as most important in their decision-making processes (Han, 2012; Johnston, 2010).

**Gender.** Another important student characteristic influencing the college choice process, according to Perna’s (2006) model, was gender (Cho et al., 2008; Galotti, 1995; King, 2009; Schmit, 1991; Smith & Fleming, 2006). In 1970, women surpassed men enrolling in college, and by 2000, 63% of all students enrolled were women (Smith & Fleming, 2006). In fact, all racial and ethnic groups experienced a gender gap in college or university enrollment, and this has been especially true for African Americans (Smith...
It is important for university enrollment managers to understand the different factors men and women use when making their college choice decisions (Han, 2014; Poon & Byrd, 2013; Smith & Fleming, 2006). In a study conducted by Poon and Byrd (2013), which utilized both qualitative and quantitative research techniques, women found a college’s academic reputation, family approval, and a college’s co-curricular offerings to be more influential than men. Of the 409 students surveyed and 10 students interviewed, parents’ and siblings’ opinions impacted women more than men when making their decisions (Poon & Byrd, 2013). Men were more likely to name their friends as their sources of influence in the decision-making process (Bielby et al., 2014; Poon & Byrd, 2013; Smith, 2008; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Women were more likely to consider costs as compared to men (Hossler et al., 1998). Galotti (2005) found, of 321 students surveyed, women identified climate of the university, residential facilities, appearance of the campus, size, and type of institution as important factors. Men identified academic challenges and success of graduates as the most important influences (Galotti, 2005). Cho et al. (2008), surveying 1,339 diverse college freshmen, found female students rated psychological variables higher than male students and considered the academic quality of an institution more seriously than male students. Schmit (1991), surveying 3,110 students in 21 high schools in Indiana, found female students to have a stronger commitment to their post-high school graduation goals, while male students received more parental support in deciding to attend an institution of higher education (Schmit, 1991). However, Smith & Fleming (2006) found African American parents to be unintentionally contributing to the university enrollment gender gap by encouraging their sons to graduate high school, gain vocational skills, and find a job in order to escape
a life of crime and poverty, while they encouraged their daughters to attend four-year universities and graduate with a post-secondary degree. Parental influence and encouragement were considered important factors, but it appears to be mixed as to the level for gender based on ethnic and racial backgrounds (Bielby et al., 2014; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Viewing the college choice process through Perna’s (2006) College Choice model, at the social capital layer, parental influence impacted female and male students differently when going through the college decision-making process, which shows the complexity of college choice process.

Lastly, a study, conducted by Bielby et al. (2014), focused on identifying why women were not as equally represented at elite universities as men. Through analyzing the National Longitudinal Survey and the High School and Beyond survey over four decades, Bielby et al. (2014) found male students to have scored higher on the math portion of the SAT, and as a result, they were more likely to be admitted into elite universities, even though women were found to have higher GPAs and were more involved in extracurricular activities. Both male and female students applied at the same rate, and discrimination towards female applicants in the application process was not found to be an issue (Bielby et al., 2014). However, there was no difference in gender when considering science, technology, engineering, and mathematics majors enrolled at the elite universities (Bielby et al, 2014). It was argued admissions formulas needed to be changed to put less emphasis on SAT standardized tests scores, because it impacted not only women but students of diverse backgrounds as well (Bielby et al., 2014). While there was an overall gender gap at institutions of higher education favoring women, females were not equally represented at elite universities (Bielby et al., 2014). Gender
differences impacted students’ decision-making processes, and universities can use this information to tailor their marketing strategies to better meet prospective female and male students’ needs and increase diverse student enrollment (Bielby et al., 2014; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010).

Overall, there was strong evidence women and men placed different levels of importance on different factors when they were choosing to attend college and where they would attend (Cho et al., 2008; Galotti, 2005; Hossler et al., 1998; Poon & Byrd, 2013; Reynolds, 2007; Smith, 2008; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Factors influencing the college choice decision for female and male students were different with women identifying college academic reputation, family, cost of the university, and climate of the university to be important (Bielby et al., 2014; Galotti, 2005; Smith, 2008). Men focused on academic challenges and post-graduate opportunities and relied more on friends than family for advice and guidance (Bielby et al., 2014; Galotti, 2005; Smith, 2008; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Parental influence was mixed, while both female and male students were encouraged by their parents to attend a college or university, the level of encouragement seemed to be based on racial background as to whether women or men received parental support (Schmit, 1991; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Looking at these findings through Perna’s (2006) College Choice model, these differences provide the opportunity for further stratification of a university’s target market, which allows a university the opportunity to attract female and male students to their campuses based on the student characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, and racial backgrounds, influencing their college choice processes (Bielby et al., 2014; Galotti, 2005; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Smith, 2008; Smith & Fleming, 2006).
**Socioeconomic Status.** Socioeconomic status was another important student characteristic factoring into a student’s college choice process (Chen & DesJardins, 2008; Cox, 2016; Hurwitz, 2012; McPherson & Schapiro, 1994; Belley, Frenette, & Lochner, 2014; Jez, 2014; Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009; Kinsler & Pavan, 2011; McDonough, 1994; Myers & Myers, 2012; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Smith, 2008). Family income, family wealth, and the cost of an institution of higher education have become the main considerations in determining if a student attends a university and what university the student attends (Belley, Frenette, & Lochner, 2014; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012; DesJardins et al., 1997; Jez, 2014; Hurwitz, 2012; Kinsler & Pavan, 2011; Lillis & Tian, 2008; McPherson & Schapiro, 1994; Myers & Myers, 2012; Perna & Li, 2006; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Smith, 2008; Wilson & Adelson, 2012). According to Chen and DesJardins (2008), analyzing data from the National Center for Education Statistics and the Beginning Postsecondary Student Survey from 1995-96, 56% of the students from a high income background obtained a bachelor’s degree as compared to 26% of students from low income backgrounds, due to the many obstacles students from a low socioeconomic background face. Cox (2016), interviewing 16 female, high-school seniors from low socioeconomic backgrounds about their college aspirations, found these women felt they had too many barriers to overcome in order to enroll at a university. Examples included lack of access to a university; lack of information about the application and enrollment processes; and lack of understanding about how the financial aid process works, all which were attributed to their family’s socioeconomic backgrounds (Cox, 2016). Universities have an opportunity to identify the barriers and work with high school counselors, prospective students, and their parents to explain the
enrollment and financial aid processes along with addressing these concerns in their marketing strategies (Cox, 2015; Han, 2014; Johnston; 2010).

Hurwitz (2012) found, based on data from 30 highly selected colleges, students with family incomes of less than $50,000 were three times more likely to attend a university, if a financial aid package increased by $1,000, providing an opportunity for a university to strategically award their financial aid packages to students of need, increasing the likelihood of students from low income backgrounds attending their university (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010). Similarly, DesJardins et al. (1997), using longitudinal data from the 1995 ACT data and matching it with institutional data, found students with parents making less than $12,000 and more than $50,000 were three times more likely to attend a land grant institution than other students. The most important factors identified by students as they were considering attending a land grant university were socioeconomic background, geographical location of university, cost of a university, and personal attitudes towards a land grant university (DesJardins et al., 1997). Low income and middle income students were more sensitive to financial aid packages as well as changes to financial policies, which caused students from these backgrounds to drop out of school or chose not to attend a university or college due to negative changes in financial aid policies (Chen & DesJardins, 2008; McPherson & Schapiro, 1994; Perna & Li, 2006; Plank & Jordan, 2001). According to the fourth layer, social, economic, and policy context, of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model, students made college choice decisions based on public policies, such as changes in financial aid policies or grants, so universities need to be aware of public policies when recruiting and marketing to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Han, 2014).
Paulsen and St. John (2002) identified four clusters based on price sensitivity on college choice using data from the National Postsecondary Study Aid Survey of 1987. All four groups were based on income and socioeconomic status, which included low income students, lower-middle income, upper-middle class, and upper-income class (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). The two groups most sensitive to price were the lower-middle class group and the upper-middle class group due to the high cost of college tuition and low level of financial aid packages these groups of students received (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Similarly, Shaw et al. (2009), analyzing data from College Board’s 2006 College Bound Senior database, focused on the search phase of the college choice process and identified five unique clusters of students, who have distinct characteristics and college aspirations. The five clusters were privileged high-achievers, disadvantaged students, average students needing more guidance, mostly female academics, and privileged low achievers (Shaw et al., 2009). Two of these groups were created from the factor of socioeconomic status, and these groups differed based on academic performance; demographic characteristics; participation in school activities; and the number and types of institutions of higher education they applied to (Shaw et al., 2009). These five groups provide enrollment offices with a segmented population, which allows them to implement different marketing strategies to more effectively recruit the different groups to their universities focusing on socioeconomic status (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2012; Shaw et al., 2009).

Hossler et al. (1998), through a survey of students and their parents, in Indiana, found family backgrounds, tuition costs, and financial aid impacted students’ college choices significantly; however, they were not the only factors involved in the
decision. Students used a variety of factors when making a decision, cost was one of many considered. However, the more information about financial aid options and the university’s academic programs students received from a university they were interested in attending, the less anxious they would be about the cost associated with attending the university (Hossler et al., 1998). Creating relationships with university admissions counselors would also alleviate some of the monetary concerns students coming from lower socioeconomic statuses experienced (Hossler et al., 1998). Students from higher socioeconomic statuses had fewer barriers to attend higher cost institutions because they did not need to rely on financial aid as much as students from middle to lower socioeconomic statuses did (Hossler et al., 1998). Kim, DesJardins, & McCall (2009), analyzing data from the 99,287 students sending ACT scores to the University of Iowa from 1997 to 2002, found a large number of students with a high socioeconomic status preferred attending elite universities and land grant institutions as compared to students coming from low and middle class socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact, McDonough (1996) found students from high income backgrounds were hiring personal admissions counselors, due to the increased competition and increased admissions standards in order to attend an elite university. This study, through field observations, one-on-one interviews, and review of literature, examined the high stakes of elite institutions of higher education enrollment, and a level which students from low income backgrounds could not compete on (McDonough, 1996). Based on the evidence presented, the relationship students from low and middle class socioeconomic backgrounds have with a university’s cost of attendance is complicated and difficult to understand (Hossler et al., 1998; Perna & Li, 2006; Smith, 2008).
Socioeconomic status played an important role in a student’s decision-making process (Cox, 2016; Hossler et al., 1998; Hurwitz, 2012; McDonough, 1996; Perna & Li, 2006; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Shaw et al., 2009; Smith, 2008). Students from low and middle income families were more sensitive to tuition costs than students from higher income families and had more barriers to overcome to enroll in a university or college (Chen & DesJardins, 2008; Cox, 2016; Perna & Li, 2006). As a result, low and middle income students were more likely to attend a university, if the financial aid packages they were offered were increased minimally, providing universities the opportunity to use financial aid as a marketing tool (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Shaw et al., 2009). Students from high socioeconomic status were more likely to attend land grant and elite universities and had more access to these types of institutions because of their backgrounds (Hossler et al., 1998; McDonough, 1996). There is an opportunity for universities to provide more information to students and their parents about the university and financial aid options; educate high school counselors on the scholarships and financial aid packages available to students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds; and target each group differently based on their socioeconomic status in order to increase their enrollments (Cox, 2016; Hossler et al., 1998; Hurwitz, 2012; McDonough, 1996; Perna & Li, 2006; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Shaw et al., 2009; Smith, 2008). Cost or lack of information about an institution of higher education should not be barriers to students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Cox, 2016; Hossler et al., 1998; Hurwitz, 2012; McDonough, 1996; Perna & Li, 2006; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Shaw et al., 2009; Smith, 2008).
Parental Influence. Another important student characteristic in Perna’s College Choice model was the social influence or social capital people closest to prospective students had on their decision-making processes (Cho et al., 2006; Myers & Myers, 2012). Children were believed to be influenced by their parents, high school counselors, other family members, and friends; however, the level of parental influence on student college choice has been found to be both highly impactful in some situations and minimal in other situations (Cho et al., 2006; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Johnston, 2010; Myers & Myers, 2012; Institutional Brand and Parental Influence on College Choice: A Noel-Levitz Benchmark Psychographic Study. Noel-Levitz Research Report, 2009; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Smith, 2008). Several studies found parents played a significant role in all three stages of the college choice model by discussing the importance of higher education early in life with their children, pushing their students to finish high school, encouraging them to take the college standardized tests, apply to different institutions, and then pushing them to attend a college or university (McDonough, 1997; Myers & Myers, 2012; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) found, during interviews with parents and their students, parental encouragement and involvement were the reasons students enrolled at an institution of higher education. Lack of parental influence and involvement were also found to be barriers for students from low and middle socioeconomic backgrounds wanting to attend a university or college (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Analyzing two years of NELS data, Plank and Jordan (2001) found parents with low incomes who provided information, guidance, and encouragement to their students increased their students’ chances of applying and attending a post-secondary institution. Increased
parent and student discussions and ACT/SAT planning increased the likelihood of students from all socioeconomic statuses attending a university or college (Plank & Jordan, 2001). Myers and Myers (2012) surveyed 4,000 students and their parents and corroborated the results of Plank and Jordan’s (2001) study. Students who discussed college with their parents were more likely to attend a university or college (Myers & Myers, 2012; Plank & Jordan, 2001). Parental encouragement and involvement varied depending on socioeconomic status of family, the higher the income, the more likely students were to be positively influenced by their parents to attend a university or college (Meyers & Myers, 2012; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Schmit, 991). McDonough (1997) found parents who attended and graduated from a university or college to be more helpful than parents who did not attend an institution of higher education. Myers and Myers (2012) corroborated the results of the studies conducted by Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) and McDonough (1997). By ninth grade, a majority of parents had already discussed with their children the importance of attending college and the steps needed to reach their goal of attending and graduating from an institution of higher education (Myers & Myers, 2012). Latinos had a higher level of two-way communications about college choice than non-Latino families, single-parent families had higher levels of communications than two-parent families, and households in which English was not the first language spoken had higher levels of communication about college (Myers & Myers, 2012). Smith (2008), focusing on three African American women and their high school children in low-income situations, found these women wanted their children to exceed their level of education and their current living situations (Smith, 2008). However, there was a lack of knowledge about college admission,
financial aid, and other important and essential sources of information for students whose parents did not attend college, making it more difficult for these students to enroll and succeed in a university or college (Smith, 2008). Using Perna’s (2006) College Choice model, many of these barriers would be alleviated through the education of high school counselors, students, and their parents from low income backgrounds in the school and community context, which focuses on high school counselors and institutions of higher education (Smith, 2008).

Cho et al. (2008) found first-generation college students rated parental preferences of where they attended college as more likely to impact their decision than students who were not first-generation students. In a survey done by Gallup & Robinson, polling more than 800 parents and 300 high school junior and senior students, it was found 80% of parents felt their child’s education was valuable, and 92% of parents felt college was the most important investment they could make (College Bound: Americans’ Attitudes about Paying for College. A Survey of Families with College-Bound High School Students on the Value of a College Education and Its Costs, 1996). In a survey, administered to African American students at HBCUs, students identified family as the most important influence on their college decision followed by friends, alumni of the university, and the high school they attended (Gyapong & Smith, 2012). However, when asked what factors most influenced their choice, academic programs were listed first, followed by cost and family influence, making it an important factor, but not the most important student characteristic students considered (Gyapong & Smith, 2012). When focusing on the effects of variables relating to student characteristics and institutional factors on the decision to apply to a land-grant institution, DesJardins et al. (1997) found
parental and sibling influence had no impact on the decision. Nadelson (2013) found the 351 students surveyed at a metro research university in the Western United States were influenced by academic expectation and influences; influences and personal characteristics; and awareness and influence of institutional programs. Both intrinsic and extrinsic values were identified as important; however, extrinsic values, including parents and friends influences, were rated less important than intrinsic values, proving social capital to be important but not the most important characteristic when a student is going through the college-choice process (Nadelson, 2013; Perna, 2006).

Parents played a significant role in the college choice process, whether it was to encourage their students to prepare for college, attend an institution of education, pay the tuition, or help choose the university or college (Cho et al., 2006; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Johnston, 2010; Myers & Myers, 2012; Institutional Brand and Parental Influence on College Choice: A Noel-Levitz Benchmark Psychographic Study. Noel-Levitz Research Report, 2009; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Smith, 2008). The level of influence a parent had over their children varied depending on socioeconomic status; gender; and whether a student was a first-generation student or not (Myers & Myers, 2012; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). In fact, a university has the opportunity to target both students and their parents through the university website, social media sites, on-campus recruiting events, campus visits, and university brochures to increase the likelihood of prospective students attending their university (Han, 2014; Noel-Levitz Research Report, 2009; Plank & Jordan, 2001).

**Conclusion of Student Characteristics.** Overall, student characteristics, including gender, race, socioeconomic status, and parental influence, played an important
role in the college choice process for students (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; DesJardins & et al., 1997; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Han, 2014; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Litten, 1982; Nadelson, 2013). For example, the research found Asian Americans and Caucasian students tended to follow the traditional college choice model closely but Latinos and African Americans students did not, proving students of different backgrounds often prepare for a university, apply to a university, and choose a university differently (Coe et al., 2008; Hurtado et al, 1996; Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2009). While female and male students identified similar characteristics as important in the college choice process, the level of importance they assigned the characteristics varied (Bielby et al., 2014; DesJardins et al., 1997; Galotti, 2005; Shaw et al., 2009; Smith & Fleming, 2006). Students from different socioeconomic backgrounds considered the same characteristics, but students from lower and middle socioeconomic backgrounds were more sensitive to a university’s cost and the level of financial aid they received, while students from higher economic status focused more on the type of institution they wanted to attend, such as a land grant institution or an elite university (Cox, 2016; Hossler et al., 1998; Hurwitz, 2012; McDonough, 1996; Perna & Li, 2006; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Shaw et al., 2009; Smith, 2008). Parents impacted their children’s college choice process; however, the level which they influenced their student to attend a university or help decide on a university for the student to attend depended on a variety of factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and if the parents had attended an institution of higher education (Myers & Myers, 2012; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). When examining Perna’s theoretical college choice model, it was clear student characteristics played an important role in the student college choice process.
in the habitus; school and community context; and the social, economic policy context (Perna, 2006). This information also provides a university with valuable data, such as demographics, influences, and known barriers, they can use to segment their target audience, the prospective student, and create a marketing strategy designed to effectively reach students based on the student characteristics they have identified as important, including reaching out to students’ parents (Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Lillis & Tian, 2008).

**Institutional Characteristics**

Prospective college students considered institutional characteristics when making their college choice decisions (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Kim, Koo, & Dittmore, 2014; McDonough et al., 1997; Reynolds, 2007; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). Institutional characteristics included a university’s academic reputation, cost of attendance, extracurricular activities, a university’s athletic department, a university’s location, a university’s overall image, a university’s recruiting events, and financial aid packages offered to students (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Kuntz, 1987; McDonough et al., 1997; Reynolds, 2007; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). Several institutional factors influencing prospective college students’ decision-making processes as they were choosing a college or university have been identified and have been helpful to university enrollment offices looking to recruit students to their universities (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2013; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; McDonough et al., 1997; Kim, Koo, & Dittmore, 2014; Reynolds, 2007; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). Institutional factors identified included a university’s location; its cost; its image and reputation; its use of marketing and recruitment; and overall college and
university rankings (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Crawford, 2013; Dolinsky, 2010; Greenwood, 2012; Han, 2014; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Johnston, 2010; Lopez-Turley, 2009; McDonough et al., 1997; Kim, Koo, & Dittmore, 2014; Reynolds, 2007; Sandlin & Pena, 2014; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). In Perna’s (2006) Theoretical College Choice model, the third layer or the higher education context, identified three main factors: institutional factors; location; and marketing of a university and the recruitment of students, all which were important factors in students’ college choice process (Crawford, 2013; Greenwood, 2012; Han, 2014; Reynolds, 2007; Sandlin & Pena, 2014). Kim, Koo, & Dittmore (2014) surveyed 251 students to determine the importance of university athletics in their college choice process at a large university in the Southeast. Institutional characteristics were found to be most important, followed by student characteristics such as financial conditions, university recruiting efforts, and the influence of those most important to students (Kim, Koo, & Dittmore, 2014). The athletic department was found to be a useful recruiting tool for students, but not a main institutional factor students considered when choosing a college or university (Kim, Koo, & Dittmore, 2014). Joseph, Mullen, and Spake (2012) conducted a similar study in order to determine the criteria students used when choosing their universities. They sent out surveys to freshmen students at a private religious-affiliated university and a public urban university in the Southern United States (Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012). When public university students were considering applying to universities, they looked at quality education, university accreditation, friendly environment, location, facilities, acceptance rate, and athletic programs (Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012). However, when selecting a university, these students rated academic programs/service, environment/athletic
programs, quality, financial aid considerations, housing/scholarships, and housing most important (Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012). Private university students looked at the university’s reputation, exclusivity, faculty interaction, facilities/athletic programs, and financial considerations when considering their universities (Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012). Their top five overall selection criteria included the availability of financial aid, quality education, availability to get a scholarship, an accredited university, and reputation of the university (Joseph, Mullen, & Stake, 2012). Students were found to be interested in a number of student and institutional characteristics during the search stage, but used a different set of institutional and student characteristics when choosing their universities, underscoring the importance of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model that took into account a variety of factors in the four different layers. Reynolds (2007) found the level of importance prospective students placed on campus facilities during the choice stage of the college process. The findings, survey data collected from 16,513 students, indicated most prospective students chose a university based on academic-oriented characteristics. These characteristics included: (a) a strong major in their field of interest, (b) excellent professors, (c) preparation for their career choice, (d) accessible professors, and (e) a customizable education. The next item determined to be “essential” or “very essential” when choosing a university was the overall quality of campus facilities, an institutional characteristic. The facilities respondents felt were most important to visit while touring the campus were the building housing their major and the residential buildings. The facilities deemed important by respondents when choosing a university included: (a) the building for their major, (b) the library, (c) state-of-the-art technology, (d) the classrooms, and (e) the residential buildings (Reynolds, 2007). It was found
having a well-maintained campus and high-end facilities played a part in students’ decision-making process as they were determining where they would go to college. The lack of desired facilities caused students to eliminate a university from their list of choices, indicating to universities campus facilities were an important factor to students during the recruitment process (Reynolds, 2007).

Dolinsky (2010) also focused on the college choice model but on the second stage of the process, search. Dolinsky’s (2010) research objective was to find out if prospective freshmen were receiving adequate information about the universities they were interested in attending. Three hundred surveys were sent out to a random sample of undergraduate students at a mid-Atlantic university. The most highly rated attributes were found to be programs of study, overall academic reputation, tuition, and scholarships (Dolinsky, 2010). While males rated the importance of athletic programs higher than females, females rated campus safety, the size of the college, location, and attractiveness of a campus higher. The results also highlighted an area, which the university could strengthen its recruitment and marketing efforts through focusing more on career placement after graduation, financial aid, and scholarships (Dolinsky, 2010).

More studies found the university’s academic reputation to be most important followed by degree valuation, familiarity with the university, extracurricular activities, and location of the university (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; McDonough et al., 1997; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). Institutional characteristics played a significant role in a student’s college choice process as identified through Perna’s (2006) Theoretical College Choice model (Yugo & Reeve, 2007). University enrollment officers have the opportunity to identify the different institutional characteristics which factor into a
student’s choice process and effectively recruit students based on these characteristics (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Dolinsky, 2010; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; McDonough et al., 1997; Kim, Koo, & Dittmore, 2014; Reynolds, 2007; Yugo & Reeve, 2007).

**Geographical Location of a University.** Another institutional characteristic students identified as an important consideration in their college choice processes was the geographical location of a university (DesJardins et al., 1997; Gyapong & Smith, 2102; Lopez-Turley, 2009; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). Lopez-Turley (2009) conducted a quantitative study investigating the effect of college proximity, defined as the number of colleges within commuting distance, on the application and enrollment decisions of a national sample of high school seniors. The data were collected from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) for 1991-92 and the 1988 NELS (Lopez-Turley, 2009). Evidence found students living close to colleges would increase their likelihood of the applying to college, because making the transition to a university that was closer to home was easier financially and emotionally for students (Lopez-Turley, 2009). However, the number of colleges within a certain distance had no impact on the chances of students enrolling in a four-year college (Lopez-Turley, 2009). College proximity was found to play an important role in students deciding to go to college; however, there was no link between location to home and the likelihood of a student enrolling in a university or college (Lopez-Turley, 2009).

Location or the university’s distance from home was one of the top five factors students used when deciding on a university, if not one of the top two factors (DesJardins et al., 1997; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Lillis & Tian, 2008; McDonough et al., 1997;
Wilson & Adelson, 2012; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). Lillis and Tian (2008) found, through a survey of 289 university freshmen, the two most important considerations to be cost and location. While the cost of a university was first, the distance from home played an important role in students' college choice process as well (Lillis & Tian, 2008). In a survey, administered to 109 freshmen attending either an elite university or non-selective university, the fifth most important factor was distance from home, behind academic reputation of the university, the student being recruited by the athletic department, a university’s graduates being admitted to graduate schools, and good financial aid packages offered (McDonough et al., 1997). Yugo & Reeve (2007) focused on college freshmen attending a Midwestern University. Based on 300 students surveyed, distance from home was listed in the top five factors considered when choosing a university (Yugo & Reeve, 2007). Gyapong and Smith (2012), focusing on why African American students attended HBUCs, found distance from home or the location of the HBCU to be the second most important factor behind tuition costs in the survey results, which reinforced the importance of a university’s location in a student’s decision-making process.

As Perna’s (2006) College Choice model identified, the location of a university to a student’s home played an important role in the college decision-making process of a student (DesJardins et al., 1997; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Lillis & Tian, 2008; McDonough et al., 1997; Wilson & Adelson, 2012; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). While the number of college and universities located in close proximity to a prospective student did not impact a student’s decision to attend a four-year university, location was an important factor in both the search and choice stages of the college choice model, once the student
had decided to pursue a degree in higher education (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Turley-Lopez, 2009; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). It played a very prominent, but passive role in a student’s decision-making process, providing universities the opportunity to target students within a predetermined proximity using financial aid packages and scholarships as recruiting tools (DesJardins et al., 1997; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Lillis & Tian, 2008; McDonough et al., 1997; Perna, 2006; Wilson & Adelson, 2012; Yugo & Reeve, 2007).

**Cost of a University.** Cost was an important consideration in a student’s decision-making process, during both the search and choice stages, due to the rising tuition costs and declining economy (Carter & Curry, 2011; College Bound: Americans’ Attitudes about Paying for College. A Survey of Families with College-Bound High School Students on the Value of a College Education and Its Costs, 1996; Lillis & Tian, 2008; Petr & Wendel, 1998; Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Lillis and Tian (2008) focused on the impact cost had on students’ college choice process. They presented series of hypotheses to test cost and the impact it played on a student’s college choice (Lillis & Tian, 2008). Over 250 college students responded to a 34-question survey administered during their freshmen year (Lillis & Tian, 2008). The findings revealed students were influenced most by location and tuition (Lillis & Tian, 2008). They were also influenced by the academic strengths of a university, student life, and school size (Lillis & Tian, 2008). Students having to pay for college themselves were much more likely to be concerned about cost, while students not paying for college were not as price-sensitive (Lillis & Tian, 2008). Location and cost were important to students who are sensitive to cost; however, students choose universities based on reasons personal and unique to the
students, leading to the conclusion a student's college decision making process was not rationale or fully explainable (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Lillis & Tian, 2008).

As a result of a slowing economy and increasing tuition costs due to state budget costs, prospective students have become more cost conscious than they have been in the past (Crawford, 2013; DesJardins et al., 1997; Hurwitz, 2012; Kinsler & Pavan, 2011; Kim, Koo, & Dittmore, 2014; McDonough et al., 1997; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Wilson & Adelson, 2012). According to a Noel-Levitz survey (2010), 46% of student respondents reported the downturn in the economy caused them to think twice about schools they would consider due to the cost of the university or college compared to 34% percent of students surveyed the year before. In another survey, conducted by Noel-Levitz in 2014, 75% of the parents surveyed responded they would limit the college choice sets of their children due to high costs of attending a university. They would encourage their students to become more selective of the universities considered based on tuition costs (Noel-Levitz, 2014). As a result of this phenomenon, financial aid, grants, work-study options, and scholarships have become more important when recruiting students to universities, providing a university the opportunity to use lucrative financial packages to recruit all students to a university (Crawford, 2013; DesJardins & et al, 1997; College Bound: Americans’ Attitudes about Paying for College. A Survey of Families with College-Bound High School Students on the Value of a College Education and Its Costs, 1996; Kim, Koo, & Dittmore, 2014; McDonough et al., 1997; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Wilson & Adelson, 2012; Yugo & Reeve, 2007).

In fact, universities have been implementing programs to minimize costs to students once they have arrived on campus (Holley & Harris, 2012). Holley & Harris
(2012) conducted a case study at two university and found one campus created a textbook rental program, worked with students on different types of payment plans, and recalculated financial aid packages in attempt to increase student enrollment. Another university offered small financial aid packages and/or scholarships to the majority of students attending to help students with the financial burden of tuition (Holley & Harris, 2012). Another program the latter university offered was to provide a variety of on-campus jobs to help students earn extra money, since the university was located in a rural setting (Holley & Harris, 2010). Universities were aware the rising costs in tuition were directly impacting students and hurting enrollment, and they worked to come up with innovative solutions to keep costs down for their prospective and current students (Holley & Harris, 2012; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). In related research, two studies based on out-of-state students versus in-state students attending a university found in-state students to be more sensitive to the cost of tuition of the university than out-of-state students (Carter & Curry, 2011; Gyapong & Smith, 2012; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Peter & Wendel, 1998). However, it is important to point out out-of-state students listed both scholarships and cost of tuition in their top five factors when choosing to attend an out-of-state university (Crawford, 2013; DesJardins, et al., 1997; College Bound: Americans’ Attitudes about Paying for College. A Survey of Families with College-Bound High School Students on the Value of a College Education and Its Costs, 1996; Hurwitz, 2012; Jez, 2014; Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2014; Lillis & Tian, 2008; McDonough et al., 1997; Peter & Wendel, 1998; Wilson, & Adelson, 2012; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). Overall, the cost of tuition and the availability of financial aid packages had a significant impact on college choice as students were making their decisions (Crawford, 2013; DesJardins,

Due to increasing tuition costs and a sluggish economy, the price tag for attending a university has become very high (Crawford, 2013; Lillian & Tian, 2008 Yugo & Reeve, 2007). A majority of students were sensitive to higher costs, and universities have an opportunity to identify these students and utilize scholarships, grant aid, work-study, and financial aid as marketing tools to recruit these students to attend their universities as identified in Perna’s (2006) College Choice model (Crawford, 2013; Han, 2014; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Wilson & Adelson, 2012). It is important to understand the price of a university was not the only institutional characteristic students considered as they chose a university or college to attend; however, it can provide students an incentive to attend a university in their college choice set over another college (Crawford, 2013; Kim, DesJardins, & McCall, 2014; Lillis & Tian, 2008; McDonough et al., 1997; Peter & Wendel, 1998; Wilson, & Adelson, 2012; Yugo & Reeve, 2007).

**University’s Reputation and Image.** According to Perna’s (2006) College Choice model, universities need to be monitoring and building their reputation and image in order to more effectively compete for prospective students (Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012). A university’s reputation and image played an important role in a student’s decision to attend a university, and universities can actively manage their brand (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Bunzel, 2007; Curtis, Abratt, & Minor, 2009; Hemsley-Brown
Kuntz (1987), surveying 408 high school students from New York, found students placed a high level of importance on a university's brand when deciding on an institution of higher education to attend. Students were more likely to choose a university if its image was congruent to their ideal of the perfect college or university (Kuntz, 1987). University administrators should be aware of their image as perceived by the general public and prospective students in order to be able to market the university effectively to prospective students (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Kuntz, 1987). Sevier (2007) conducted a case study on Hendrix University focusing on how they delivered their brand experience to prospective students. Hendrix University's holistic approach to building and living their reputation and image led to 48.4% increase of on-campus visits by prospective college students during a five year period, providing a link between a university's image and increased enrollment (Sevier, 2007). In fact, in a 2009 Noel-Levitz survey, students were mostly heavily influenced by a university's brand or image when deciding on a college, underscoring the importance of building and maintaining a positive university image (Curtis, Abratt, & Minor, 2009). It is important to note students and parents from high income backgrounds were more influenced by brand reputation and image as opposed to those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Curtis, Abratt, & Minor, 2009). Curtis, Abratt, and Minor (2009) found a university built its image by focusing on web administration, program marketing, and strengthening its corporate branding position. A private university's increase in enrollment was directly related to its implementation of a marketing plan designed to strengthen its image (Curtis, Abratt, & Minor, 2009). Conversely, it was believed negative publicity would damage a university's image and
impact students’ decisions to attend a university (Milo & McEuen, 1989). However, Milo & McEuen (1989), surveying 500 current students and 1,000 students who applied to the university but did not attend, found students planning on attending a university that experienced negative publicity during the students’ decision-making process were not impacted by the negative publicity received by the university, nor were the other students applying to but not attending the university (Milo & McEuen, 1989). Overall, a university’s image played an important role in a student’s college decision-making process, and universities need to continuously work both on strengthening and safeguarding their images (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Bunzel, 2007; Curtis, Abratt, & Minor, 2009; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Kuntz, 1987; Milo & McEuen, 1989).

Universities can build their image and reputation through a mix of advertising, public relations, personal selling, direct mail, sales promotions, and word of mouth publicity by its current students (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Word-of-mouth marketing was rated the most effective way to influence prospective students, according to a student survey conducted by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006). Vander Schee (2009), surveying higher education administrators, found universities having an effective institutional marketing plan; an admissions and recruitment office; effective retention programs; a comprehensive enrollment plan; and a structural model in place positively enhanced their image and grew their student enrollment numbers, providing evidence marketing and recruiting are important components of a university’s long-term success (Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Milo & McEuen, 1989).
College Rankings. Another institutional factor related to marketing and recruiting students often considered by prospective students was independent-third party college and university ranking systems (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Bunzel, 2007; Jones, 2015; Meredith, 2004). In fact, 40% of entering college freshmen felt college rankings played an important role in their college decisions (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009). In particular, Asian Americans were most likely to consider third party college rankings when choosing a university to attend (Sanoff et al., 2007). The most popular of these university and college ranking magazines was the *U.S. News & World Report* magazine's list of best colleges and universities (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Bunzel, 2007; Jones, 2015; Meredith, 2004). The findings have been mixed when examining whether college rankings impact universities and their recruiting efforts as defined by Perna's (2006) College Choice model (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Bunzel, 2007; Jones, 2015; Meredith, 2004). Meredith (2004), analyzing the student demographics of the universities listed in the rankings and SAT collected data, found universities did experience changes in enrollment due to movement in the college and university rankings. However, the changes in rank were more impactful at the top of the list as compared to universities listed lower in the rankings; and public and private universities were impacted differently (Meredith, 2004). Both Meredith (2004) and Bowman and Bastedo (2009), using IPEDS data from 1998-2005, found a university's number of applications increased or decreased based on movement within the top 25 rankings, or if the university moved into or out of the top 25. As a result, admission into these universities became more difficult and tuition at these universities increased over time due to their popularity and perceived prestige (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Meredith, 2004). However, different results have
occurred at the HBCUs which have been named to “American’s Best Black Colleges” list released by *U.S. News & World Report* (Jones, 2015). While the website listing the chosen HBCUs had 10 million views, an HBCU listed in the top 50 colleges and universities did not experience an increase in admissions outcomes due to its appearance on the list based on an analysis of application and enrollment data of the universities ranked on the list (Jones, 2015). Similarly, Bunzel (2007), focusing on several universities implementing branding campaigns in order to increase the universities’ rankings on the list, found no correlation between a university’s image and increasing the university’s chances to be on the *U.S. News & World Report* list of best colleges and universities. University and college rankings, as determined by third-party vendors, would be important to students looking to attend an elite university and factor into their college choice process, and as a result, be a factor for universities to consider when implementing marketing and recruiting plans, especially in the case of elite universities (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Bunzel, 2007; Jones, 2015; Meredith, 2004).

Students placed a significant level of importance of the image and reputation of a university along with the third-party rankings of the best universities and colleges in the U.S. (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Bunzel, 2007; Jones, 2015; Meredith, 2004). Universities working on strengthening their image and reputation should strive to be ranked on these lists, because as universities and colleges moved higher up on the list of rankings, their application numbers, enrollment numbers, and tuition dollars increased (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Meredith, 2004). The exact opposite occurred if a university or college fell out of one or multiple college ranking lists (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Meredith, 2004). However, Bunzel (2007) found no evidence of building a university’s
image and reputation resulted in the university being named to one of the lists. Overall, these rankings were another tool university enrollment offices can effectively utilize to market the university, recruit prospective students, and increase student enrollment (Bowman & Bastedo, 2009).

**University Marketing and Recruiting Efforts.** Perna's (2006) Theoretical College Choice model identified four layers of a student's decision-making process. The third layer, higher education context, identified a university’s marketing and recruiting plans as important factors in a student’s decision-making process (Perna, 2006). In order for students to choose to attend a specific university, they must know it exists (Han, 2014; Perna, 2006). Eighty-nine percent of prospective students participating in a 2010 Noel-Levitz survey reported they learned about universities based on the print publications they received in the mail, proving the importance of a university’s marketing and recruiting plans (Han, 2014; Perna, 2006). The second main influence came from parents, family, and friends at 80%; 79% learned about universities from email messages; and 77% from high school teachers or counselors (Focusing Your E-Recruitment Efforts to Meet the Expectations of College-Bound Students. E-Expectations, 2010). Johnston (2010) found, of the 463 students surveyed at a mid-sized public university, personal sources of information were the most important factors, followed by social media, university publications, and on-campus visits, signifying the importance of social media in a student’s decision-making process. According to a Carnegie Communications research study, 95% of the 5,136 prospective new students responding requested print publications when making their college decision (Summer, 2012). Admissions offices reported spending almost 24% of their yearly recruiting budgets on newly created print
material for prospective students (Cooper, 2009). In fact, in a 2012 Noel-Levitz survey, students ranked the printed publications received in the mail and at college fairs as the most effective way to learn about the academic programs at a university at 70.8%. Program descriptions on the university website were second at 69.2% (The Online Expectations of College-Bound Juniors and Seniors. E-Expectations Report, 2012). While students craved technology, they still viewed print publications as a very important, if not the most important, piece of the decision-making process along with on-campus tours, visits, and recruiting events (Johnston, 2010; Marketing & Student Recruitment Practices, 2011). In fact, according to Johnston (2010), campus visits were the one way to impress a student and meaningfully impact a student’s decision-making process. These findings underscore the level of influence marketing and recruiting had on a student’s choice process (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Joseph, Mullen, & Stake, 2012).

An important component of marketing is to understand one’s target market, and in the case of a university, their target market is prospective students (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Kotler, 2003). Cooper (2009) found universities should be using the language prospective students use, speak to them in the manner in which they understand, talk to them, not at them, as a way to recruit students to their universities. Similarly, Kretchmar and Memory (2010) wanted to understand how prospective students imagined their ideal college experience at the University of North Carolina (UNC). Using metaphor elicitation, participants selected pictures expressing their thoughts and feelings about their desired college experiences. The following week, they participated in follow-up one-on-one interviews (Kretchmar & Memory, 2010). Through the course of analysis,
two metaphors, journey and connection, emerged to describe what male high school seniors imagined their college experience to be like (Kretchmar & Memory, 2010). A consensus map was created with 35 different constructs also describing important thoughts about college life. These findings led to UNC’s new recruitment strategies and communications plans to better reflect what prospective students were looking for when choosing a university as well as to increase student applications and enrollment numbers (Kretchmar & Memory, 2012).

**Online Communications.** Universities must understand their target market in order to effectively market to and recruit them, and prospective students are known for their high use and knowledge of online technology (Evans, 2014; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2012). In fact, a Noel-Levitz survey (2010) found 92% of prospective freshmen would be turned off of a university and possibly remove a university from their list, if the official website of the university did not meet their expectations. In a similar study done by Noel-Levitz in 2009, 85% of students surveyed felt website links should be easy to use, and 72% of students expected to land on the university’s website when searching for it (Institutional Brand and Parental Influence on College Choice: A Noel-Levitz Benchmark Psychographic Study. Noel-Levitz Research Report, 2009). Crawford (2013) found 93.5% of the 431 college freshmen surveyed had viewed their university’s website before making a decision. In 2014, a survey showed of 1,000 students polled, 65% had looked at a college university webpage in the past week (Noel-Levitz, 2014). Noel-Levitz surveyed 3,000 high schools students looking at universities in 2016 and found almost 70% of these prospective students found universities’ websites to more influential in their decision-making process as compared to communications from the admissions
offices, print publications, and university planning sites (Joly, 2016). A little over half of the students surveyed also felt it a website was reflective of a university’s reputation and made an impression on these students (Joly, 2016). According to a 2014 Noel-Levitz survey, the use of cell phones to view college mobile sites had increased, with 71% of students responding they have visited a university website on a cell phone or tablet as compared to 51.6% of students in 2012 (Noel-Levitz, 2014; The Online Expectations of College-Bound Juniors and Seniors. E-Expectations Report, 2012).

When integrating cell phones into recruiting strategies, admission offices made use of the trend, with 74.2% of public four-year universities collecting the cell phone numbers of prospective students in 2012 compared to 50.9% in 2010 (Noel-Levitz, 2010; The Online Expectations of College-Bound Juniors and Seniors. E-Expectations Report, 2012). Thirty percent of public four-year universities sent text messages to the cell phones of prospective students, and 60.3% of the students surveyed would allow universities to text messages to their cell phones with important admissions information (The Online Expectations of College-Bound Juniors and Seniors. E-Expectations Report, 2012). In another survey, 70% of students preferred applying for admissions online; however, 42% of students preferred to mail in their deposits. As a result, it is important to understand students’ preferred methods of communication with a university, in order to more effectively recruit them and increase student enrollment (Han, 2014; Kotler, 2003; Making Web Sites an Effective Recruitment Asset: Content Management Solutions Keep Web Sites Fresh and Relevant--and Students Engaged. Noel-Levitz White Paper, 2009). This use of technology, including websites, emails, and cell phones, provides an opportunity for recruiters to effectively market their universities to students through the
students’ first source of communication (Han 2014; Johnston, 2010; Lindbeck & Fodrey, 2009).

In a 2010, A Noel-Levitz survey, the most valued web content was academic-related content at 54%, followed by cost-related web content at 30%, while only 3.8% of students felt student life content was the most valuable (Focusing Your E-Recruitment Efforts to Meet the Expectations of College-Bound Students. E-Expectations, 2010). In the same survey, it was revealed 52% of students watched online videos about the universities they were interested in, but only 10% responded they watched them on YouTube, a popular social media, suggesting students were also going to college websites to view the videos, a recruiting opportunity for enrollment offices to capitalize on (Focusing Your E-Recruitment Efforts to Meet the Expectations of College-Bound Students. E-Expectations, 2010; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Kotler, 2003). Prospective students felt the most valuable videos were made by both students and universities. The most watched videos were student life at 46%, second were academic videos at 30%, and second to last were athletics at 6% (Focusing Your E-Recruitment Efforts to Meet the Expectations of College-Bound Students. E-Expectations, 2010). This information was the most updated statistics on record; however, it safe to assume the use of online technology has increased greatly over the last few years (Crawford, 2013; Focusing Your E-Recruitment Efforts to Meet the Expectations of College-Bound Students. E-Expectations, 2010; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2013; Kotler, 2003). This evidence showed prospective students looked a variety of different online media when determining a college to attend providing a variety of ways for recruiters to market their universities to students (Crawford, 2013; Focusing Your E-Recruitment Efforts to Meet the
Social Media. Students searched many different social media sites when collecting information about universities they were interested in, such as Facebook, YouTube, blogs, Twitter, iTunes, Flickr, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, Foursquare, and MySpace (Crawford, 2013; Focusing Your E-Recruitment Efforts to Meet the Expectations of College-Bound Students. E-Expectations, 2010; Greenwood, 2012; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015; Making Web Sites an Effective Recruitment Asset: Content Management Solutions Keep Web Sites Fresh and Relevant—and Students Engaged. Noel-Levitz White Paper, 2009). The most popular social media sites for prospective college students were Twitter and Facebook followed closely by blogs, Snapchat, and Instagram; however, this list has changed yearly as technology changes (Evans, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Joly, 2016; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016; Sandlin & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). In a survey of 1,000 students and 500 parents, 40% of students followed a university on Twitter, 75% used Facebook, 40% used Snapchat, and 73% used YouTube to research a university (Noel-Levitz, 2014). A total of 60% of students and 40% of parents used a form of social media in their everyday life (Noel-Levitz, 2014). In a Noel-Levitz 2016 survey, a majority of 3,000 prospective college students responding used YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram on a daily basis (Joly, 2016). However, the impact of the social media on the student college choice model needs to be further researched, providing a gap in the literature to study the impact of social media on students’ decision-making processes (Noel-Levitz, 2014).
Students wanted official information from the university website, but they also wanted to connect with current students and alumni to ask what life at the university was truly like, providing universities an opportunity to encourage prospective and current students to utilize a social media platform to connect with each other and the university (Crawford, 2013; Greenwood, 2012; Focusing Your E-Recruitment Efforts to Meet the Expectations of College-Bound Students. E-Expectations, 2010; Johnston, 2010; Joly, 2016; Sandal & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). Sandlin and Pena (2014) found student-written blogs to be a way for a university to connect with prospective students. Through 16 in-depth interviews with college-bound students, 165 blog entries, and an eight-person focus groups, Sandlin and Pena (2014) used grounded theory to determine prospective students connected with the student blogger and internalized their thoughts and feelings as result of the authenticity of the blogger and the blogger’s experiences. More than half of high school students surveyed utilized Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat, which provides an opportunity for universities to connect with prospective students through these social media sites (Joly, 2016). To underscore the importance of universities on social media, one study found 70% of the 1,000 prospective college students felt universities should have a social media presence, and 73% of students felt universities should have private communities on social media open to prospective and current students of the university (Making Web Sites an Effective Recruitment Asset: Content Management Solutions Keep Web Sites Fresh and Relevant—and Students Engaged. Noel-Levitz White Paper, 2009). However, there were very little discussion or findings on the level of impact social media has student’s college choice decision-making process, and as a result, social media’s impact is largely

As a result, universities have started to react to the social media movement (Greenwood, 2012; Rutter, Roper, and Lettice, 2016). Greenwood (2012) analyzed the colleges and universities listed in the *U.S. News & World Report 2010-11 Best Colleges Report* to determine the importance universities and colleges place on social media platforms. Ninety-two percent of the colleges and universities analyzed used and listed two social media sites on their websites (Greenwood, 2012). Ninety-nine percent of the institutions were using Facebook, and 92% were using Twitter in their recruiting efforts (Greenwood, 2012). Rutter, Roper, and Lettice (2016) found a positive impact on both recruitment and enrollment for universities when they effectively used social media sites, according to the university enrollment managers surveyed. When universities effectively used social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, interactively with prospective students, universities attracted a large number of likes on Facebook as well as followers on Twitter, which positively impacted student recruitment, number of student applications, and enrollment numbers (Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). The number of Twitter followers a university had was found to be a strong predictor of recruitment success and the content and the type of tweets made by the universities matter to prospective students (Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). Botha, Farshid, and Pitt (2011) did a correspondence analysis of the five most popular South African universities using the free website, How Sociable, to determine how visible these universities are on the 32 different social media platforms. None of the five brands were found to be significantly
visible on social media, and the universities did not have strategic marketing plans in place to utilize social media effectively in branding or recruiting efforts which could be detrimental to student recruiting efforts (Botha, Farshid, & Pitt, 2011). In survey conducted by Noel-Levitz in 2016, high school juniors and seniors responding overwhelmingly used social media sites to learn more about a university’s students, their experiences and activities through photos, videos, and stories posted to social media sites (Joly, 2016). Students used a university’s website to find out more information about tuition and fees; the admissions process; scholarships; and academic programs and courses (Joly, 2016). More research on the impact of social media on the recruiting of students by universities needs to be conducted focusing on the many different social media sites both universities and students utilize during the college choice process as online technology changes and online usage increases over time (Joly, 2016; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016).

The most popular social media site for adults, with 71% using it, is Facebook; however, the next most popular social media site is no longer Twitter (Abbott, Donaghey, Hare, & Hopkins, 2013; Joly, 2016; Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015, Stampler, 2015; Ting, Cyril de Run, & Liew, 2016). The second most popular social media site has become Instagram, a social media app designed for mobile phones launched in 2011 (Joly, 2016; Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015, Stampler, 2015; Ting, Cyril de Run, & Liew, 2016). This social media platform has allowed users to not only share pictures and videos with other users but to allow celebrities, sports stars, businesses, and now colleges the opportunity to create relationships with the almost 300 million monthly active members (Joly, 2016; Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015; Stampler, 2015). Pew conducted a
survey in 2014, which found over half, 53%, of internet using young adults between the ages of 18-29 years old used Instagram and 49% of them used it daily (Lee, Lee, Moon, & Sung, 2015). Another survey found 76% of all teenagers use Instagram, and the high school students graduating in 2015 were the first set of students who were able to capture their entire high school experience on Instagram (Stampler, 2015). In another study, researchers found Instagram use by high school and college students had exceeded that of Facebook, making Instagram the social media app that prospective students use most and the one universities should be using when marketing and recruiting prospective students to attend their universities (Joly, 2016; Stampler, 2015; Ting, Cyril de Run, Liew).

However, there have not been a lot of research studies conducted on how many universities had Instagram accounts, used their Instagram accounts actively, the type of photos they posted, and the number of followers, likes, and comments they received (Joly, 2016).

While Facebook has been determined the most utilized social media site, Sashittal, DeMar, and Jassawalla (2015) identified Snapchat as an effective marketing tool for universities to connect with current students based on four in-depth focus groups conducted on a college campus focusing on building brand reputation and marketing services of popular brands. Snapchat provides companies with the opportunity to connect with current students without any long-term commitment from the students, as they are primarily exchanging pictures (Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). The students surveyed viewed Snapchat as a way to learn more about companies and their products with no strings attached or commitment level required; however, the study focused on current companies and their use of social media and not on a university’s use of Snapchat.
for student recruitment or during a student’s college choice process (Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). Based on a survey of 1,650 college students who self-identified as influential college students, 77% of those students used Snapchat on a daily basis (Joly, 2015). Launched in 2011, it is the most popular social media platform used behind YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram based on a survey of 7,000 high school students (Joly, 2015). Additionally, the study also found 21% of those surveyed used Snapchat to research colleges and universities they are interested in (Joly, 2015). The University of Houston, University of Michigan, University of New Hampshire, and Miami University have integrated their university’s Snapchat account into their recruiting strategies to create a community of engagement and to build relationships with prospective students and have seen positive results with increased followers, unsolicited snaps, and stories with increased number of likes (Joly, 2015). Universities should be effectively integrating the use of Snapchat and other social media sites into their marketing and recruiting plans to provide information to prospective students and grow student enrollment through social media (Han, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015).

Evans (2014) surveyed 252 undergraduate students in the business and marketing department to determine the level of impact social media has in the college classroom to facilitate the use of media, collaboration, and the sharing of information. The survey focused on students’ attitudes and experiences using Twitter in a course, and it was found students were more engaged in the course as a result of using social media (Evans, 2014). Junco, Heiberger, and Loken (2014) found similar results implementing Twitter in the classroom. One hundred and twenty five freshmen seminar students were surveyed in two different classes, and those utilizing Twitter in their course were found to be more
engaged and have higher grades at the end of the course (Evans, 2014). While social media use was widespread among college students, there has been little empirical data produced on the level of impact of social media with college prospective students, especially in the area of college choice decision (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013; Evans, 2014; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2014).

Print publications, on-campus recruiting events, and campus tours are still the most effective marketing tools to reach students (Johnston, 2010; Summer, 2012). However, students also utilized a variety of technology including cell phones, university websites, and social media platforms, and universities need to target prospective students on those media platforms strategically as well (Johnston, 2010; Noel-Levitz, 2010). The use of social media and two-way communication is important to this generation; they need constant, instantaneous communication with their peers, and universities should be using these tools to more effectively to reach prospective students and impact their college choice process through strategic marketing and recruiting plans (Elam, Stratton, & Gibson, 2007; Evans, 2014; Roper & Lettice, 2016; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015).

**Conclusion of Institutional Characteristics.** Academic reputation, location, and cost were consistently mentioned in many studies as significant factors (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Bunzel, 2007; Crawford, 2013 Greenwood, 2012; Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Johnston, 2010; Jones, 2015; Meredith, 2004; Lopez-Turley, 2009; McDonough et al., 1997; Kim, Koo, & Dittmore, 2014; Reynolds, 2007; Sandlin & Pena, 2014; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). Academic reputation was extremely important to students when making
their college choice and when cost was considered along with academic reputation, the
two factors strongly impacted a student's college decision (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska,
2003; Dolinsky, 2010; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Reynolds, 2007; Yugo & Reeve,
2007). Location was considered an important consideration for students, but there was
no empirical data to validate the theory that the location of a university increased the
likelihood of a student attending an institution (Lopez-Turley, 2009). University image,
recruiting strategies, and outside media influences were interrelated and played an
important role in a student's college choice process as well (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska,
2003; Bowman & Bastedo, 2009; Greenwood, 2012: Meredith, 2004). Students were
more likely to attend a university with an image most closely aligned with their idea of
the perfect college or university (Kuntz, 1987). While students preferred print
publications and on-campus visits, the effective use of technology, including the various
social media sites, played a crucial role in students' decisions to attend their universities;
however, the impact of social media on student college choice process is largely
unknown (Casey & Llewellyn, 2012: Crawford, 2013; Evans, 2014; Johnston, 2010;
Lindbeck & Foley, 2010; Noel-Levitz, 2014). Overall, a university's characteristics, its
cost, its location, brand image, reputation, marketing, and recruiting played an important
role in the higher education context of the students' college choice model (Perna, 2006).

Summary

It was clear the student college choice market was segmented based on
demographic, socioeconomic, social, and behavioral factors, which provides an
opportunity for enrollment managers to more effectively create marketing and recruiting
plans targeting student groups based on both institutional and student characteristics
students consider during the college choice process (Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Johnston, 2010; Lillis & Tian, 2008). As Perna’s (2006) Conceptual College Choice model explained, students focused on a variety of factors in four different contexts. Race and ethnicity; gender; parental influence; and socioeconomic status all played important roles in a student’s college choice process; however, the impact of each factor varied depending on their interaction with each other and institutional characteristics (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Dolinsky, 2010; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1998; Perna, 2006). Institutional characteristics, such as cost; location; a university’s reputation and image; a university’s marketing and recruiting efforts; and college rankings, also played important roles in a student’s college choice decision (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012; Kim, Koo, & Dittmore, 2014; McDonough et al., 1997; Reynolds, 2007; Yugo & Reeve, 2007). All of these factors taken together impacted students’ decisions differently based on the different factors making the student college choice process complicated, complex, and difficult to completely explain (Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Johnston, 2010; Perna, 2006).

As outlined in Perna’s (2006) College Choice model, marketing and recruiting by a university impacted a student’s college choice process, two factors many of the college choice models did not acknowledge (Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Johnston, 2010; Lillian & Tian, 2008). Over the past 10 years, online technology has become an increasingly popular tool for students during both the search and choice stages of college choice process (Crawford, 2013; Greenwood, 2012; Focusing Your E-Recruitment Efforts to Meet the Expectations of College-Bound Students. E-
Expectations, 2010; Johnston, 2010; Joly, 2016; Joly, 2015; Sandal & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015; Stampler, 2015). Universities and colleges have started to take advantage of a variety of online technology such as university websites, emails, cell phones, and social media sites to market to and recruit prospective students, because prospective students are highly active on a variety of social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, blogs, YouTube, and Flickr (Crawford, 2013; Greenwood, 2012; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016; Sandal & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). However, the level of impact social media use had on a student’s college choice decision-making process is relatively unknown due to lack of empirical data (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013; Evans, 2014; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2014).

Social media sites provided the opportunity for students to informally connect with other prospective students, current students, university administrators, and alumni to learn more about the authentic college experience offered at a university. However, more research needed to be conducted on the level of impact social media sites have on students’ college decision-making processes and universities use of social media to recruit students (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013; Crawford, 2013; Greenwood, 2012; Focusing Your E-Recruitment Efforts to Meet the Expectations of College-Bound Students. E-Expectations, 2010; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Joly, 2016; Sandal & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). Studies focused on if universities were using Facebook and Twitter to recruit prospective students, if students used social media to research universities, and the impact administrators perceived social media to have on a university’s increase in enrollment and recruiting numbers; however, there was no
research focusing specifically on how the different social media platforms could be used by universities to impact student choice process (Crawford, 2013; Evans, 2014; Greenwood, 2012; Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Sandal & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). There was also evidence showing, while companies, including universities and colleges, used social media sites, they were not strategic in their use of these sites, missing an opportunity to create important relationships with prospective students which would impact student enrollment (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Greenwood (2012) analyzed the universities and colleges on the U.S. News 2010-11 Best Colleges Rankings using the content analysis method, providing evidence social media platforms were used frequently by colleges and universities to promote their images and recruit prospective students. This quantitative research design focused on the importance of social media sites from the universities and colleges’ perspectives (Greenwood, 2012). Relevant findings were presented, but Greenwood (2012) focused on one very specific group of universities, and as a result, the results of the study were not generalizable to all universities. Campbell et al. (2013) found through interviewing 10 freshmen, two high schools students, and three adults that social media can be very useful for companies, because social media was relatively inexpensive. It allowed companies to stay current and connect with customers when they saw companies’ ads on Facebook, and often the customers were compelled to act as a result of the ad. In fact, the respondents saw the use of Facebook by companies as a personal touch and a company’s website as corporate and impersonal (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013). The qualitative research method, interviewing college freshmen, was helpful in determining the impact social media has on a student’s relationship with
different businesses and corporations; however, it focused on businesses and not universities (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013). Sashittal and Jassawalla (2015) conducted four focus groups with current college students, who were heavy Snapchat users, to determine how businesses could effectively build relationships with students via Snapchat. The focus groups identified the top social media sites among college students and produced in-depth findings that new brands should use to create a relationship and increase their brand awareness among college students (Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). This qualitative research method produced both relevant and useful findings for companies looking to build their brands and reach current college students (Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). The use of qualitative methods to understand how universities used different social media sites to recruit students, thus impacting student college choice process produced important findings that will help continue to create integrated marketing plans to increase student enrollment at their universities (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013; Greenwood, 2012; Han, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015).

Technology is constantly evolving and changing, and prospective students seek out the newest technologies to utilize and communicate on (Han, 2014; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). In fact, several of the research studies focusing on online technology and students’ college decision-making processes discussed their use of MySpace, a social media site that no longer exists (Han, 2014; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). Only a small amount research on current social media sites, such as Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, and Twitter, exists with regards to students’ college choice process as this online technology
is new and constantly evolving (Han, 2014; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). A Noel-Levitz (2014) report found 40% of high school seniors use Snapchat and only 3% of colleges and universities utilize this social media site as a recruiting tool. In 2015, Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla found 38.2% of Millennials to use Snapchat, while only 23.8% used Twitter. The average age of Snapchat users was 18, and the average age of Facebook users was 40, making Snapchat the social media platform of choice for Millennials and prospective college students (Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). In a survey of 3,000 prospective college students in 2016, 60% of the respondents used Snapchat on a daily basis compared to 53% using Facebook and YouTube on a daily basis (Joly, 2016). Additionally, Instagram is more popular among high school and college students than Facebook, and these students use Instagram more than any other social media site, two statistics university administrators and admissions offices should pay attention to (Ting, Cyril de Run, & Liew, 2016). In fact, in 2016, the four most popular social media platforms were YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat (Joly, 2015, Joly, 2016). Most of the research focusing on social media and college choice had been focused on Facebook, and if universities utilized Facebook in their recruitment of students (Casey & Llewellyn, 2012). While there has also been research done on the use of Twitter and college students, the focus has been on its use in college courses to increase student engagement (Evans, 2104; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2014). Overall, there is little data on the level of impact social media had on prospective students when they were choosing their universities or colleges and how universities were utilizing social media sites in order to market their universities to prospective students to increase student enrollment (Campbell, Anitsal, &
Anitsal, 2013; Evans, 2014; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2014). The purpose of this research study was to understand how social media impacted students’ college choice decision-making processes by analyzing how universities used social media sites to market their universities to prospective students.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Competition for students among colleges and universities has become fierce due to the lack of state funding, the increase in student tuition, and the growing number of colleges and universities in the United States (Casey & Llewellyn, 2012; Lewison & Hawes, 2007). Universities must be aware of the college choice decision-making process students go through and understand both the student and institutional characteristics impacting students’ decisions in order to more effectively market their universities and colleges (Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Johnston, 2010; Lillis & Tian, 2008). Extensive research has been done to determine the different student and institutional characteristics students have used to decide where they attended college; however, there were many differences based on a student’s gender, socioeconomic status, racial background, and ethnicity (Bateman & Spruill, 1996; Bergerson, 2009a; Bergerson, 2009b; Dolinsky, 2010; Han, 2014; Hossler & Gallagher, 1998; Perna, 2006). As result of these findings, there is an opportunity for universities to segment their target market, prospective students, in order to more effectively recruit them (Han, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Johnston, 2010; Lillis & Tian, 2008). One effective marketing tool that is relatively new and has not been researched in-depth is social media sites (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013; Han, 2014; Evans, 2014; Johnston, 2010). Social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, blogs, Vimeo, Vine, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Foursquare, Pinterest, and Snapchat (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal,
Students have started using social media at an increasingly high rate, and universities have the opportunity to create relationships and facilitate meaningful conversations with students through the use of popular social media sites in order to increase their brand awareness, create meaningful relationships, and recruit students to attend their universities (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013; Han, 2014; Joly, 2016; Johnston, 2010; Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). The purpose of this research study was to understand how social media impacted students' college choice decision-making processes by analyzing how universities used social media sites to market their universities to prospective students. This study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. How were universities utilizing their social media sites to connect with and recruit prospective students?

2. What impact, if any, did official university social media sites have on students’ college choice decision-making processes?

3. What patterns and/or trends emerged from this study that will help universities more effectively market their universities to students?

This study answered these research questions through a qualitative research design using content analysis.

**Research Methods**

**Research Study**

This research study utilized a quantitative research design to determine the level of significance social media has on students’ college choice decision-making processes through a thorough content analysis of universities’ official social media sites.
Qualitative research was conducted to determine the how and why of a central phenomenon, in this case, the impact of social media on the college choice process (Yates & Leggett, 2016). By analyzing the social construct of reality of a phenomena, college choice process, this study sought to understand if the use of social media sites by universities impacted a prospective student’s choice on what university to attend, focusing on the depth of the topic (Yates & Leggett, 2016). This qualitative research study was a content analysis of the use of various social media platforms by eight different types of universities and colleges in the United States. Qualitative content analysis was utilized to analyze the meaning of text communications (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). This type of research methodology provided an opportunity to uncover the nuances and true meanings of the institution of higher education, its target market, and current trends by analyzing the text of their communications (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). Through detailed analysis, data were grouped into meaningful categories; coded; and patterns and trends were identified based on qualitative data collected (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). The content analysis focused on how 16 universities and colleges used their official social media sites to recruit freshmen for the fall of 2017 and how social media communication impacted student college choice decision-making processes. The study took place during a one-week period at the height of recruitment season in October of 2016. During the time period of Sunday, October 23, 2016, to Saturday, October 29, 2016, data were collected, coded, and analyzed to determine trends and patterns in the use of social media by universities and potential students in order to more effectively market a university and recruit students.
Participants

The study utilized the method of content analysis to determine the impact social media platforms had on students’ college choice decision-making processes at 16 different universities and colleges. The 16 universities chosen were based on the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.) as defined by size and setting. It was a stratified purposeful sample based on geographical location. The 16 institutions studied included two four-year, large primarily residential universities; two four-year, large, nonresidential universities, two four-year medium, primarily residential universities; two four-year, medium, nonresidential universities; two four-year, small, primarily residential universities; two four-year, small, nonresidential universities; two four-year, very small, primarily residential universities; and two four-year, very small, nonresidential universities (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.). Each group consisted of one private university and one public university with the exception of one private-for-profit university chosen in the very small, non-residential category. The number of prospective students, junior and seniors in high school during the fall of 2016, following the different social media sites utilized by the 16 universities and colleges for a week, and factors, such as their activity on the sites, interaction, and resulting comments, were recorded, counted, and analyzed as were the type of messages and photos posted by the universities on their official social media sites. Prospective students’ names following, interacting with, and commenting on the university’s social media sites were recorded and analyzed but remained anonymous.
Data Collection

The research proposal was submitted to the Louisiana Tech University Institutional Research Board (IRB) and the Texas Tech University Institutional Research Board (IRB), the university where I was employed at the time of the study. The study was approved by both institutions.

Qualitative Procedures

The research design was qualitative in nature. Content analysis methodology was used to analyze data collected from the official social media sites of 16 different colleges and universities. One purpose of the universities' social media sites were to recruit prospective students. The social media sites used in the content analysis were the official Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Vimeo, Vine, Flickr, Tumblr, LinkedIn, blogs, Cloud, iTunes, Foursquare, Google+, Pinterest, Tagboard, and YouTube accounts of each university listed on their official website. This content analysis focused on eight different types of universities and colleges as categorized by size and setting based on the Carnegie classifications (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.). Of the 16 universities chosen, there were two universities from each size and setting, one public institution and one private institution for all but one category (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.). Data were collected from the various social media sites over a one-week period (seven days) in October of 2016, Sunday, October 23rd to Saturday, October 29th, which was a peak recruitment time. The content analysis identified the number of followers; types of interaction; descriptive statistics; comments made; pictures posted; and messages sent out by the university and received by prospective students along with other data useful in analyzing
and determining the impact social media sites have on students' college choice decision-making processes. The data were collected, analyzed, and coded to identify themes and trends.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected from the content analysis of 16 universities' official social media sites and corresponding enrollment reports were transcribed in NVivo, a qualitative software program, and analyzed using the ground theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). Coding was used to develop categories, concepts, and properties to determine the interrelationships of the data collected and identify trends and patterns related to the impact social media has on students' college choice decision-making processes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). Cross-analysis was conducted, and coding was reviewed for overlap, redundancies, and commonalities (Straus, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005).

**Verification**

To ensure verification, the research questions, data collection methods, and data analysis methods were reviewed for fit. Rich descriptions and accurate data sets were provided in order to produce a study that was transferable. Screenshots, comments, and raw data were included in the research study in order to provide conformability.

**Role of the Researcher and Ethical Considerations**

I worked at Texas Tech University, one of the universities I collected and analyzed data from during the content analysis. I was the Director of the Center for Campus Life at Texas Tech University at the time of the study. However, I did not have
any contact with or influence over the administrators posting on the university's official social media sites being analyzed. I collected, analyzed, and reported the data ethically. Prospective students' names were left out to protect their identities when sharing the results of the qualitative data collected through the social media sites analyzed. The results were locked in my office. I received IRB permission from Louisiana Tech University as well as Texas Tech University.

Conclusion

This research design utilized qualitative techniques providing a research study focusing on students' college choice decision-making processes and social media. The qualitative study, content analysis, allowed for an in-depth explanation of how social media impacts students' college choice decision-making processes through a study of 16 universities and colleges and their official social media sites designed to recruit students during the fall of 2016. It also looked at how universities recruit students through the use of various social media sites. This research design allowed me to gain an in-depth look at how the official universities' social media platforms impacted students' college choice decision-making processes. The outcomes of the analysis, based on the university posted content, students' responses, identified factors for choosing their universities, and their interaction with a university's social media sites, will help universities effectively market their institutions and grow enrollment. The next chapter will focus on an overview of the findings of the research project.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social media sites are increasingly becoming the way people, especially prospective college students, communicate with each other as well as gain information about the things they are interested in (Johnston, 2010; Joly, 2016; Joly, 2015; Noel-Levitz, 2010; Stampler, 2015). Social media platforms provide a unique opportunity for colleges and universities to communicate in real-time with prospective students in order to more effectively market their institutions of higher education (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013; Evans, 2014; Joly, 2016; Joly, 2015; Stampler, 2015). It also allows prospective students the opportunity to connect with current students at a university and find out what the university is really like, helping universities to recruit more students (Joly, 2016; Joly, 2015; Stampler, 2015). The purpose of this research study was to understand how social media impacted students’ college choice decision-making processes by analyzing how universities used social media sites to market their universities to prospective students.

This study sought to answer the following three research questions:

1. How were universities utilizing their social media sites to connect with and recruit prospective students?

2. What impact, if any, did official university social media sites have on students’ college choice decision-making processes?
3. What patterns and/or trends emerged from this study that will help universities more effectively market their universities to students?

This research study used a qualitative method, content analysis, to understand how social media impacted student college choice process by analyzing how universities used their official social media sites to market their universities to prospective students.

**Analysis of Data**

The month of October is a very popular recruiting period for colleges and prospective students. As a result, a seven-day period during the month of October was chosen to conduct a comprehensive content analysis study. The dates, Sunday, October 23, 2016, to Saturday, October 29, 2016, were picked at random. The 16 universities studied were randomly selected based on the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.) and geographical location in order to gain a comprehensive view of universities and colleges across the United States. The random purposeful sample was stratified further with four universities from each size and setting classification. Each size and setting classification was then broken down into residential and non-residential, and private versus public universities with one for-profit university. The 16 universities chosen were Texas Tech University, Auburn University, Brigham Young University, Texas Christian University, Jackson State University, Northwestern State University, Barry University, Marymount University, University of Notre Dame, Southern University of New Orleans, South College, Trinity Washington University, Bacone College, University of Maine at Presque Isle, Allen College, and Northern New Mexico College. Since the information gathered from each of these universities' social media sites is public information, the names of the universities were used in order to easily differentiate
the results of one university’s use of social media use from another. The social media sites used by the 16 universities were identified through the listing of social media sites on each of their main webpages. The social media sites discovered and studied were blogs, Cloud, Facebook, Flickr, Foursquare, Google+, Instagram, iTunes, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tagboards, Tumblr, Twitter, Vimeo accounts, Vine, and YouTube. A variety of variables were analyzed, including the usage of each site by university administrators; the types of pictures and content posted to the sites by the university administrators and the followers of the accounts; the number of followers, likes, and shares gained; and the comments made by followers during the seven-day analysis period. The qualitative software, NVIVO 11, was utilized to log, collect, and analyze the data. The analysis of the data determined how social media sites impacted the college choice process of prospective students through an analysis of universities’ official social media sites and provided insight for universities to more efficiently recruit new students.

Presentation of the Findings

Type of Coding

Once the data were collected, data were coded four different ways. The types of coding included coding data based on word frequency queries; coding determined by the content posted to the social media sites; the overall use of social media sites by the universities; and the individual usage of social media sites by the 16 chosen universities. By creating this type of coding, the data were analyzed, coded, and synthesized to answer the research questions and determine how social media impacted students’ college choice decision-making processes.
**Word Frequency Coding.** The first type of coding scheme used was word frequency, or the number of times a word was used in the data collected from the seven-day content analysis of the 16 universities’ official social media sites. The word, universities, was posted to the universities’ social media sites 3,207 times during the seven-day period (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 1). The social media administrators and followers of Jackson State University used the word, university, over 1,495 times. The second most frequent word posted to the 16 universities’ social media sites was students at 2,602 times. Barry University’s social media sites, their administrators and followers, used the word, students, 373 times, while Brigham Young University’s social media sites, their administrators and followers, mentioned the word, students, 238 times. These two words were by far the most posted words on the 16 universities’ social media sites.

The next most posted word was admissions, and it was mentioned 802 times. Barry University’s social media sites contained the word, admissions, 148 times, while the University of Notre Dame’s social media sites contained the word 137 times, and Brigham Young University’s sites mentioned it 100 times. Only two universities’ social media sites did not have any postings containing the word, admissions. The two universities were South College and Northern New Mexico College. The word, undergraduates, was posted frequently as well to the social media sites. In fact, it was posted 616 times to 14 of the universities’ social media sites analyzed, all but Bacone College and South College. Barry University’s social media sites mentioned it 144 times, and Marymount University was next with 81 mentions. The word, graduate, was posted 603 times to all 16 universities’ social media sites. Bacone College’s social media sites
had the word posted 44 times to their sites; the University of Notre Dame’s social media
sites mentioned the word 35 times; and Texas Tech University’s sites mentioned it 31
times. The word, loans, was posted 658 times to 12 of the 16 universities’ social media
sites. Barry University’s social media sites mentioned the word 106 times, while
Brigham Young University and Marymount University’s sites mentioned the word 71
times. Allen College, South College, Southern University of New Orleans, and the
University of Maine at Presque Isle’s social media sites did not contain the word, loans.
The word, academic, was posted 521 times on 14 of the 16 universities’ social media
sites. Barry University’s social media sites’ administrators and followers mentioned it
the most at 98 times, while South College and Bacone College’s sites did not mention the
word. The word, freshmen, was posted 443 times to 14 universities’ social media sites.
Barry University’s social media sites mentioned the word, freshmen, 105 times. Brigham
Young University’s social media sites contained the word, freshmen, 65 times (for a
more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 1).

The next group of words all related to the recruiting of new students. The word,
scholarships, was used frequently at 404 times (for a more detailed description, see
Appendix A, Table 2). Brigham Young University’s social media sites contained the
word, scholarships, 76 times, while Northwestern State University mentioned it 50 times.
Only two universities’ social media sites, Allen College and South College, did not
contain the word, scholarships, during the seven-day period. The word, applications, was
posted on 12 of the 16 universities’ social media sites 349 times. Barry University’s
social media sites contained the word 78 times with Brigham Young University’s sites
mentioning it 43 times. The word, applicants, was mentioned 230 times by eight
universities’ sites with Barry University’s social media sites mentioning the word 60 times, and Marymount University’s sites mentioning it 28 times. The word, admitted, was posted 165 times to Marymount University’s social media sites by administrators and followers. Barry University’s social media sites mentioned the word 53 times, and Brigham Young University and Texas Christian University’s social media sites both mentioned the word 22 times. HBCU was posted 115 times to two universities’ social media sites, Jackson State University and Southern University of New Orleans, 68 times and 47 times respectively. The word, recruiting, was mentioned 109 times by 10 of the 16 universities’ social media sites. The University of Notre Dame’s social media sites mentioned the word, recruiting, 45 times and the word was posted to Auburn University’s site 23 times. Ten of the 16 universities’ social media sites mentioned the word, recruitment, 87 times. While none of the universities’ social media sites’ administrators and followers posted the word, recruitment, more than eight times, all 10 universities posted at least one post containing the word, recruitment, with Northwestern State University posting it eight times, and the University of Notre Dame posting it seven times. These words all dealt with components of the recruitment process of prospective students for universities (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 2).

Lastly, words related to athletics were used in the universities’ social media posts, tweets, pictures, and comments by followers. In fact, the word, athletics, was posted 123 times; the word, games, was posted 608 times; and the word, football, was posted 392 times. The word, coach, was posted 284 times; the word, team, was posted 281 times; and the word, basketball, was posted 227 times (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 3). The word, baseball, was posted 104 times; the word, gridiron,
was posted 101 times; and the word, soccer, was posted 93 times. Overall, words related to university athletics were posted on the social media sites 2,270 times. Only two universities, Allen College and South College, had no mention of the athletic-related words on their social media sites during the seven-day period. The word, football, was mentioned most by the universities’ social media sites’ administrators and followers. Texas Christian University’s social media sites had posts using the word, football, 115 times, while University of Notre Dame’s social media sites mentioned the word, football, 87 times, and Brigham Young University mentioned it 68 times. Jackson State University’s social media sites mentioned the word 48 times, Auburn University mentioned it 37 times, and Texas Tech University mentioned the word, football, 12 times. The remaining eight universities’ social media sites mentioned football five time or less. The use of athletic-related words was common in a majority of the universities’ official social media sites’ posts and their followers’ comments.

A common component of social media posts, tweets, and pictures were hashtags following a post or tweet or accompanying a picture on Instagram. Hashtags are very popular in the social media arena. Hashtags that are tweeted multiple times are said to be trending, thus increasing views, likes, shares, and comments of the hashtags that were shared. Five universities’ social media sites had followers posting the universities’ hashtags in a response to a post, picture, or tweet (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 4). The five universities using hashtags were the University of Notre Dame, Auburn University, Jackson State University, Texas Christian University, and Texas Tech University. Four hashtags were used for a total of 2,105 times on the University of Notre Dame’s social media sites. The hashtag, #NotreDame, was used
1,811 times; the hashtag, #fightingirish, was used 212 times; the hashtag, #goirish, was used 81 times; and, the hashtag, #ApplyND, was used once. Three different hashtags were used a total of 1,975 times on Auburn University's social media sites. The hashtag, #Auburn, was used 1,585 times; the hashtag, #Wareagle, was used 301 times; and the hashtag, #AUfamilynews, was used times. There were five hashtags used for a total of 885 times on the Jackson State University’s social media sites. The hashtag, #jsuhomecoming16, was used 626 times; the hashtag, #jsu20, was used 88 times; the hashtag, #theelove, was used 73 times; the hashtag, #jsu was used 48 times; and the hashtag, #teamjsu, was used 50 times. Only two hashtags were used on the Texas Christian University’s social media sites, #gofrogs and #TCU, for a total of 883 times. The hashtag, #TCU, was used 758 times; and, the hashtag, #gofrogs was used 125 times. Lastly, there were two hashtags used for a total for 326 times on Texas Tech University. The #texastech hashtag was used 161 times, and the #TTU hashtag was used 165 times.

Of the 16 universities chosen, over one-fourth of the universities had hashtags posted on or to their official social media sites via administrators and followers.

**Content-Based Coding.** After the initial analysis of data, it was coded the content into types of events. The pictures and messages posted by the administrators of the universities’ official social media sites were classified based on the content of the posts. The classification codes identified and chosen were based on the analysis of data and were as follows: academic programs, alumni mentions, admissions events, alumni events, aspirational ideas, athletic events, campus events, community service events, current events, everyday observations, faculty recognition, family events, game day posts, homecoming events, open houses, Election Day 2016, prospective students, research
programs, social media mentions, student events, student recognition, and university recognition. This classification system allowed further stratification and analysis of the data, in order to determine the findings based on the type of content posted by the universities on their social media sites and how their followers reacted to the content.

The most frequently used classification code was student events (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 5). There were 412 posts during the seven-day period that were identified and coded as student events. Student events were classified as any event taking place on the university’s campus created for students to attend. Jackson State University’s social media sites had the most content posted about student events with 130 posts, followed next by Trinity Washington University’s social media sites with 73 posts. Northwestern State University’s social media sites posted 39 times about student events, and the University of Notre Dame’s social media sites posted 33 messages about student events. However, one college’s social media sites, Bacone College, did not have a tweet, picture, or post mentioning student events on campus during the seven-day period.

The next most popular type of content posted was campus events. The category, campus events, was determined to be any event hosted by the university on campus open to all faculty, staff, students, alumni, and the public. There were 267 posts about campus events, with Jackson State University’s social media sites having 59 posts about campus events (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 5). The University of Notre Dame had 41 posts on their social media sites about campus events, and Northwestern State University had 29 posts. Every university analyzed mentioned campus events at least twice in their posts, pictures, or tweets.
Current events were a very popular subject to post and tweet about on the universities' social media sites. There were 162 times campus events were coded on the different institutional social media accounts (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 5). Trinity Washington University's sites had the most mentions with 104, followed by the University of Notre Dame with 17 mentions, and Auburn University with eight mentions. Current events were classified as a post or tweet related to the events going on in the world at a point in time. These types of posted included national breast cancer awareness day, polio day, national holidays, protests, and other current events happening around the world.

The fourth most mentioned classification were tweets, pictures, or posts aimed directly at prospective students. These posts advertised an aspect of the university impacting prospective students directly, such as open houses, admissions deadlines, events, FAFSA instructions, or application advice. There were 157 posts, pictures, or tweets targeting prospective students. Trinity Washington University’s social media sites’ administrators tweeted or posted 57 different times about information regarding prospective students, while the University of Notre Dame sites had 21 tweets or posts about prospective students (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 5). Northwestern State University’s and Texas Tech University’s social media sites had 16 posts, pictures, or tweets targeting prospective students and recruiting them. The only institution not mentioning prospective students in their social media content was Bacone College. However, there were only a total of 25 tweets or posts about open houses taking place at four universities during the seven-day period analyzed. Trinity Washington University’s social media sites had the most mentions of an admissions open house with
18 posts. Northwestern State University’s social media sites mentioned open houses three times, and Allen College’s sites mentioned it twice. However, it is important to note, Trinity Washington University had its own separate social media accounts created and controlled by their admissions office in order to recruit new prospective students and advertise upcoming admissions events. These accounts focused strictly on admissions and recruiting prospective students for their universities.

Tweets, pictures, and posts about homecoming events on a university’s campus had the fifth most number of mentions with a total of 145 (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 5). Jackson State University celebrated homecoming during the seven-day period analyzed, and the university’s social media sites had 125 posts, tweets, or pictures about homecoming events. Southern University of New Orleans also hosted homecoming during the seven-day period but only had seven tweets and posts about their festivities. Homecoming activities were defined as any event on campus pertaining to the university’s week-long homecoming activities.

The next category with the most mentions was tweets, pictures, and posts relating to academic programs. There was a total of 134 posts about academic programs on the 16 universities’ social media sites (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 5). Northwestern State University’s social media sites mentioned academic programs 19 times. Auburn University and the University of Notre Dame had 18 mentions each, and Texas Tech University’s sites mentioned academic-related programming 16 times. All 16 universities studied, except Southern University of New Orleans, mentioned academic programs at least once in their pictures, tweets, and posts on their official social media sites.
The next category, Election Day 2016, received 117 mentions on 12 of the universities’ social media sites during the course of the content analysis (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 5). Most of the universities’ posts promoted go vote as part of their Election Day 2016 content. All, but one university posting about Election Day 2016, focused on advertising the importance of voting in the election and voting early. Each university had at least one mention about Election Day 2016. Brigham Young University’s and Jackson State University’s social media sites had eight mentions a piece. The University of Notre Dame and Texas Christian University had four mentions each, and Marymount University had three mentions. Auburn University and University of Maine at Presque Isle had two mentions each; and Barry University, South College, and Texas Tech University each had one mention. Trinity Washington University tweeted and posted 82 times about Election Day 2016 in the seven-day analysis period, signifying how important the university felt about the presidential election. The posts were partisan with an overwhelming 64 tweets, pictures, and posts about the election, the university’s beliefs, and the actions of the two presidential candidates.

Twelve universities’ social media sites posted or tweeted about athletic-related activities on campus a total of 110 times with six of those universities also tweeting or posting an additional 42 times about football game days (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 5). Auburn University’s social media sites posted 38 times about athletic-related events during the seven-day period and additional three times about its football game day coming up on Saturday, October 29, 2016. The University of Notre Dame mentioned athletic events 17 times on its social media sites and its upcoming
football game on Saturday, October 29, 2016, a total of 18 times. Jackson State University’s social media sites tweeted or posted 11 times about athletic-related activities and an additional 10 times about its football game day on Saturday, October 29, 2016. Texas Christian University’s social media sites’ administrators posted and tweeted eight times about athletic-related events and five times about its upcoming football game day on Saturday, October 29, 2016. The other universities tweeting and posting about athletic-related events on their social media sites included Texas Tech University, Brigham Young University, Northwestern State University, Southern University of New Orleans, Bacone College, Northern New Mexico College, Trinity Washington University, and the University of Maine at Presque Isle.

Admissions events were the next most mentioned category with a total of 64 mentions by six universities (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 5). Trinity Washington University’s social media sites mentioned upcoming admissions events for prospective students 46 times. The University of Notre Dame’s social media accounts mentioned admissions events eight times, and Northwestern State University’s sites mentioned these types of events four times. Allen College and North New Mexico College’s sites mentioned these activities twice, and South College’s accounts once. However, it is important to note both the University of Notre Dame and Trinity Washington University had social media accounts run by their admissions offices in order to specifically recruit prospective students as did Brigham Young University. However, those sites run by the Brigham Young University Admissions Office posted no upcoming admissions-related events.
Several of the categories had anywhere between two to 51 mentions on the 16 universities’ official social media sites (for a more detailed description, see Appendix A, Table 5). These posts included everyday observations, research programs, student recognition, alumni recognition, alumni events, community service, faculty recognition, social media sites, family events, aspirational ideas, and university recognition. Everyday observations, such as quotes by famous people to inspire followers, were popular posts on eight universities’ social media sites. They were mentioned on the universities’ social media sites a total of 51 times. Brigham Young University’s social media sites posted 14 everyday observations, and the University of Notre Dame posted 11 times. Brigham Young University and Trinity Washington University both posted seven times about everyday observations. Research programs had 39 mentions on nine universities’ social media sites with the University of Notre Dame leading the way with 13 mentions, Auburn University with seven mentions, and Texas Tech University with four mentions. Research program tweets, pictures, and posts were defined as posts covering any relevant research implemented by a university or one of its professors. Student recognition was classified as any post, picture, or tweet highlighting a student or students for achieving an academic milestone. There were 38 posts, pictures, or tweets classified as student recognition. Eight universities tweeted or posted about student recognition with Trinity Washington University posting about it 23 times; Northwestern State University five times; and Northern New Mexico College and Barry University posting three times each. Alumni-related posts were made by 12 universities for a total of 37 mentions. Posts or tweets classified as alumni posts covered content aimed at alumni or recognizing alumni of the university. University of Notre Dame had 11
alumni-related posts; Auburn University had nine posts; and Jackson State University and Northwestern State University each had seven posts. Alumni events, messages specifically inviting alumni to campus for events, were coded separately. There were only 15 alumni event-related posts. The University of Notre Dame, Jackson State University, and Northwestern State University all had two posts about alumni events, and Auburn University had one post. Lastly, there were six categories that each had less than 15 mentions by the universities’ social media sites. These categories were community service with 13 posts, faculty recognition with eight posts, social media sites with six posts, family events with six posts, aspirational ideas with five posts, and university recognition with two posts.

**Universities Social Media Sites Coding**

**Social Media Sites.** The first step of the content analysis was to identify all of the official social media sites of the 16 chosen universities. I followed all of the social media sites before Sunday, October 23, 2016, the day the content analysis began, as not to impact the number of followers during the seven-day period. All 16 universities listed their official social media sites on their main webpages with the exception of Bacone College. Bacone College only listed its Facebook page and not its Instagram and Twitter pages. Three of the universities, Brigham Young University, University of Notre Dame, and Trinity Washington University, also had official social media sites run by admissions. The social media sites listed on the universities main websites included blogs, Clouds, Facebook, Flickr, Foursquare, Google+, Instagram, iTunes, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tagboard, Tumblr, Twitter, Vimeo, Vine, and YouTube.
While many of the social media sites listed on the universities’ websites were active, many were inactive, and the universities still had those social media sites listed on their main webpages. For example, Trinity Washington University had a blog linked to their main webpage; however, it was out of date. Jackson State University had a cloud account, but it had not been updated for over two years. The University of Notre Dame had an iTunes account; however, it had not been updated since 2009 and was password protected. It was only accessible to current students and faculty. Texas Tech University had a Foursquare account, and the account lost one follower during the seven-day period. Texas Tech University created its Foursquare account in May 2011, and it had not been updated in over two years. Another social media platform being utilized by one university, Texas Christian University, was Tagboard; however, the content was outdated. Texas Christian University also had an outdated Vine account. Four universities had Pinterest accounts, Jackson State University, University of Notre Dame, Texas Christian University, and the University of Maine at Presque Isle. All of the accounts looked active; however, there was no activity, no additions of pins, and no new followers gained in the seven-day period analyzed. Five universities had Flickr accounts; however, only one of the accounts, Marymount University, was updated in the seven-day period. Texas Tech University’s Flickr account was the next most recently updated with pictures from the university’s May 2016 commencement ceremony.

Several social media accounts listed on the universities’ main pages were still active, and they still received views and gained followers; however, the universities did not update the content on their social media accounts. These social media sites were Vimeo, LinkedIn, Google+, and YouTube. Three universities, Jackson State University,
Northwestern State University, and University of Maine at Presque, had Vimeo accounts. The University of Maine at Presque Isle increased their following by one. Northwestern State University increased their views of the content by 20, up from 210 views to 230 views. However, none of the three universities’ Vimeo accounts had more than 36 followers. Also, during the seven-day period none of the universities updated the content posted on their accounts. Five universities had current LinkedIn accounts, University of Maine at Presque Isle, Texas Tech University, Northern New Mexico College, Barry University, and Marymount University. However, there were no activity or posts during the seven-day period on any of the five accounts. The last update on any of the five accounts was over a month ago. However, three universities did gain followers in the seven-day period with Texas Tech University gaining six followers, University of Maine at Presque Isle gaining 10 followers, and Marymount University gaining 116 followers. Northern New Mexico College and Barry University both lost followers, one and 18 followers respectively. Five universities had Google+ accounts; however, the most recently updated account was in August of 2016. Three of the universities with Google+ accounts, Barry University, Brigham Young University, and University of Maine at Presque Isle, did not gain any new followers in the seven-day period. Two universities did gain new followers. Jackson State University’s Google+ page gained one new follower, and Texas Christian University’s site gained six new followers. YouTube was a popular social media site for universities. Thirteen of the 16 universities had YouTube accounts. In fact, two of the universities had two accounts, one university account and one admissions account. However, only the University of Notre Dame updated their channel with one video during the seven-day analysis period. The only three universities
without YouTube accounts were Allen College, Bacone College, and Trinity Washington University. The University of Notre Dame and Brigham Young University each had an official university YouTube account and an admissions account with different content posted. Nine of the total 15 accounts had been updated within the last month, eight before the seven-day period, while six universities’ accounts had not been updated in over a year.

Two social media sites, Tumblr and Snapchat, while active, were not utilized by many universities. Three universities, Northwestern State University, the University of Notre Dame, and Texas Christian University, all had Tumblr feeds. Texas Christian University’s Tumblr account was a dead link, while the other two universities’ Tumblr accounts were active. Northwestern State University’s Tumblr account posted new stories about the university, research programs, and current student programs at least once a day during the seven-day period. The University of Notre Dame used their Tumblr account as a recruiting tool for prospective and incoming students. It was geared towards incoming students and updated daily by the student interns in the admissions office with relevant admissions information about the university. Six universities had Snapchat accounts; while only one university, University of Notre Dame’s Admissions office, utilized their Snapchat in the seven-day period.

The most active and utilized sites by the universities were Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Every university chosen had a Facebook page and four universities had admissions Facebook accounts. The admissions Facebook pages varied in size with Brigham Young University Admissions page having 16,033 followers; the University of Notre Dame Admissions page having 6,146 followers; Trinity Washington University
Admissions having 307 followers; and the University of Maine at Presque Isle
Admissions' Facebook page was blank. The sixteen universities' Facebook page number
of page likes could be split into three categories: Facebook pages with a large number of
page likes, a medium number of page likes, and a small number of page likes. Brigham
Young University had 352,797 total page likes; Auburn University had 348,732 total
page likes; Texas Tech University had 230,389 total page likes; and the University of
Notre Dame had 157,764 page likes. These four universities made up the universities
with the largest number of page likes by Facebook users. Texas Christian University,
Barry University, Jackson State University, Northwestern State University, and
Marymount University all had a medium number of page likes. Texas Christian
University had 77,743 total page likes; Barry University had 68,645 total page likes;
Northwestern State University had 63,048 total page likes; and Marymount University
had 10,200 total page likes. The remaining universities, Trinity Washington University,
Northern New Mexico College, Bacone College, Southern University of New Orleans,
the University of Maine at Presque Isle, South College, and Allen College, all had a much
smaller number of page likes. Trinity Washington University had 3,195 total page likes;
Northern New Mexico College had 2,849 total page likes; Bacone College had 2,814
total page likes; University of Maine at Presque Isle had 2,476 total page likes; South
College had 2,352 total page likes; and Allen College had 1,818 total page likes. The
number of new page likes during the seven-day period ranged from three to 720 likes,
and the number of likes per post ranged from zero to 3,300 likes, making Facebook an
active social media site. In fact, every university posted at least two posts to its Facebook
account during the seven-day period. The university with the most Facebook posts was
Jackson State University, with 30 Facebook posts made during the time period. Brigham Young University had the most liked Facebook post with 3,300 likes, and Jackson State University had the highest number of new page likes at 1,720 during the analysis period.

Of the 16 universities, 13 universities had active Instagram accounts. Three of the universities had two Instagram accounts, one run by the university and one by its admissions office. Those universities were Brigham Young University, University of Notre Dame, and Trinity Washington University. Of the 16 Instagram accounts, 10 accounts were active during the seven-day period, posting photos at least one time during the designated time period. Those universities included Auburn University, Barry College, Brigham Young University Admissions, Brigham Young University, Jackson State University, Marymount University, Northwestern State University, University of Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Admissions, and Texas Christian University. Of the 16 active Instagram accounts, six accounts were not active during the seven-day period. Those universities included Allen College, Bacone College, Texas Tech University, Trinity Washington University Admissions, Trinity Washington University, and University of Maine at Presque Isle. The posts on all 16 Instagram accounts ranged from athletics to academic programs, to campus programs, to student recognition, to everyday observations, to admissions and recruiting events and received large numbers of likes for the photos and videos posted as well as a large increase of followers during the seven-day period. The number of followers gained during the seven-day period ranged from two new followers to 700 new followers. The number of likes per picture ranged from no likes to 9,161 likes on the 16 Instagram accounts. Three universities, Northern New Mexico College, South College, and Southern University at New Orleans, did not
have Instagram accounts.

All 16 universities and the three universities' admissions offices had twitter accounts. However, Brigham Young University Admissions, University of Notre Dame Admissions, Trinity Washington University Admission, Bacone College, Brigham Young University Admissions, and Northern New Mexico College's accounts had no tweets during the seven-day period. The Jackson State University's official account posted the most to Twitter, with 59 tweets and all but two tweets focusing on Homecoming 2016. Trinity Washington University's account had the most retweets at 139 retweets and 40 tweets with a total of 179 tweets. The types of tweets all of the universities’ accounts covered included: campus events, athletic events, retweets, politics, student recognition, academic programs, research programs, random observations, current events, quotes, and community service. The number of likes and shares per post ranged from zero to 876 likes, and the number of followers gained during the seven-day period ranged from zero to 1,000 new followers, making it a popular social media site.

Individual Universities Use of Social Media Sites. Each university chosen for the content analysis had each of its official social media sites analyzed by content of posts, types of pictures, and types of comments. The number of posts; shares; comments; likes per post or picture; shares or retweets; followers gained; and overall usage by the administrators of the accounts and its followers were also analyzed. Each university’s size, type, and Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education were analyzed and coded as well. Every university’s use of social media sites were logged, coded, and analyzed to determine how universities use of social media sites impacted student’s
college decision-making process along with logging the number of new followers, likes, shares and comments per post per social media site per university.

Allen College is classified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.) as a very small, private, four-year, non-residential campus. This college focuses on healthcare education and offers associate, bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees in variety of healthcare majors such as nursing, health science, radiography, and occupational therapy. Allen College has an enrollment of 610 students and is located in Waterloo, Iowa. Allen College used Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts to recruit prospective students and market its university. A university administrator posted once a day everyday on its Facebook page but Saturday, October 29, 2016, for a total of six posts in the seven-day period. There were a total of 1,818 page likes, an increase of four new page likes during the seven-day period. There were two likes on the six posts with no shares and no comments on the posts (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 1). Only one of the followers who liked the two posts was a prospective student. The types of posts included quotes, thoughts, a campus open house, and a post asking for feedback about the Facebook account. Allen College’s Instagram account had a total of 68 followers, no change in followers, and no pictures posted during the seven-day period. There were a total of 22 pictures posted on the Instagram account with no new followers or pictures posted. Allen College’s Twitter feed was active with a total of four tweets during the seven-day period. The tweets were quotes, campus events, and the promotion of a campus open house. There were a total of 143 followers with no new followers, no likes, no comments, and no retweets of the four tweets posted (for a
more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 2). Allen College posted a total of 167 posts since it opened its Twitter account.

Auburn University is a large, four-year, public, non-residential university located in Auburn, Alabama, with an enrollment of 28,290 students. Auburn University had active social media accounts, which included a Facebook page, Instagram, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube accounts. Auburn University posted at least once a day on its Facebook account during the seven-day period. There were a total of 11 posts made with an increase of 611 new page likes. The total page likes at the end of the analysis period was 348,732 likes. The two Facebook posts with the most likes, 1,100, were a post about Auburn University basketball great, Charles Barkley, and a post about football game day. There was an average of 488 likes per post, and the lowest number of likes per post was 14. The number of comments ranged from no comments to 63 comments per post. The announcement of a new Gulf Shores campus received 63 comments, and the announcement of a NASA partnership received the highest number of shares with 282 shares (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 3). Only upcoming events, campus partnerships, and athletic-related content were posted on the Facebook account. A total of 207 prospective students commented, liked, or shared the 11 Facebook posts. Auburn University’s Instagram had 60,000 followers at the end of the seven-day period and an increase of 300 followers. The administrator of the account posted six pictures. The types of pictures included events, the announcement of the new campus, athletic events, and Auburn University historical events. The pictures received anywhere from 893 to 2,492 likes. The pictures with the most likes was national pumpkin day with 2,492 likes, and it also received the most likes by prospective students
at 303. Six pictures had comments ranging from two to as many as 15 comments per post. A total of 1,249 prospective students liked the six Instagram pictures during the seven day period. Auburn University’s Twitter account was the most active of its social media accounts with 22 tweets, 13 tweets and 9 retweets, made during the seven-day period, resulting in an increase of 400 followers to reach a total of 90,200 followers. The tweets included notifications about campus events, athletic events, research programs, academic events, and student events. The average number of likes were 97, and the average number of retweets by followers was 67. The tweet with the most number of retweets, 687, was the tweet wishing the Auburn University football coach a happy birthday. The tweet with the most likes, 878, was the announcement of Auburn University winning the football game on Saturday, October 29, 2016. Only 37 prospective students liked the 13 tweets posted by Auburn University. The types of comments Auburn University received on their Facebook and Twitter accounts were made by alumni, current students, and parents of current students based on their social media site profiles. Auburn University also replied twice to comments when asked a question by the accounts’ followers. While Auburn University had both YouTube and Flickr accounts, neither account was active. The YouTube account did not post new videos during the seven-day period but did increase its number of subscribers by 12 to reach 6,173 subscribers. The number of views of the video posted to the account increased by 11,788 in the seven-day period. The Auburn University Flickr account had no new followers, and the last picture posted was October 20, 2016. This type of activity meant the site was active and fairly current; however, there were no new pictures posted during the seven-day period.
Bacone College is a very small, private, primarily residential, four-year, liberal arts college with an enrollment of 900 students located in Muskogee, Oklahoma. The college had active Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts. Bacone College had an increase of 21 new page likes during the seven-day period to increase its Facebook page likes to 2,979. There were a total of nine posts made with two comments and no shares (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 4). The average number of likes per post was nine, and the posts’ content were all event-related except for the athletic-related post, with 19 prospective students liking or sharing the nine posts. While Bacone College had an Instagram account with 405 followers and a total of 33 posts, there were no posts made during the seven-day period, and the account lost one follower. Bacone College’s Twitter account made two tweets during the period, both about campus events. There was one retweet and one like on one of the posts by the same person, a prospective student. During the period, Bacone College’s Twitter account gained one follower to reach 685 followers and had posted 1,730 tweets since creating the account.

Barry University is a medium, four-year, private, non-residential, liberal arts university located in Miami, Florida, with an enrollment of 8,518 students. The university had several official university social media site accounts including Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. The Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts were active; however, the Google+, LinkedIn, and YouTube accounts were not. The Barry University’s administrator posted 10 times to the university’s Facebook page the during the seven-day period with a least one post a day except for Saturday, October 29, 2016. The posts included a variety of inspirational quotes, spotlights on professors, and advertisements for upcoming events (for a more detailed
There were an average of 81 likes per post, and every post had at least five likes (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 6). The most likes by followers were for a quote with 148 likes. One post was shared five times, and there were a total of six comments for the 11 posts, all made by those attending the events. A total of 49 prospective students shared or liked the 10 Facebook posts made by Barry University. The total number of page likes at the end of the seven-day period was 68,645 with an increase of 193 likes. Barry University’s Twitter administrator tweeted seven times during the seven-day period and gained 23 followers to bring the total number of followers to 3,530. The total number of tweets made by Barry University’s account was 3,418. The types of tweets made included campus events, quotes, and go vote advertisements; however, no prospective students liked or shared the tweets made by Barry University. There were a total of 10 likes for the seven posts, six retweets, and no comments. Barry University’s Instagram account gained 48 followers during the seven-day period, posted four pictures, and ended with a total of 3,460 followers with 1,326 pictures posted. The posts included student accomplishments, go vote advertisements, a quote, and a student event, and 30 prospective students liked the four pictures posted by Barry University. The average likes per picture were 42 likes with one of the pictures receiving no likes. The most liked quote, 124 likes, was a quote by Abraham Lincoln. There were no shares and comments by followers of the Instagram account. Additionally, there was no new content posted on Google+ during the seven-day period; however, there were two new followers. On the other hand, the LinkedIn account lost 18 followers to end the seven-day period with a total of 38,260 followers. There was also no new content posted on the LinkedIn account. The YouTube account
had no new videos posted; however, subscribers increased by three people to reach 401, and the number of view increased by 1,307 to reach a total of 335,929 views.

Brigham Young University is a large, private, four-year, non-residential, faith-based university in Provo, Utah, with an enrollment of 32,615 students. Brigham Young University had social media sites run by its communications office and social media sites run by its admissions office. The official Brigham Young University social media sites included Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, Google+, and Instagram. The Brigham Young University Facebook account gained 382 new page likes during the seven-day period to bring the total page likes to 352,797. There were two posts made, one about a professor's research, and one about the BYU sexual assault on campus report. The post pertaining to the professor had 297 reactions, 37 shares, and 10 comments, while the post about the sexual assault report had 3,300 reactions, 404 shares, and 97 comments (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 7). A total of 134 prospective students liked, shared, or commented on the two Facebook posts made. The official Brigham Young University Twitter's administrator posted 28 tweets, 13 tweets and 15 retweets, and the account gained 300 followers during the seven-day period. The most liked tweet was the sexual assault on campus report with 103 likes, and there was an average of 18 likes per post. The sexual assault on campus report was also the most retweeted post with 70 retweets. The average number of retweets per post was six, and a total of 15 prospective students liked or retweeted the 13 tweets from Brigham Young University. The other tweets were quotes, upcoming athletic events, and campus events. There was a total of 5,256 tweets and 46,200 followers. The Instagram account was active with five pictures, gaining 300 new followers to bring the total number of followers up to 79,400.
The pictures included everyday observations about campus, elder quotes, and student events. There was a total of 893 posts since the account was created. The most liked picture was picture of a rainy campus on a Monday morning with 6,561 likes and 25 comments. The picture also had 256 likes by prospective students. The seven pictures averaged 5,542 likes per picture, and the comments ranged from one to 25 comments per picture. Most of the comments came from Brigham Young University alumni and current students. Google+, Snapchat, and YouTube accounts, while active, did not gain followers or have content posted on their sites. The YouTube views on the Brigham Young University account did receive an additional 12,964 views during the seven-day period. The Brigham Young University Admissions Office official media sites included Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. While active, these social media sites were not as active as the Brigham Young University's social media sites. Brigham Young University Admissions' Facebook account had no posts; however, it did post a new cover page that received 61 reactions and had over 16,000 page likes (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 8). Two prospective students liked Brigham Young University Admissions' Facebook cover page. There was an increase of 20 new page likes during the seven-day period. The YouTube account gained four additional subscribers, and views increased by 496 views. The Twitter account gained no new followers, and no new tweets were made during the seven-day period. There were a total of 433 followers of the account. The Brigham Young University Admissions Instagram account was active with one picture and one recruiting video. The account gained three new followers to reach a total number 290 followers. The picture announced a new building on campus and the video was recruitment-related. The picture received 65 likes
and the video received 120 views over the seven-day period. There were also two
comments on the one picture and no sharing of the two posts. Thirty-six prospective
students liked, viewed, or shared the two posts on Instagram.

Jackson State University is a medium, public, four-year, residential, HBCU
located in Jackson, Mississippi, with an enrollment of 9,811 students. Jackson State
University had several social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Cloud,
Flickr, Google+, Vimeo, and YouTube. However, the only active social media accounts
during the seven-day period were Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The Jackson State
University Facebook account was active with a total of 30 posts during the seven-day
period. Twenty-six posts were related to Jackson State University’s 2016 Homecoming
week, while one post announced the university president resigning, and one post was
about senior day (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 9). Another
post was about recruiting, and the last post was about breast cancer awareness. There
was an average of 404 likes per post. The Homecoming#16 toga party video had 852
reactions, and another homecoming video posted had 32,680 views. The homecoming
posts focused primarily on the homecoming events such as painting paw prints for the
event, advertising the queen’s coronation, and showcasing student homecoming events
with pictures and videos (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 10).
The post with the highest number of shares, 683, was the president of the university
announcing her resignation. There were posts with no shares, no comments, and one post
with nine comments. Two hundred and sixty-nine prospective students liked, shared, or
commented on the 30 Facebook posts. The comments came from alumni, current
students, prospective students, fans, and rival fans based on their Facebook profiles.
There were 1,720 page likes over the seven-day period to bring the number of page likes of the Facebook account to a total of 63,028 likes. Jackson State University’s Instagram account gained 200 followers over the course of the seven-day period bringing the total number of followers to 16,900. There were 46 pictures and videos about Homecoming 2016 and one picture about the president’s resignation. The total number of pictures and videos posted on Jackson State University’s Instagram account was 2,684. The average number of likes per picture was 236, and the average number of views of the 18 homecoming videos were 1,359. Twenty-seven of the pictures had comments ranging from one comment to 29. A majority of the likes, views, and shares were alumni and current students. The Instagram account was followed by mainly current students with an average of 35 prospective students liking each picture or video posted. However, Twitter was the most active of the Jackson State University’s social media sites with 59 posts. The account gained 200 followers and finished the seven-day period with 24,800 followers and a total of 12,100 tweets. There were 54 homecoming-related tweets, one dining tweet, and one tweet about the president’s resignation. The tweet with the most retweets, 90, and the most liked tweet, 146 likes, was the Homecoming 2016 hashtag. The average number of likes was 17 per tweet, and the average number of retweets was 14. Only 12 prospective students liked the 56 tweets made by Jackson State University. Its other social media sites were not active. The Cloud account was last updated two years ago; the Flickr account had six followers and was last updated in 2011; and its Google+ had no new content posted and only gained one follower to reach 336 followers. There was no change in Jackson State University’s Pinterest account, and there was only one view of Jackson State’s University’s Vimeo account during the seven-day period.
No new videos were uploaded to the YouTube account during the seven-day period, but it gained eight new subscribers to reach 2,449 subscribers and had an increase in viewership by 1,220 views to reach total 893,151 views.

Marymount University is a small, four-year, residential, private, Catholic university located in Arlington, Virginia, with an enrollment of 3,369 students. The university had several official social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube. The Facebook account posted 10 posts during the seven-day period, gained 61 new page likes, and reached a total of 10,200 page likes. The 10 posts included student events, recruiting events, and current events (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 11). The highest number of likes for one post was 54 likes for a #halloweenfest follow-up picture and post. The number of likes per post ranged from 11 likes to 54 likes, and no posts were shared. Additionally, there was only one comment for five posts and no prospective students liked the 10 Facebook posts. The Flickr account was active with a total of 92 followers, and it gained no new followers during the seven-day period. The only pictures posted during the seven-day period were from Halloween Fest and posted on Saturday, October 29, 2016. The LinkedIn account had no new content; however, it gained 116 followers to have a total of 18,975 followers. Marymount University had a Snapchat account; however, it was not active during the seven-day period. The YouTube channel only had eight total subscribers and eight views with no activity during the seven-day period. The Instagram account gained two followers over the seven-day period and posted three pictures. Additionally, 29 prospective students liked the three pictures posted to Marymount University’s Instagram account. The pictures included three campus events
with an average number of likes for each picture of 110 with no comments. The account had a total of 258 pictures posted and 1,516 followers. Marymount University’s Twitter account was active during the seven-day period with 23 tweets, 14 tweets and nine retweets. The account gained nine followers during the period to bring the total number of followers to 3,012. There were six prospective students who liked or retweeted one of the 14 tweets made by Marymount University. The types of tweets were campus events, community service events, and student scholarships with 2,429 total tweets. The average number of likes per tweet was two, and the average number of retweets was three.

Northern New Mexico College is a very small, four-year, public, non-residential campus located in Espanola, New Mexico, with an enrollment of 1,052 students. It had Facebook, Flickr, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter accounts. Northern New Mexico College’s Facebook account administrator posted 10 times during the seven-day period with no shares and two comments by a prospective student and a university department. The content posted were campus, athletic, financial aid, nursing, recruiting, and academic-related (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 12). The average number of likes per post was seven with 2,849 followers. The page had an increase of 17 page likes during the analysis period. Four prospective students liked the 10 Facebook posts. While Northern New Mexico College had a Flickr account, the last picture posted on the account was in March of 2014; however, there was an increase of six views in the seven-day period to increase the number of views of the pictures in the account to 60. Northern New Mexico College also had both LinkedIn and YouTube accounts, but neither had been updated in over a year. In fact, the LinkedIn account lost one follower during the seven-day period to drop to 1,589 followers. The YouTube
account had 11 subscribers and 19 views with no changes. The Northern New Mexico College Twitter account, while active, had no new posts and did not gain any followers during the seven-day analysis period.

Northwestern State University of Louisiana is a medium, four-year, public, non-residential university located in Natchitoches, Louisiana, with an enrollment of 9,002 students. Northwestern State University used a variety of official social media sites. The university used Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vimeo, Flickr, and YouTube. Northwestern State University had four posts on Facebook during the seven-day period with 25,832 page likes and 100 new page likes during the seven-day period. The four posts included an open house recruiting post, a post about a new Competency-Based Education program, a post about the newest edition of the alumni newsletter, and a post about an upcoming campus event. The average number of likes for a Facebook post was 25, and two prospective students liked the four Facebook posts. There was one comment for the four posts, which was from a prospective parent. The largest number of likes, 57, and largest number of shares, 13, were for the post about the Competency-Based Education program, and the second largest number of likes, 27, were for the open house recruiting event. The Flickr account was not active during the seven-day period with no new followers and no new posts; however, the Tumblr account was very active, posting 12 new stories about Northwestern State University. The stories focused on student awards, admissions events, the Competency-Based Education program, a local community reading program, a new scholarship offered, five campus events, the nursing program, and an awards ceremony. The Vimeo account did not gain any followers, nor was there any new content posted; however, there was an increase of 20 views of the
videos posted. The Twitter account was active with 25 tweets, 14 tweets and 11 retweets, posted during the seven-day period with an average number of likes of 84 and average number of retweets of three for all 25 tweets. The tweets included campus events, athletic events, recruiting events, student recognition, and academic programs (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figures 13 & 14). The account gained 24 new followers to increase the number of followers to 5,470, and there was total of 5,998 tweets made since the account was created. No prospective students liked the tweets posted by Northwestern State University. The Instagram account posted two pictures and gained 40 new followers during the seven-day period. The two pictures were about the upcoming recruiting open house and football game day. The open house picture received 271 likes, and the game day post received 73 likes. A total number of 96 prospective students liked the two pictures. The number of total followers increased to 5,280, and the total number of pictures posted increased to 380 pictures.

South College is a four-year, small, non-residential, private, for-profit university located in Knoxville, Tennessee, with an enrollment of 1,214 students. The college grants associate, bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees. The university had Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter accounts. Both Facebook and the Twitter accounts were very active; however, the YouTube account was not active with six subscribers, but did see an increase of three views over the seven-day period to increase it views to 531. The Facebook administrator posted nine posts over the seven-day period to increase the total page likes by eight to reach 2,351 page likes. The posts included two quotes, three campus events, one recruiting event, a community event, and two everyday observations. Six of the nine posts each received one like, but there were no shares or comments on the
posts. Five prospective students liked the nine Facebook posts. The Twitter account increased by nine tweets during the seven-day period to reach a total of 876 tweets. There was an increase of one follower to reach 252 followers, and only one post received one like and one retweet; however, five prospective students liked the nine tweets (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 15).

Southern University of New Orleans is a four-year, small, public, primarily residential campus with 2,715 students located in New Orleans, Louisiana. Southern University of New Orleans had two social media accounts, Facebook and Twitter. The university’s Facebook account boasted of 2,806 page likes with an increase of 11 new page likes during the seven-day period. There were a total of six posts including two homecoming posts, one volleyball post, two basketball posts, and one recruiting-related post. Each Facebook post had at least one like with the average number of likes per post of six, and there were no comments made. Four of the posts had at least one share by its followers, and no prospective students liked the Facebook posts. The Twitter account had four tweets during the seven-day period, two homecoming posts, one retweet about the health benefits of tilapia, and one basketball post (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 16). There were no comments; however, the post about the health benefits of tilapia received the most likes, 52, and most retweets, 47. Two other tweets had one like and one retweet each. The Southern University of New Orleans account had 1,815 followers at the end of the seven-day period increasing it followers by four. The account also had tweeted out 3,372 posts since it was created, but had no prospective students like the four tweets.
Texas Christian University is a medium, four-year, private, primarily residential university located in Fort Worth, Texas, with an enrollment of 10,323 students. Texas Christian University had several active social media accounts and several inactive accounts. The Facebook account posted five posts during the seven-day period and had 172 new page likes to bring the total number of page likes to 77,743. The types of posts included news about academic programs, upcoming student events, and athletic events (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 17). The average number of likes per post was 117 with a range of six to 230 likes with 45 prospective students liked, commented, or shared the five Facebook posts. Four posts had comments ranging from one to six comments from current students, prospective students, and alumni. There were also three shares on the five posts, and 4,792 views of the posted TCU athletic video during the seven-day period. The Instagram account gained 200 followers during the seven-day period to reach 48,600 followers. However, only one picture was posted during the analysis period, a campus event receiving 969 likes with 336 prospective students liking the picture. There were no shares and no comments on the one picture posted, and the total number of pictures posted on the Instagram account was 635. Texas Christian University’s Twitter account made eight tweets during the seven-day period, gained 1,000 followers, and reached a total of 10,000 tweets posted since it was created. The total number of followers for the account was 97,300. The types of posts included three retweets, student events, and athletic events (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figures 18 & 19). The highest number of likes for a tweet was 144. It was a TCU football post: #BeatTech, and the highest number of retweets, 33, was of the same tweet. The average number of retweets per tweet was eight. Twelve prospective students
liked or retweeted the five tweets. The other social media sites linked to the Texas Christian University webpage were not active. The Vine, Flickr, and Pinterest had no change in content posted or followers, and the Tagboard was inactive. The Google+ account increased the number of its followers from 676 to 682, and the YouTube account increased its views of old content by 599 views, but there was no change in number of subscribers to the channel.

Texas Tech University is a large, four-year, public, primarily residential university located in Lubbock, Texas, with an enrollment of 35,893 students. The two most active social media sites were Facebook and Twitter. Its Flickr, Foursquare, and Pinterest accounts had no activity and gained no new followers during the seven-day period. The LinkedIn account had no activity but gained six new followers. The YouTube account gained nine new subscribers, but had no new views on the videos posted. Texas Tech University’s Instagram gained 200 new followers to reach 45,600 followers; however, the account posted no pictures during the seven-day period. The Facebook account had a total of three posts, two tech alert reminders and the announcement of the new campus in Costa Rica (For a more detailed description, see Appendix B, figure 20). There were 100 likes and 52 likes for the two tech alert reminders. There were 3,100 likes, 62 shares, and 15 comments on the announcement about the new campus from current students and alumni. Eighty-nine prospective students liked, shared, and commented on the three Facebook posts. There were a total of 230,389 new page likes with an increase of 704 page likes during the seven-day period. The Twitter account was active during the seven-day period with over 39 tweets, 33 tweets and six retweets posted on the account and an increase of 1,000 followers. The
types of posts included athletic events, campus events, student recognition, research programs, and announcements of academic programs. The average number of likes per tweet was 33, and the average number of times a tweet was retweeted was 13. Thirty-two prospective students liked the 33 tweets posted by Texas Tech University. The highest number of retweets, 286, was a tweet announcing the red raiders had beaten the horned frogs in a football game on Saturday, October 29, 2016. The total number of tweets posted since the account was created was 22,200, and the total number of followers was 118,000.

Trinity Washington University is a small, four-year, private, non-residential, women’s Catholic university located in Washington, D.C., with an enrollment of 2,267 students. Trinity Washington University had two sets of official social media sites, the university’s official social media sites, and the social media sites created and run by the admissions office. The Trinity Washington University Admissions social media sites included Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The Facebook account had a total of 14 posts with six new page likes to bring the total number of page likes to 307 over the seven-day period. The posts were recruitment-related posts with no more than five likes per posts with no shares, no comments, and no likes from prospective students. The recruitment video on the Facebook page received four new views to increase its total to 15 views. The page also updated it cover page with three likes and one of those likes was from a prospective student. The Twitter account was active with a total of 16 tweets, five tweets and 11, retweets made during the seven-day period. The tweets included 11 admissions retweets, two open house tweets, and three admissions events tweets (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figures 21 & 22). The total number of tweets
was 268, and the total number of followers was 74. There were no likes from prospective students. The average number of likes per tweet and the average number of retweets was two. The Instagram account, #discoveryourstrength, was inactive, with no new pictures posted. It also lost one follower of its 60 followers, and it had posted a total of 43 pictures. The official social media sites of Trinity Washington University included Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. The blog was not active, and the YouTube account was actually a media page. While the content was updated frequently on the page, the number of subscribers and views were not available. Additionally, the Facebook page and Twitter account were very active; however, the Instagram account was not. There were a total of 80 pictures and 94 followers, and there was no increase of followers or posting of any pictures during the seven-day period. Trinity Washington University’s Facebook page posted four posts over the seven-day period, which resulted in 10 new page likes for a total of 3,195 page likes. The posts were about the closing of the Metrosurge, a research-related post, and an athletic post (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 23). The average number of likes per post was 10, and there was one comment for four posts and no shares. Trinity Washington University’s Twitter account was very active tweeting 40 tweets and 139 retweets for a total of 179 posts in the seven-day period. The account gained 13 new followers and reached a total following of 1,518 people. The account has tweeted out 12,400 tweets since it was created. The tweets posted included upcoming recruiting events, the metrosurge closing, election coverage, and student recognition. Over 50 of the retweets dealt with politics and the upcoming election. Thirty-six of the tweets dealt with the metrosurge, student recognition, and admissions/recruiting events. The highest number of
retweets and likes on a non-political tweet was the FAFSA tweet at 225 retweets and 118 likes. The highest number of retweets and likes on a political tweet was 4,300 retweets and 4,300 likes; however, no prospective students liked the tweets posted by Trinity Washington University.

The University of Maine at Presque Isle is a small, four-year, private, non-residential university located on Presque Isle, Maine, with a total of 1,200 students. Facebook and Twitter were the University of Maine at Presque Isle’s most active social media sites with no activity or new followers for the Google+ account and the Pinterest account. The LinkedIn account had no new activity but gained 10 new followers. The Instagram account also gained four followers to increase its following to 225 followers with a total of 89 pictures posted; however, no new pictures were posted during the seven-day period. The University of Maine at Presque Isle had a Snapchat account; however, there were no pictures snapped. Both the Vimeo and YouTube accounts saw an increase in followers or views. There was one new follower for Vimeo, and 116 new views of the videos posted on the YouTube account. The Facebook page had a total of 10 posts with 12 new page likes to increase the total number of page likes to 2,476. The types of posts included current events, student events, and research projects, and five prospective students liked the 10 posts. The average number of likes for each post was eight with all 10 posts having at least two likes. One post received 16 likes with four shares for the 10 posts, and one comment from a fan. The University of Maine at Presque Isle’s Twitter account gained one new follower during the seven-day period to increase the total number of followers to 823. There were three new tweets bringing the total number of tweets to 957, and no prospective students liked or shared the three
tweets (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 24). The types of tweets included campus events and research projects. Two of the tweets were liked for a total of three likes.

The University of Notre Dame is a private, large, four-year, residential, Catholic university in South Bend, Indiana, with an enrollment of 12,791 students. The University of Notre Dame had several official social media sites and several official media sites run by the University of Notre Dame Admissions office. The University of Notre Dame Admissions office had Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram accounts. The Facebook account posted four posts and had 23 new page likes. Three of the four posts pertained to recruiting events and information, and one post was a picture of the campus after a rainfall. The rainy day photo gained the most likes with 15 likes and five comments from University of Notre Dame alumni. Thirty-nine prospective students shared or liked the Facebook posts. The page had a total of 6,136 page likes. The Tumblr account was very active and run by the students in the admissions office. There was a post every weekday, and it was used for recruiting new students to the University of Notre Dame and providing admissions tips to prospective students (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figures 25 & 26). While no new videos were posted on the YouTube account during the seven-day period, there were 1,078 new views of the current content. The University of Notre Dame Admissions’ Twitter account was active with 14 posts and an increase of 23 new followers to increase the total number of followers to 6,585. The tweets were all admissions-related, and 16 prospective students liked or retweeted the 14 posts (for a more detailed description, see Appendix B, Figure 27). The Instagram account was also active with 10 pictures posted
covering current students events, everyday observations, game day activities, and the
football game. The account gained 103 followers to reach a total of 4,505 followers. A
total of 1,410 prospective students liked or commented on the 10 pictures posted to the
University of Notre Dame Admissions’ Instagram account. One picture of the campus,
an administrator playing tourist, had the highest number of likes with 812 likes, and three
pictures had comments posted from three current students, three prospective students,
five alumni and two fans. The Snapchat account was very active with five days of snaps
sent. The topics included pictures and content about potential careers, the well-being of
students, the benefits of being a student worker, football game day vibes, and actual
video footage of the football game. The University of Notre Dame’s official university
social media sites were also active. The sites included a Facebook page, a YouTube
account, a Twitter account, and an Instagram account. The iTunes account had not been
updated in over two years and was password protected. The Facebook page had seven
new posts with three religious posts, two research-related posts, and two football game
day posts. The average number of likes for each post was 411, and the highest number of
likes and shares, 1,700 and 151, were of the football game day post (for a more detailed
description, see Appendix B, Figure 28). The football game day post also had the highest
number of comments at 28. The total number of page likes increased by 288 to reach a
total of 157,764 page likes, and there were 6,600 views of the Cancer detection video
posted during the seven-day period. A total of 172 prospective students liked, shared, or
commented on the seven Facebook posts. The YouTube account had one video posted
on it during the seven-day period, the cancer detection video. The account gained 42
subscribers and 14,992 new views. The Twitter account was also active, gaining over
I,000 followers and reaching a total of 111,000 followers. There were a total of 33 tweets, 25 tweets and eight retweets, which brought the total number of tweets up to 11,900 tweets made since the account was created. The types of tweets included campus events, athletic events, research programs, and academic programs. The tweet with the highest number of tweets was, “Go Irish Football!,” with 183 likes, and it also had the highest number of retweets at 49. The average number of likes was 33, and the average number of retweets was nine. A total of 27 prospective students liked or shared the 25 tweets made by the University of Notre Dame. The Instagram account gained 700 new followers during the seven-day period and posted two pictures. The total number of followers increased to 76,200. The two pictures were everyday observations with pictures of the campus. A total of 865 prospective students liked or commented on the two pictures posted on the Instagram account. The average number of likes for the two pictures was 8,060, with one receiving 9,161 likes and the other receiving 6,559 likes, and multiple comments were made for each picture commenting on the beautiful scenery. Overall, the results of the content analysis of 16 universities’ social media sites produced a variety of findings, patterns, and themes of how universities used social media sites to market their universities and recruit prospective students.

**Interpretation of Findings**

The data coding was broken down into word frequency, type of content posted, the overall use of social media sites by universities, and the individual usage of social media sites by the 16 universities. Each set of findings highlighted how universities chose to market their universities to prospective students based on the type of content posted, the sites utilized, and the frequency of new posts posted by the universities’
administrators of the social media sites. The findings also revealed how the followers of
the social media sites reacted to the content posted through views, likes, shares, retweets,
comments, and new followers gained during the seven-day period. The findings
showcased how social media impacted students' college choice decision-making
processes by answering the research question, how universities were utilizing their social
media sites to connect with and recruit prospective students.

**Word Frequency Coding**

When analyzing the word frequency coding results, the three most frequently used
words by the 16 universities' official social media sites' administrators and their
followers were universities, students, and admissions. The words, universities and
students, were the most frequent words used on the social media sites, which would not be
surprising to most people. The word, admissions; however, was mentioned 802 times on
the 16 universities' official social media sites, underscoring the importance of admissions
to a university. Only two universities; South College, a for-profit college, and Northern
New Mexico College, an associate’s and bachelor’s degree granting institution; did not
mention the word, admissions, on their official social media sites during the seven-day
period. Barry University's social media sites mentioned it 148 times, signifying the
importance Barry University places on admissions and enrollment. The University of
Notre Dame's social media sites mentioned it 137 times, and Brigham Young
University’s social media sites mentioned the word 100 times. However, both the
University of Notre Dame and Brigham Young University had official social media sites
run by their admissions offices dedicated to recruiting prospective students to their
universities. The word, scholarships, was also posted frequently at 404 times, with 14 of
the 16 universities using it on their social media sites. Again, Allen College and South College were the only two universities with their social media sites not containing the word. Brigham Young University and Northwestern State University’s social media sites mentioned the word, scholarships, the most, highlighting the importance of the word at those universities. Scholarships are used to attract and recruit prospective students to universities. Applications, recruiting, and recruitment were also words used frequently on the universities’ social media sites. Twelve of the 16 universities’ social media sites contained the word, applications, and Barry University and Brigham Young University social media sites posted the word most. The word, recruiting, was posted to 10 of the 16 universities’ social media sites, and recruitment was mentioned on 10 of the universities’ social media sites. There was only one university; South College, a for-profit, private university; not mentioning any of the words relating to prospective students. The results showcased the importance universities place on admissions, open houses, and prospective students through their official social media sites.

The findings from the coding based on word frequency revealed the most used word in the seven-day content analysis period was universities at 3,207 times, and the next most frequent word was students at 2,602. However, if all of the athletic-related words were added up, the total number of times an athletic-related word was used would be the third most used word at 2,213 times. This showed the importance universities place on college athletics due to the popularity of athletics by fans, alumni, current students, and prospective students. Fourteen universities’ social media sites posted athletic-based words during the seven-day period. Only two universities or colleges did not post about athletics, Allen College and South College. Allen College and South
College do not have athletic programs. Allen College focuses on healthcare degrees, and South College is a private, for-profit university, catering to non-traditional students and does not offer collegiate athletics. The most common sports word was football, which appeared 392 times in the word frequency coding. Based on word frequency findings, athletics played an important role in the marketing of a university to stakeholders and the recruitment of prospective students.

Based on the use of social media hashtags throughout the posting of content by social media site’s administrators and their followers, social media hashtags played an important role in online communications. The hashtags, #ApplyND, #fightingirish, #NotreDame, and #GoIrish, were used a total of 2,105 times on the University of Notre Dame’s official media sites. Auburn University’s social media sites utilized three hashtags to represent Auburn University for a total of 1,975 times. Jackson State University had the most hashtags used to represent its university on its social media sites with five hashtags for a total of 885 postings. Texas Christian University and Texas Tech University each had two hashtags representing their universities for a total number of 883 posts and 326 posts. The total number of hashtags for the five universities was 6,174 postings, beating out the word, universities, for the most postings, signifying the importance of hashtags for social media communications by a university and its followers.

Content Coding

After coding the different posts, pictures, and tweets based on content, the findings of the types of content universities’ social media sites revealed universities were most likely to post upcoming student events on their social media sites. There were a
total of 412 student events posted by the 15 universities' official media site administrators. Jackson State University had the most student events posted; however, this was because the seven-day period studied was also Jackson State University's Homecoming week. This is a very popular week for universities, their students, and alumni to celebrate their university. It is also a popular week to promote the university to prospective students. Trinity Washington University posted 73 times about student events, and Northwestern State University posted 39 times. In fact, the only university not posting student events was Bacone College. The results signified the importance universities place on advertising current student events on their social media sites to market their universities and recruit prospective students. Closely related to student events are campus events, as these events take place on campus and include students as well faculty, staff, and alumni. All 16 universities' social media sites posted about campus events for a total of 267 times, which highlighted the importance of advertising and promoting campus events to the university's stakeholders including prospective students.

Another important category was prospective students. This classification covers admissions events, recruiting activities, and open houses focusing on recruiting new students. Posts, pictures, and tweets aimed directly at prospective students totaled 246 posts over the seven-day period for all of the 16 universities' social media sites. Trinity Washington University's and the University of Notre Dame's social media accounts had the most mentions about prospective students. Trinity Washington University's accounts had the most posts about upcoming admissions events and upcoming on-campus open houses. Brigham Young University, the University of Notre Dame, and Trinity
Washington University all had separate official social media sites run by their admissions offices in order to recruit prospective students, which signified the importance these three universities place on recruitment of new students. However, Brigham Young University’s Admissions’ sites had no mention of admissions events or upcoming on-campus open houses, and only four mentions about prospective students on its social media sites. Overall, universities’ social media sites posted a majority of content aimed at recruiting prospective students to their universities.

Current events were popular posts with 162 posts on 15 of the universities’ official social media sites. The only university not posting about current events was Southern University of New Orleans. Trinity Washington University posted 104 times about current events, and the next closest university posting about current events was University of Notre Dame. The Election Day 2016 posts could be considered current events; however, there were so many posts about Election Day 2016, the decision was made to code it separately. Twelve universities’ social media sites posted about Election Day 2016, with Trinity Washington University posting 82 times about the event taking place in November of 2016. The other universities posted a total of 25 posts about making sure their followers were aware of the upcoming election and would be exercising their right to vote either during the early voting period or on Election Day 2016. The findings showed current events were a popular category for universities to post about in order to market their universities to current stakeholders.

Athletic-related posts, tweets, and pictures were posted on 12 universities’ social media sites for a total of 110 times. The most popular athletic-related sport posted about was football game days with 42 mentions. Four universities, Auburn University, the
University of Notre Dame, Jackson State University, and Texas Christian University, had the most athletic-related and football-related tweets. Additionally, Auburn University, Bacone College, Northwestern State University, Southern University of New Orleans, Texas Tech University, and the University of Notre Dame all posted about their football game day on Saturday, October 29, 2016, and the results of the game. These findings indicated the importance of advertising upcoming athletic events and scores of athletic contests to further market a university and recruit prospective students.

Other important findings included the mention of university academic programs 134 times, research programs 39 times, and student recognition posts 38 times. Auburn University, University of Notre Dame, and Texas Tech University, all Tier One research universities, had the most number of posts about academic programs. In fact, only Southern University of New Orleans did not mention the academic programs offered at their university during the seven-day period. However, the findings signified the importance of advertising academic programs to a university’s stakeholders. Again, University of Notre Dame, Auburn University, and Texas Tech University had the most posts about research programs. Trinity Washington University and Northwestern State University had the most mentions about student recognition. Each of these topics showcased the achievements of the university, its faculty, and students in order to more effectively market their universities and recruit new students.

**Social Media Sites**

Each university had both active and inactive official social media sites that were identified, coded, and analyzed during the seven-day period. The active social media sites included Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, Instagram accounts, Snapchat accounts,
two Tumbler accounts, and two Flicker accounts. The most active social media platforms for the 16 universities were Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. All 16 universities had Facebook pages, and four universities had two pages, one for official university marketing and one page run by the admissions offices. The four largest universities defined by student enrollment, Texas Tech University, Brigham Young University, Auburn University, and the University of Notre Dame, had the largest number of page likes. The next group of universities, Texas Christian University, Barry University, Jackson State University, Marymount University, and Northwestern State University, all large-to-medium sized universities based on student enrollment had the next largest number of page likes. The universities with small student enrollment numbers had the smallest Facebook followings. These universities included Allen College, Bacone College, Northern New Mexico College, South College, Southern University of New Orleans, Trinity Washington University, and the University of Maine at Presque Isle.

Brigham Young University Admissions Facebook page had the most likes for an admissions page at 16,033 likes, while the University of Notre Dame’s Admissions Facebook page had 6,146 page likes. Trinity Washington University Admissions Facebook page had 307 page likes and the University of Maine at Presque Isle Admission Facebook page was created but blank.

Every university chosen had a Twitter account, with three admissions offices also having Twitter accounts. All, but two universities’ Twitter accounts, Bacone College and Northern New Mexico College, and one admissions office’s Twitter account, Brigham Young University Admissions, did not post any new tweets during the seven-day period. The universities with the most followers on the Twitter accounts were Texas Tech
University, University of Notre Dame, Texas Christian University, Auburn University, and Brigham Young University. They also had the largest student enrollments within the study. The only other university having over 10,000 followers but less than 46,000 followers was Jackson State University, which could mean the larger the university, the larger the Twitter following. Universities with larger enrollments are typically more well-known as compared to universities with smaller enrollments. The types of tweets each of the accounts posted to their accounts included student events, campus events, current events, quotes, and upcoming recruiting information. The amount of tweets posted on the accounts varied. For example, Trinity Washington University, a small university with a small following of 1,518 followers, had tweeted out over 12,400 posts, since the account was created. Two of the larger universities analyzed, Auburn University and Brigham Young University, each had accounts tweeting out less than 5,300 tweets since their creation but had large followings. The other larger schools with large followings, including Jackson State University, tweeted over 10,000 posts since their accounts were created. Tweeting out more posts did not equal more followers for a university’s Twitter account.

Instagram was a popular social media site for the 16 universities chosen to analyze. Thirteen of the universities had official Instagram accounts, and three admissions offices had active Instagram accounts. Again, the largest universities in the study had the largest followings. These universities were Brigham Young University, University of Notre Dame, Auburn University, Texas Christian University, Texas Tech University, and Jackson State University. Additionally, posting more pictures on its Instagram account did not mean a university would gain more followers. The University
of Notre Dame Admissions Instagram account was the only admissions account with over 100 followers, reaching a total of 4,505 followers. The University of Notre Admissions Instagram account also posted the most pictures of the three admissions’ Instagram accounts with 10 pictures posted. While Instagram was a popular social media site for the universities, only 10 of the 16 accounts posted a picture to their Instagram accounts during the seven-day period. In fact, Instagram posts received more likes per post than Facebook and Twitter accounts combined on five of the six largest universities: Texas Christian University, University of Notre Dame, Jackson State University, Brigham Young University, and Northwestern State University. Texas Tech University, the largest university in the study, did not post to its Instagram post during the seven-day period. The Instagram accounts also had the most number of prospective students liking, sharing, and commenting on their pictures compared to the universities’ Facebook and Twitter accounts combined, but in most cases, had the fewest number of posts as compared to Facebook and Twitter. The posts included the following topics: athletics, academic programs, campus events, admissions events, and student recognition posts. Overall, these three social media platforms were the most active for the seven-day analysis period.

There were several social media sites that were active, but the content had not been updated within the seven-day period. Those social media sites included YouTube, LinkedIn, Google+, Vimeo, Flickr, and Snapchat. However, they still gained both subscribers and followers. They also had views of their posted content within the seven-day period. For Google+, two of five universities’ accounts saw an increase of followers, but there was no new content posted. Three universities had Vine accounts with only one
account gaining followers, and one account seeing an increase of views of the content posted. Flickr had one account which had been recently updated, three days before the content analysis began, but it was not updated during the seven-day period. Thirteen universities had a YouTube channel, and while only one of them were updated during the seven-day analysis period, nine of them had been updated in the last month. In the case of the 13 YouTube accounts, these accounts were active; had content updated within the last 18 months; and were still gaining followers, subscribers, and views. While six universities had Snapchat accounts, only the admissions office at the University of Notre Dame used its Snapchat account during the seven-day period. Overall, these social media sites, while not current, were still active social media platforms being utilized by university stakeholders.

Other social media sites listed on the universities’ main websites but were clearly inactive for a long period of time, included Vine, Foursquare, Tagboard, Pinterest, iTunes, Cloud, Flicker, and blogs. These accounts were either blank, had not been updated in over a year, or were dead links. The following universities still had these types of social media sites listed on their main webpage: University of Notre Dame, Trinity Washington University, Jackson State University, Texas Tech University, Texas Christian University, the University of Maine at Presque Isle, Northwestern State University, and Northern New Mexico College. In fact, 50% of the universities analyzed had at least one inactive social media account.

**Individual Universities Use of Social Media Sites**

Each of the 16 universities had official social media sites varying in level of usage activity. The findings divided the 16 universities into four different categories based on
their level of social media usage in order to market their universities and recruit prospective students. The four categories were universities with very active social media sites, universities with active social media sites, universities with somewhat active sites, and the admissions offices' social media sites. Each university's social media site usage, number of page likes, followers, shares, and comments were analyzed by to determine these classifications and answer the research question of how universities used social media sites to recruit prospective students to their universities, which could impact college choice process.

Universities having very active social media accounts were Auburn University, Brigham Young University, Jackson State University, Texas Tech University, and the University of Notre Dame. Each university had active Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube accounts at minimum. They made a large number of posts on their many different social media sites and received many likes, shares, comments, and had high number of followers on each of their social media accounts during the seven-day period including large number of likes, shares and comments made by prospective students.

For example, Auburn University posted on its Facebook page, Twitter, and Instagram accounts at least once day during the seven-day period. It increased its followers on Instagram by 300, had 611 new Facebook page likes, and gained 400 followers on Twitter. For its 11 posts on its Facebook page, it averaged 488 posts per page, 63 comments on one post, and 207 prospective students liking the 11 posts. One picture on its Instagram account received 2,492 likes, and the average number of likes on Twitter were 97 with an average 67 retweets per tweet. One thousand two hundred and forty-nine prospective students liked Auburn University's Instagram picture, and 37
prospective students liked its Twitter post. The most retweeted post was the tweet wishing the Auburn University football coach a happy birthday, and the most liked tweet was the post announcing Auburn University beating the University of Mississippi in football. The content posted to its social media sites were campus events, athletic events, research programs, academic events, and student events. There were no mentions of admissions-related events or recruiting events. Auburn University also had an active Flickr account and gained both views and subscribers on its YouTube account. Auburn University posted frequently to its Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages, and as a result, received a variety of likes, shares, comments, and an increase in followers, making Auburn University’s official social media sites very active.

Brigham Young University’s official social media sites were also very active during the seven-day period. Brigham Young University posted on its Facebook page, Twitter, and Instagram accounts multiple times during the seven-day period. The university gained 382 new page likes, 300 followers on Instagram, and 300 followers on Twitter. One post made by Brigham Young University was the results of their sexual assault on campus report, and it received 3,300 reactions, 37 shares, and 10 comments on Facebook. The Facebook account had a total of 134 prospective students liking the two Facebook posts. The sexual assault on campus report was also posted on Twitter and received 103 likes and 70 retweets. Each Twitter post averaged 18 likes during the seven-day period, and 15 prospective students liked the tweets. The content of the posts were the sexual assault on campus report, everyday observations, campus events, and Elder quotes, none of the content was admissions-related. The Instagram account had five pictures with each picture having likes ranging from 4,639 to 6,561, making each
post very popular. All five posts had more likes than the Twitter and Facebook accounts combined. There was a total of 1,192 prospective students liking the five Instagram pictures. While it had a Snapchat account, Brigham Young University did not use it during the seven-day period. Brigham Young University did gain 21 subscribers and 12,964 views on the content posted on its YouTube account that had not been updated in a week. Brigham Young University had very active social media accounts resulting in positive comments, an increase of followers and increase of likes by prospective students on their accounts.

Jackson State University had active Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts during the seven-day period. The university posted 30 times on its Facebook account, 59 tweets on its Twitter account, and 52 pictures on its Instagram account with all but six posts about Homecoming 2016. Jackson State University gained 1,720 new likes on its Facebook page, 200 new Instagram followers, and 200 new Twitter followers during the seven-day period due to its increased activity on these social media sites. Each Facebook post had an average of 404 likes, and one homecoming video had 32,680 views in the seven-day period. The account also had 269 prospective students like the Facebook posts, while 12 prospective students liked the tweets posted, and an average of 36 prospective students liked each Instagram video and picture. This showed how popular Instagram was with prospective students. The post with the largest number of shares on Facebook was the president’s resignation, only surpassed by views of the different Homecoming-related videos. Eight new people subscribed to the YouTube account and had 1,220 additional views on the content posted. Jackson State University’s official social media sites were very active during the seven-day period. Over 95% of the content
posted on its social media sites was related to Homecoming 2016, and the number of video views, likes, shares, retweets, posts liked by prospective students, and new followers the university’s accounts received, as a result, showed how important student events are to a university and prospective students.

The University of Notre Dame also had very active Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. It posted eight posts to its Facebook page; one video to its YouTube account; 33 total tweets and retweets; and two picture to its Instagram account. There were 288 new page likes on Facebook; a total of 1,000 new Twitter followers; 42 new YouTube subscribers and 14,992 views; and 700 new Instagram followers. Its Facebook posts received likes by 172 prospective students; its tweets received likes by 27 prospective students; and its Instagram pictures received likes from 865 prospective students, underscoring the popularity of Instagram for prospective students as compared to Facebook and Twitter. The University of Notre Dame’s most liked and shared Facebook post was a football game day post, and the cancer detection video posted on its Facebook page received over 6,660 views. The tweet with the most likes and retweets was a football post, and the Instagram post with the most likes was a picture of the campus in the fall with 9,161 likes and 53 comments. These result showcased the most used social media account by users was Instagram. The University of Notre Dame had very active social media sites, and as a result, increased the number of its followers on social media.

Overall, these four universities had the most active official social media sites posting multiple times on their Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts, while gaining subscribers and views on their YouTube accounts as well as their active social media
sites. These universities focused on content reaching both current and prospective students such as athletic events, campus events, student events, and academic programs. Each of the accounts received a high number of followers; prospective students liking posts; and high number of shares, comments, and likes. However, none of the universities’ social media sites posted about recruiting events or admissions information, content commonly thought to recruit prospective students.

The next group of universities had active social media sites utilizing their Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram accounts fairly regularly. Several of them also had YouTube, Google+, and Linked accounts, while not updated recently, they did gain followers and views, in most cases. The universities varied in student enrollment and were a mix of public and private universities. They received likes, shares, comments, and experienced both large and small increases in followers depending on the university and the social media site. These universities included Barry University, Marymount University, Northwestern State University, Texas Christian University, Texas Tech University, and Trinity Washington University.

Barry University made 10 posts to its Facebook page, seven tweets to its Twitter account, and posted four pictures to its Instagram account. The university gained 193 new page likes on its Facebook page, 23 followers on its Twitter account, and 48 followers on its Instagram account. Its Facebook posts received 49 likes from prospective students, zero likes on its Twitter account, and 17 likes on its Instagram pictures by prospective students. The average number of likes per post for Facebook was 81, and the average number of likes per tweet were 42. The content for its sites included campus events, go vote events, student events, inspirational quotes, and spotlights on
professors. There were no mention of recruitment events during the seven-day period, and its LinkedIn account lost 18 followers. Barry University also gained three new subscribers and had 1,307 views on its YouTube account. Overall, Barry University’s social media sites were active during the seven-day period, and as a result, the university saw positive results by an increased number of followers on its social media sites; an increased level of likes and shares by followers; and a total of 67 prospective students liking the university’s social media accounts.

Marymount University made five posts to its Facebook page, posted pictures to its Flickr account; posted three photos to its Instagram account, and made 22 tweets on its Twitter account. The university gained 61 new page likes on its Facebook page, 116 new LinkedIn followers, two new Instagram followers, and nine new Twitter followers during the seven-day period. The content posted to its social media sites included student events, recruiting events, community service events, scholarships, and current events. The average number of likes per picture posted on its Instagram account was 110; however, the average number of likes per tweet was two. Marymount University had no prospective students like its Facebook posts; six prospective students like its tweets; and 29 prospective students like its Instagram pictures, showing Instagram was the social media site of choice for prospective students. While Marymount University had a Snapchat account, it was not active during the seven-day period. Overall, Marymount University’s social media sites were active focusing on campus events, student events, current events, and recruiting events to publicize their university to its stakeholders.

Northwestern State University’s social media sites were active during the seven-day period with four Facebook posts, 12 new stories posted to Tumblr, 26 tweets posted
to Twitter, and two pictures posted to Instagram. The university gained 100 new Facebook page likes, 20 new views on Vimeo, 24 followers on Twitter, and 40 new followers on Instagram. Northwestern State University also had no prospective students like its posts on Facebook or its tweets on Twitter; however, 96 prospective students liked its Instagram pictures. The content posted included campus events, athletic events, recruiting events, student recognition, and academic programs. The Facebook post with the most likes, 57, and shares, 13, was the announcement about the new Competency-Based Education program at Northwestern State University. The second largest number of likes was for the prospective student open house taking place on Saturday, October 29, 2016. Instagram had the most likes of all the social media sites with 271 likes for the Open House event and 73 likes for Game Day. There were a total of five posts on different media sites advertising the upcoming recruiting events. Its YouTube account also gained five subscribers and 917 new views of the content posted. Overall, Northwestern State University had active social media sites which resulted in an increased number of likes, shares, and followers; and its Instagram had the most likes for all of its social media accounts.

Texas Christian University posted five times to its Facebook page, one picture to its Instagram account, and eight tweets on its Twitter account. It gained 172 new page likes, 200 Instagram followers, 1,000 Twitter followers, and 559 new views on YouTube. There were also 4,792 views of the TCU Athletic video posted on Facebook. The content posted on its social media sites included student events, campus events, and athletic events. The two most liked and shared posts on all three active social media sites were a campus event followed by a #BeatTech retweet. The only Instagram picture, an
upcoming campus event, had 969 likes, the highest number of likes. A total of 45 prospective students liked its Facebook posts; 12 prospective students liked its tweets; and 369 prospective students liked the one Instagram post. However, there were no posts about upcoming recruiting events or admissions information. Overall, Texas Christian University had active social media sites, posting content receiving likes, shares, and comments, which resulted in a large increase of followers.

Texas Tech University's Facebook page and Twitter accounts were active with three Facebook posts and 39 tweets posted during the seven-day period. However, there were no pictures posted to its Instagram page. The university gained 704 new Facebook page likes, six LinkedIn followers, 1,000 followers on Twitter, and 200 followers on Instagram. Texas Tech University had 89 prospective students liked its Facebook posts, and 32 prospective students liked its tweets. The content posted to its social media sites included athletic events, campus events, student recognition, research programs, academic programs, and the announcement of a new campus. In fact, the largest number of likes, 3,100, and shares, 401, came as a result of the announcement of the Texas Tech University Costa Rica campus on Facebook. The highest number of retweets, 268, came from a post announcing the red raiders had beaten the horned frogs in football. Texas Tech University's social media sites were active during the seven-day period, based on the number of Facebook posts and tweets posted on its social media, and as a result, there was a substantial increase in the number of likes, shares, comments, and increase in followers.

Trinity Washington University also had active social media sites during the seven-day period. The university posted four times on its Facebook page and made 179
tweets on its Twitter account. It gained 10 new Facebook page likes and 13 new Twitter followers. The posts ranged from community events, campus events, recruiting events, current events, and election coverage. The non-political tweet with the highest number of likes was a post about the new FAFSA, which was aimed at both current and prospective students. The tweet with the most likes and retweets, both at 4,300, was political in nature and was about the upcoming election. However, no prospective students liked its Facebook posts or tweets. It also maintained an active media page containing videos. However, it did not use its Instagram account over the course of the seven-day period, nor did the university gain any new followers on its Instagram account. Trinity Washington University had active social media sites, posting frequently, and while it did post about student recognition, campus events, student events, and recruiting events, the administrator’s major focus was on the upcoming election and voiced the university’s opinion about the current event. As a result, there was increase of likes, shares, and comments from followers; however, there was not a large increase in followers for the university’s social media sites.

Overall, these six universities had active social media sites including Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, Instagram accounts, and Snapchat accounts; however, only one of the universities used their Snapchat accounts during the seven-day period. The universities use of their social media sites in order to post about student events, campus events, academic programs, recruiting events, and current events all resulted in a relatively substantial increase in followers, likes by prospective students, and views of its social media content. It also resulted in positive publicity for the universities by the
number of likes, shares, and positive comments posted by followers of the universities' social media sites.

Six universities had somewhat active social media sites during the seven-day period. These universities had both a Facebook page and Twitter account, and in some cases, an Instagram page. They posted infrequently to their sites and received very few likes, shares, and comments from the small followings they had on their social media sites. These universities were Allen University, Bacone College, Northern New Mexico College, South College, Southern University of New Orleans, and the University of Maine at Presque Isle.

Allen College made six posts on its Facebook page and four tweets on its Twitter account. The University did not post pictures to its Instagram account and gained no new Instagram followers. There were four new Facebook page likes and no new Twitter followers. The content posted on the social media sites included quotes, campus events, and a prospective student open house advertisement. There were only two likes on the six Facebook posts with no shares and comments. The four tweets received no likes, no shares, and no comments. Overall, Allen College’s social media sites were somewhat active and did not experience a large increase in followers or in likes, shares, and comments.

Bacone College was also somewhat active on its social media sites with nine Facebook posts, one tweet on its Twitter account, and no pictures posted to its Instagram account. It gained 21 new Facebook page likes, one new Twitter follower, and lost one follower on Instagram. Bacone College’s social media sites posted primarily about campus events with one athletic tweet. Bacone College only had two prospective
students like their Facebook posts with no prospective students liking its tweets. As a result of the university’s small amount of posts and small social media following, the university did not receive many likes, shares, or comments on their posts.

Northern New Mexico College had 11 posts on its Facebook page and no new posts on its Twitter account. Its Facebook page gained 17 new likes, four prospective students liked its posts, and its Flickr account gained six new views. It lost 10 followers on its LinkedIn account and had no Instagram account. The content of the university’s social media sites included campus events, academic programs, athletic events, and recruitment-related posts. Northern New Mexico College was somewhat active on its social media sites during the seven-day analysis period.

South College was also only somewhat active on its social media sites. It posted 11 times on its Facebook page and nine times on its Twitter account, each receiving five likes by prospective students. The content posted to its social media sites included campus events, student events, and athletic events. There were no posts about upcoming recruiting events or admissions-related events. There were two comments and no shares on the nine Facebook posts; however, the average likes per Facebook post was nine. It gained eight new page likes on its Facebook account, one new follower on its Twitter account, and three new views on its YouTube account. It had no Snapchat or Instagram accounts. Overall, the Bacone College’s social media sites were somewhat active, and while they gained followers on each account, the numbers were very small.

Southern University of New Orleans had a total of five posts on its Facebook and three tweets on its Twitter account with one retweet. Its Facebook page had 11 new page likes, and its Twitter account had four new followers in the seven-day period. The types
of posts included student events, athletic events, and one recruiting event. The average number of likes for each Facebook post was six likes, and two tweets each had a like, which meant its followers were reading Southern University of New Orleans’ social media posts. There were was one recruitment-related post, and the university’s social media sites were only somewhat active with no prospective students liking the posts on the social media sites.

Lastly, the University of Maine at Presque Isle had 10 Facebook posts, three new Twitter posts, and no new pictures posted on Instagram. The university gained 12 new Facebook page likes, 10 new LinkedIn followers, one new Vimeo follower, four new Instagram followers, and one new Twitter follower during the seven-day period. The content posted included current events, student events, and research events. The average number of Facebook likes per post was eight, five prospective students liked the Facebook posts, and two of the tweets were liked three times. The University of Maine at Presque Isle did have a Snapchat account, but it was not active during the seven-day period. Its YouTube account gained 17 new views; increased the number of its followers; and had shares, comments, and retweets on its accounts, making the University of Maine at Presque Isle’s social media sites somewhat active.

In fact, all six universities posted somewhat regularly to their social media accounts to continue to recruit new students and market their universities. These universities focused on two social media accounts, even though they had other social media accounts that were active but not updated. They had small followings but received likes, shares, and comments for the majority of their posts made to their social media sites. These universities posted about a variety of topics including campus events,
student events, recruiting events, and athletic events, all aimed at publicizing their on-campus events and recruiting prospective students.

Lastly, there were three universities that had two sets of official social media sites, the universities’ sites, and the social media sites run by the university’s admissions offices. The three universities having admissions’ social media sites were Brigham Young University, the University of Notre Dame, and Trinity Washington University. These social media sites were designed to post content about prospective new students, upcoming admissions events, and relevant admissions information. These sites varied in posting activity, number of followers, and number of likes.

The Brigham Young University Admissions Facebook had no posts during the seven-day period, but it did change its cover page. The new cover photo received 61 reactions with two prospective students liking the cover page. There were no new followers on the Twitter account and no new tweets made. The admissions office did post one picture and one video to its Instagram account and gained three Instagram followers; however, only the video was related to recruiting. The recruiting video received 120 views and two comments during the seven-day period, while the picture received 65 likes with 36 of those likes coming from prospective students. The YouTube account increased its subscribers by five people and its views by 496. Overall, while the Brigham Young University Admissions’ social media sites posted events about recruiting, there were only three total posts made during the seven-day period, and only two of the posts were about recruiting. This admission office’s social media sites were only somewhat active during the seven-day period.
The University of Notre Dame Admissions' social media sites were more active utilizing its Facebook page, Tumblr, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram accounts as compared to the other two admissions offices' social media sites. The admissions office made four posts on its Facebook page, updated its Tumblr daily, made 14 tweets on its Twitter account, and posted 10 pictures on its Instagram account during the seven-day period. There were 23 new Facebook page likes, 23 new followers on Twitter, 103 new Instagram followers, did five snaps, and 1,078 new views of its YouTube account. The University of Notre Dame’s Admission Facebook page focused on admissions and recruiting information as did its Twitter account, but the Facebook post with the most likes and shares was a picture of the campus on a rainy day. It was not a recruitment-related post. However, its Instagram account covered current student events, everyday observations, and football game day information. In fact, one picture posted on its Instagram account, the administrator playing tourist on campus, had the most likes at 812 likes. In fact, four prospective students liked the Facebook posts; 16 prospective students liked its tweets; and 1,410 prospective students liked its Instagram pictures. The University of Notre Dame’s Admissions Office was the only group to use its Snapchat account. The admissions office effectively utilized its Snapchat account, five times over the course of the seven-day period. Each snap was different, and the content was geared towards both current and prospective students. The most active social media site for the University of Notre Dame’s Admissions office was its Tumblr site. It was also the only social media account out of all the universities’ social media sites that was created and run by students in an admission office. The site was well-maintained, and there was a new post every day relating to admissions. The account was all things dealing with
admissions, focused on recruiting new students, and answering prospective new student’s questions. However, it was not well-advertised or explained on the actual Tumblr account. Overall, the University of Notre Dame Admissions’ social media sites were very active during the seven-day period.

The Trinity Washington University’s Admissions Office had three active social media sites, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The admissions office made 14 new Facebook posts, 16 new tweets on its Twitter account, and did not post any pictures on its Instagram account. It gained six new page likes on its Facebook page, three new Twitter followers, and lost one Instagram follower during the seven-day period. All of the posts and tweets were admissions-related focusing on recruiting new students to Trinity Washington University. Each Facebook post had no more than five likes, and the average number of likes per tweet was two. So while, both its Twitter and Facebook pages were active, there were not a large number of shares, likes, comments, or new followers, and none of the three social media sites run by Trinity Washington University Admissions Office had very large followings or likes from prospective students.

Overall, each admissions office had either active or somewhat active social media sites. All three admissions offices focused primarily on promoting recruiting events, admissions information, and campus events. The number of shares, likes, comments, and number of followers varied based on the social media sites. The University of Notre Dame’s Admissions social media sites had much bigger followings on Twitter and Instagram as compared to the other two universities, but a smaller Facebook following compared to Brigham Young University’s Admissions Facebook page. Overall, the
admissions offices' social media sites were active and did a good job recruiting prospective students and marketing their universities to their stakeholders.

Overall, the qualitative findings of the 16 universities’ social media sites varied based on student enrollment size of the university, the level of activity of the account’s administrator, and the type of content posted to the social media sites. Each university had at least two social media sites they used with substantial followings. The larger universities had larger followings, had higher levels of activity on their sites, received the most likes from prospective students, and had more likes, shares, and comments. Those universities also gained the most followers over the course of the seven-day period. The most popular type of content to post to social media sites were student events, campus events, and athletic events. The most popular social media site for likes and shares by both current and prospective students was Instagram, and Instagram accounts received the most likes by prospective students by far. These findings answered the questions of how universities use their social media sites to recruit prospective students and determined the impact social media platforms had on the college choice process.

Limitations of the Study

This study was qualitative content analysis of 16 universities’ social media platforms to provide a comprehensive study of how universities utilized social media sites to impact students’ college choice decision-making processes. One limitation of the study included a stratified purposeful sample of universities used to conduct the qualitative content analysis. It was a random selection of universities based on the Carnegie Classifications of Higher Institutions (n.d.). There was also the difficulty of determining a follower’s status based on their social media profile. Statuses could
include prospective student, university alumni, university fan, rival fan, parent; however, statuses were difficult to discern based on limited information provided in their profiles and/or privacy settings, which could have skewed the findings of this study. Another limitation of this study was universities’ lack of consistency to list all of their social media sites on their main webpage. There was the possibility a university could have had official social media sites that were not listed on the main webpage and were difficult to find due to abbreviations not unique to the university. If this occurred, a university’s official social media site could have been left out of the study, skewing the results of the findings. Lastly, Snapchat accounts did not allow users to see how many friends each university’s Snapchat account had total, how many friends each account gained during the seven-day period or any responses friends made. I could only become friends with each university that had a Snapchat account and view the snap each university posted to its account during the seven-day period.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Universities have been facing new challenges in recent years due to increased competition, decreased state funding, higher admissions standards, and rising tuition costs, and as a result, there has been a new focus on increasing student enrollment through new marketing and recruitment strategies (Han, 2014; Johnston, 2010; Joly, 2016). Along with the rapid advances in online technology and prospective students’ use of social media, universities have a unique opportunity to create integrated marketing plans focused on recruiting prospective students to their universities using social media platforms to connect with those potential students (Campbell, 2013; Evans, 2014; Joly, 2016; Noel-Levitz, 2014; Sandlin & Pena, 2014; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). More research was needed to determine how universities used social media sites to recruit prospective students, and, as a result, the impact social media had on students’ college choice decision-making processes (Campbell, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2013; Han, 2014; Evans, 2014; Johnston, 2010). The purpose of this research study was to understand how social media impacted students’ college choice decision-making processes by analyzing how universities used social media sites to market their universities to prospective students.
This study was seeking to answer the following three research questions:

1. How were universities utilizing their social media sites to connect with and recruit prospective students?

2. What impact, if any, did official university social media sites have on students’ college choice decision-making processes?

3. What patterns and/or trends emerged from this study that will help universities more effectively market their universities to students?

The qualitative method used in this study was a seven-day comprehensive content analysis of 16 universities’ official media sites. Several important findings were found and conclusions drawn regarding how universities utilized their social media sites and reached prospective students using the theoretical framework of Perna’s (2006) Conceptual College Choice model.

**Synthesis of Findings**

One finding answered how universities were utilizing their social media sites to connect with and recruit prospective students. This content analysis found every university studied had a Facebook page and Twitter account, highlighting the importance universities placed on reaching prospective students through social media platforms, which was an important component of the higher education context phase of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model, learning more about institutional factors of a university through a university’s marketing strategy. In the case of Brigham Young University, Trinity Washington University, and the University of Notre Dame, each had two Facebook and Twitter accounts, one run by the university and one run by the university’s admissions office. Every university posted at least once to their Facebook page during
the seven-day period, while all but two universities, Bacone College and Northern New Mexico College, posted to their twitter accounts at least once during the time analyzed.

However, the use of the social media sites by the universities varied based on their enrollment size. Four of the five largest universities, Auburn University, Brigham Young University, University of Notre Dame, and Jackson State University, had the most active social media sites during the seven-day period, which included daily use of its Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts. The largest university in the study, based on student enrollment, Texas Tech University, was not as active with its social media sites as the four other large universities. The next category of universities, based on their level of activity on social media, were mixed in terms of student enrollment and type of university. The universities, Barry University, Marymount University, Northwestern State University, Texas Christian University, Texas Tech University, and Trinity Washington University, used their Facebook and Twitter accounts primarily and on a fairly regular basis. A few universities used Instagram, while the last category of universities based on social media use, were somewhat active, and only used two accounts, Facebook and Twitter. Those six universities were a mix of smaller public and private and residential and nonresidential campuses, and were inconsistent with the level of posting to their Twitter and Facebook accounts. However, all 16 universities understood the need to have social media accounts and utilize them in order to recruit their target audience and market their universities, an important component in the college decision-making process for incoming students. According to Perna’s (2006) College Choice model phase, during the higher education context, prospective students looked at
both the marketing and reputation of the university, which includes the use of online social media platforms by universities and its current students.

Another finding that answered how universities used social media sites in order to recruit prospective students was the use of additional official social media sites by universities’ admissions offices. Brigham Young University, Trinity Washington University, and the University of Notre Dame, all had official social media sites run by their admissions offices with varied results of activity, an increase in followers, and likes by prospective students during the seven-day period. These accounts run by the admissions offices showed the importance these universities put on enrollment and meeting the needs of prospective students as they gathered relevant information on social media platforms about the different universities they were interested in during the higher education context phase of the college choice process (Perna, 2006). The most active admissions office in terms of social media use was the University of Notre Dame. It used its Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat accounts; however, not all of its social media posts were admissions-related. Trinity Washington University’s Admissions office only posted content related to recruiting prospective students, while the Brigham Young University’s Admissions office’s official social media sites were the least active during the seven-day period. Because these three universities had official social media sites run strictly by their admissions offices, there was a strong commitment by these universities to use specialized social media accounts to connect with and recruit prospective students, signifying the importance of increasing student enrollment at those universities as well as reaching prospective students through social media platforms during the college choice process.
When answering the question, what impact, if any, do official university social media sites have on student college process, specifically the higher education context phase of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model, several conclusions were drawn. Many of the universities studied were not on the social media platforms the prospective students were on and, if so, they were not as active on these sites as they should be, missing out on an opportunity to interact with prospective students. Instagram was the social media platform prospective and current students were utilizing the most; however, the universities analyzed had varied levels of activity on their Instagram accounts during the seven-day period. Compared to Facebook and Twitter, the university’s Instagram accounts received more overall likes on fewer pictures and overwhelmingly more likes by prospective students for its pictures than their university’s Facebook and Twitter accounts combined. Prospective students preferred Instagram, and universities were not reaching their target market through the social media platforms most preferred by universities, Facebook and Twitter. Universities need to focus on reaching prospective students during the higher education context of Perna’s (2006) College Choice process. This is when students were trying to learn more about a university’s reputation, location, institution, academics, culture, and student life in order to make their college decisions, which means using the social media platforms prospective students are using, Instagram and Snapchat.

Additionally, the type of content posted on a university’s social media sites impacted the number of likes, shares, and comments made by the universities’ followers, specifically prospective students. The most popular content posted on the universities’ social media sites included student events, campus events, and athletic-related events.
The posts covering these topics received the most likes, shares, and comments from
followers, specifically prospective students. Each of these types of posts were
institutional factors Perna (2006) found to be important to prospective students and part
of the higher education context phase of the student college choice model, and
universities need to utilize this finding when posting to their social media accounts. The
more likely a university was to post about one of these topics, the more likes, comments,
and shares they received on their social media sites from prospective students, an
important finding universities should use when creating a marketing strategy to recruit
prospective students.

Another finding related to the impact that university social media sites had on
student college choice process was the finding that the type of content posted to the
universities’ social media accounts most liked by prospective students was not
recruitment-related. The recruitment-related posts, with the exception of the Instagram
date of Northwestern State University’s Open House, were not overwhelmingly liked,
shared, or commented on by followers of the social media accounts. Recruiting events
were not as well liked as student, campus, and athletic-related events by both prospective
students and other social media followers. Based on these findings and Perna’s (2006)
Conceptual College Choice model, prospective students were interested in institutional
characteristics, such as a university’s reputation, athletic events, student events, and
campus events, when they were making their decisions on which university to attend, not
recruitment-related posts, and universities need to take note of this information when
creating an integrated marketing communications plan to market their universities to
prospective students in order to more effectively recruit them.
Another finding drawn that impacted students' college choice decision-making processes was the opportunity for universities to create or utilize their Snapchat accounts to connect with both prospective and current students to create meaningful relationships with them, thus increasing the likelihood of convincing their target market to attend their universities. The newest social media site gaining in popularity among young people is Snapchat. However, based on the findings, only six universities had Snapchat accounts, which is similar to previous research, which suggested only 3% of universities had Snapchat accounts (Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015). Only one university's admissions office used the social media app, Snapchat, during the seven-day analysis period. The five snaps allowed its friends to learn more about the University of Notre Dame through pictures or a seven-second video through the social media app without a long-term commitment. The University of Notre Dame's Admissions Snapchat account covered the benefits of student worker jobs, showcased game day activities, highlighted the importance of the well-being of current students, and showed the potential career opportunities of students at the University of Notre Dame, all important factors prospective students consider during the college choice process, specifically the higher education context phase, according to Perna's (2006) Conceptual College Choice model. An important finding and pattern that emerged from this study was the social media platform, Snapchat, was being underutilized by universities' communications and admissions offices as way to reach their target market prospective students, and their enrollments could be impacted by not using this popular social media app.

The first trend emerging from this study that could help universities more effectively market their universities to students was the continued popularity of YouTube.
YouTube is still a social media site used by universities’ target market; however, the universities were not actively posting to their YouTube accounts during the seven-day period, missing an opportunity to reach prospective students through videos showcasing student involvement and academic-related events. While 13 of the 16 universities chosen and two admissions’ offices had YouTube accounts, 11 universities were not actively posting new videos to their accounts. However, most of the accounts still saw an increase in views, from zero to 11,788, during the seven-day period analyzed, although seven of the fifteen accounts had not been updated in a month and six accounts had not been updated in over a year. As a result, universities’ social media sites’ administrators need to be making more of an effort to update their YouTube accounts in order to meet the needs of their target market, prospective students, as their YouTube accounts were receiving an increased number of views and subscribers even when the content had not been recently updated. YouTube channels are still a popular social media platform for online users, especially prospective students, and universities have been missing an opportunity to reach their audience during the higher education context phase of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model (Joly, 2016; Noel-Levitz, 2014).

A second trend emerging from this study was larger universities received more followers, likes, shares, and comments than smaller universities on their official social media sites during the seven-day period. The four largest universities based on student enrollment, Texas Tech University, Brigham Young University, Auburn University, and the University of Notre Dame, had the most likes, shares, comments, and gained more followers on their social media sites during the seven-day period as compared to the universities studied with smaller enrollments. Universities having large enrollments were
more well-known publicly than smaller universities, which could contribute to the increase in more followers, likes, shares, and comments by all of their followers, including prospective students, as compared to smaller universities based on their social media posts. In many cases, larger universities have more money and resources to have more well-known athletic, academic, and student life programs, the types of events that attract and recruit prospective students to universities, thus increasing their enrollments. They also have larger alumni and fan bases due to their larger enrollments, which could account for their larger number of followers on their social media accounts. However, based on this study, a higher number of tweets, posts, videos, or pictures posted by a university did not necessarily translate into an increase in the number of followers gained, comments made, or content liked. There were also no trends or patterns observed when comparing private versus public universities or residential versus nonresidential campuses, when observing the posting, sharing, and liking of content; the only patterns and trends observed were between small universities versus large universities.

The third trend emerging from the findings was prospective students have chosen Instagram as their social media site of choice, and while some universities were actively using their Instagram accounts and seeing positive results from prospective students, other universities were not using their Instagram accounts. Thirteen universities and three admissions offices analyzed had Instagram accounts; however, only 10 of the 16 accounts posted pictures to their Instagram accounts. The followers gained by the universities with Instagram accounts in the seven-day period ranged anywhere from zero to 700 followers, depending upon the size of the university. In fact, Texas Tech University gained 200 followers in the seven-day period and posted no pictures to its
account, which showed the rapid growth of the social media platform. The social media site, Instagram, is growing in popularity among 12-24 year olds, providing an opportunity for universities to create Instagram accounts and/or to become more active on their Instagram accounts in order to gain more followers, publicize their universities, and recruit prospective students (Joly, 2016). These universities were missing out on an opportunity to reach both prospective and current students on the social media site of their preference, thus not taking advantage of highlighting a university’s location, student life, and campus events on this platform, important factors students look at during the higher education context phase of the college choice process in order to make their decision on where to attend college (Perna, 2006).

The fourth trend that emerged was the most frequently used words posted on social media sites were prospective student-related. Based on the content analysis, the three most common words used on the universities’ social media sites were university, students, and admissions. Admissions was the third most used word on the universities’ social media accounts, highlighting the importance universities places on recruiting new students to their universities. Only two universities, South College and Northern New Mexico College, did not use the word, admissions, on their social media sites. The next most used words were loans, scholarships, applications, recruiting, and recruitment on the universities’ official social media sites, all having to do with prospective students, and important factors prospective students consider when choosing a university to attend, according to the second phase, school and community context, of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model. However, it is important to recognize the most popular types of posts liked by prospective students were not-recruitment-related, so universities must find a
balance between these two findings when connecting with and recruiting prospective students, providing information about institutional factors but sharing important recruitment-related information as well.

Other common words used on the social media sites were athletic-related, such as athletic, football, baseball, soccer, basketball, coach, gridiron, and games to name a few. Only two universities, Allen College and South College, neither had collegiate athletics, did not post any athletic-related words. The number of times athletic-related words were used totaled 2,213, only behind the words, universities and students, highlighting the importance students, universities, prospective students, fans, and alumni place on collegiate athletics, which falls under student life, and an important factor students consider during the higher education context phase of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model. Additionally, prospective students were more likely to like these types of posts on universities’ social media sites, which could have an impact on students’ college choice decision-making processes, which is helpful to university enrollment managers as they recruit prospective students.

The fifth trend was the use of hashtags by universities’ followers on the universities’ social media sites. It was a trend that emerged from the study that could also help universities more effectively market their universities to students. Hashtags describing five universities were used during the seven-day period by both the universities’ social media sites and their followers a total of 6,174 times. The most popular hashtags used were the names of the schools or the nicknames the universities commonly go by. The next set of hashtags were athletic-related and then homecoming-related. The amount of times the universities and their followers used hashtags showed
the importance of hashtags when communicating on social media platforms. There is an opportunity for the other 11 universities to create hashtags for their universities and actively promote these hashtags in order to have their university’s pictures, posts, and tweets trend via hashtags on Twitter, Instagram, and/or other social media platforms. When a social media user searches for a popular hashtag, all pictures, tweets, videos, and posts having that hashtag are displayed. This allows prospective students the opportunity to learn more about the current students of a university, its traditions, the culture, and other important characteristics of a university through the posted pictures, tweets, and posts in order for them to gain more information to make their decision on where to attend college. If hashtags created by a university or its followers are trending, this could lead to more followers, likes, shares, and attract prospective students, thus potentially increasing a university’s enrollment and create a positive online reputation for a university.

The last trend that emerged from this study was the number of inactive social media accounts universities still had listed on their main webpages. While social media sites are good recruiting tools, having inactive social media sites connected to universities’ websites could hurt a university’s chances with prospective students. Twelve universities had one or more inactive social media sites advertised on the main webpage of their university. For example, the universities’ Vine, Pinterest, and Google+ accounts had very few followers, gained no new followers during the seven-day period, and no new content was posted. As previous research has shown, prospective students are likely to eliminate universities from choice sets based on websites that are not up-to-date, which included outdated linked social media sites or dead links on the university’s
main website (Noel-Levitz, 2010). This could cause universities to lose prospective students during the higher education context phase of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model when they are considering a university’s characteristics and reputation. Universities need to decide whether to start using their accounts on these social media sites or deactivate their accounts and remove the links from universities’ main webpages. Ignoring the inactive sites could both hurt a university’s enrollment and damage its online reputation.

**Situated in the Larger Context**

Due to increased competition, declining state funds, and a stagnant economy, universities are having to find innovative ways to increase student enrollment (Casey & Llewellyn, 2012; Han, 2014; Holley & Harris, 2010; Johnston, 2010; Lewison & Hawes, 2007). Additionally, students are using a variety of factors to choose where they will attend college, and social media sites are impacting their college decision-making process during the higher education context phase of Perna’s Conceptual College Choice model (Casey & Llewellyn, 2012; Crawford, 2013; Evans, 2014; Johnston, 2010, Noel-Levitz., 2014; Perna, 2006). Situated in a larger context, universities need to recognize the impact social media sites created by universities have on students’ college choice decision-making processes and understand how they can effectively use that information to recruit prospective students by focusing on the institutional characteristics students consider important according to the higher education context of Perna’s (2006) Conceptual College Choice process. This study looked at what social media sites universities utilized; how they utilized the sites; the types of posts, number of likes, shares, followers and comments posted; and the number of prospective students who
liked the posts, tweets, and pictures posted to the universities’ different social media accounts and how it impacted students’ college choice decision-making processes.

The results of this study found most universities, both small and large, had two active social media sites they utilized most frequently, Facebook and Twitter. In fact, most universities posted to their Twitter accounts more than they posted to any other social media account utilized. While both Facebook and Twitter were popular and universities need to continue to update and utilize their accounts, there were two other social media sites, Snapchat and Instagram, underutilized by universities that need to be better utilized in order to recruit prospective students. Based on this study’s results, both prospective and current students were using Instagram and Snapchat more than Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook during the higher education context stage of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model. This study mirrored the previous research gathered about the social media site, Snapchat, with six of the universities analyzed having Snapchat accounts; however, only one university’s admissions office utilized its account to send out snaps over the seven-day period. Based on this study and other research studies, there is an opportunity for universities to both create and utilize a Snapchat account to build relationships with prospective students and recruit them to their universities during the higher education context phase of the college choice process, when students are looking at the different institutional characteristics of each university, including student life, athletic programs, and academic programs, when deciding where to attend college (Joly, 2016; Sashittal, DeMar, & Jassawalla, 2015).

Universities should be actively posting to their Instagram accounts to build relationships with both current and prospective students in order to recruit students and
impact their college choice process during the higher education context of Perna’s (2006) College Choice model. This study analyzed how many of the 16 universities had Instagram accounts, used their Instagram accounts actively, the type of photos they posted, and the number of followers, likes, and comments they received. Thirteen of the 16 universities analyzed had Instagram accounts, but only 10 of the universities’ accounts were active during the seven-day period. Most of the universities did not post many pictures on their Instagram accounts; however, they received more likes on their Instagram pictures overall and by prospective students than they did on their Facebook and Twitter accounts combined. The Instagram accounts of the larger universities gained anywhere from 200 to 700 followers during a seven-day period, including an increase of 200 followers for one university’s Instagram account, and it did not post any pictures to the account during the seven-day period. This phenomena showcased the growing popularity of Instagram with social media users even when a university was not actively posting to its Instagram account.

Additionally, there is an opportunity for the universities to utilize their YouTube accounts on a more regular basis by posting new videos and recruiting content to their accounts. Only nine of the 15 accounts had been updated with new videos within the last month, and six universities’ accounts had not been updated within the past year. However, most of the universities’ accounts still received a large number of views and new subscribers during the seven-day period, which indicated the popularity of YouTube accounts and provides an opportunity for universities to continue to actively post new videos, including student life-related and recruiting videos, to their YouTube accounts to recruit prospective students. According to Perna’s (2006) College Choice model,
prospective students utilized social media platforms during the higher education context phase to learn more about a universities' characteristics, its current students, traditions, athletic program, and events in order to make a more informed decision on where to attend college, and universities have the opportunity to connect with prospective students through the use of their YouTube accounts.

The five most popular social media platforms utilized by the universities were YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. However, it is important a university posts the right type of content to ensure prospective students like their posts, share their posts, and follow their accounts in order to connect with prospective students; showcase their university, its students, and its offerings; and build relationships with prospective students to recruit them to their university. Prospective students look at many different characteristics of a university including student life, athletic events, location of the university, and campus events when deciding on a university to attend during the college choice process, and as a result, the type of content universities post to their social media content are important. The most popular content posted on the universities' social media sites were found to be student events, campus events, and athletic events. These types of posts received the most overall likes, shares, and comments as well as the most likes, shares, and comments of prospective students. It is important for universities to understand the importance of the type of content posted to universities' social media accounts impacts how prospective students view a university as well as how they interact with the universities through their social media accounts during the higher education context phase of college choice process in order for universities to more effectively market their universities and recruit prospective students (Perna, 2006).
Implications

Based on the previous research studies and the results of this study, there are several recommendations that can be made to university enrollment managers in regards to how the use of social media sites impacted students’ college choice process and how these results can help universities more effectively recruit prospective students to their universities. Universities need to continue to use their Facebook and Twitter accounts for recruiting purposes; however, universities need to recognize the shift of prospective students to new, more popular social media sites. These new social media platforms are Instagram and Snapchat. While some universities are utilizing both Instagram and Snapchat, there is an opportunity for more universities to actively post pictures and videos to their Instagram and Snapchat accounts to showcase their universities, connect with prospective students, and increase the number of follows, shares, and comments by prospective students, thus increasing their visibility and creating a positive image on social media sites while increasing their enrollments. Universities’ YouTube accounts need to be constantly updated with new video content as well to meet the needs of their prospective students, and as a result, increase the number of views and subscribers.

Also, based on the results of this study, universities need to be posting about student events, athletic events, and campus events regularly to connect with prospective students as these types of posts received the most likes, shares, and comments by both current and prospective students, and play an important role in the higher education context phase of the college choice model of prospective students (Perna, 2006). Additionally, the use of social media hashtags will create more opportunities for universities to connect with and recruit prospective students. Universities need to create
simple, unique, and easy to remember hashtags universities’ social media administrators, prospective students, current students, alumni, and fans can use in order to ensure the hashtags trend on the popular social media sites, thus increasing visibility of the universities’ posts as well as highlighting their reputation, students, and events to social media users. However, with so many different social media sites to monitor and keep active through the posting pictures, videos, and other content, a university may need to hire a social media director within both their communications and admissions offices to strategically manage its social media sites in order to market the university strategically and recruit prospective students online. The use of social media by universities can have either a positive or negative impact on a university’s image and reputation, which in turn could cause an increase or decrease in a university’s enrollment, so university administrators must be very strategic in utilizing a university’s social media platforms to carry out their integrated marketing communications plan.

Universities also need to deactivate the social media accounts they no longer update. By not deactivating these inactive and outdated social media sites from the Internet and not taking the links off their main webpages, universities risk losing prospective students (Noel-Levitz, 2010). Additionally, universities need to make sure all of their active official social media sites, including those run by its admissions office, are clearly listed on their main websites, so prospective students can find the social media sites easily and quickly. Additionally, any abbreviations used for social media accounts should be commonly used abbreviations by the university, such as ND for the University of Notre Dame or TCU for Texas Christian University, so prospective students can easily find those accounts and follow them. In some cases, prospective students looking for a
university’s social media sites could miss a university’s official media account, if they are not easily accessible on the university’s main webpage or easy to find based on the abbreviations used, causing frustration or a lost opportunity for the university to create a connection with the prospective student. Lastly, a survey could be administered to current freshmen during the fall semester at different universities. This type of quantitative research could further explore how social media platforms impacted students’ college choice decision-making processes at all stages of Perna’s (2006) Conceptual College Choice model in order to help universities more effectively market their university to reach and recruit prospective students.
APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITIES SOCIAL MEDIA SITES FINDINGS
Table 1: Social Media Word Frequency

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Figure 1:
Figure 4:

We had a wonderful evening celebrating the grand reopening of Ataloa Lodge Museum! Call 918-781-7216 M-F to plan your visit!

Barry University
@BarryUniversity

The Vikings used a lotion of goose poop. The ancient Greeks used pigeon droppings mixed with horseradish to prevent balding. For what you ask?

Check out Prof. Frank Muscarella being quoted about his research into balding. It may just change your opinion about it.

The benefits of going bald

Want to appear more intelligent, influential, educated and honest? Lose your hair.
Figure 6:

Figure 7:
Figure 8:

Figure 9:
Figure 10:

Jackson State University

AJSU Homecoming 15: The Step Show/Battle of the Bands was a blast! Check out our Twitter and Instagram pages (@JacksonStateU) for more videos from the event with the unique sounds of the South and the JSU NPHC.

Figure 11:

Marymount University

As a result of my seven years of service in the Air Force, I received 36 months of Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits. Because Marymount’s cost of tuition for full-time graduate school attendance is under the annual cap for the GI Bill, I have not had to worry about the cost at all. Ultimately, the individual and personal attention I received from the Marymount admissions staff made it easy for me to choose Marymount University. — Kristena Heinz

Ask a Veteran: Why I Decided to Go to Graduate School

Read about how veteran’s successes as a graduate student at Marymount University.
Figure 12:

Need help completing your FAFSA?
GET MONEY FOR COLLEGE!

Wednesday, October 26
LIBRARY COMPUTER LAB
9 a.m. - 11 a.m. & 5 p.m. - 7 p.m.

Figure 13:

Northwestern State presents
WoodWired to present recital Friday bit 11/24/17

NSU presents Business Awards 1st 11/29/17

Have you entered your name in this month’s gift basket drawing?

Drawing for each village will be THIS Friday at 12:00pm!
University to host Fall Family View Day Saturday bit.ly/2eIFnpq
Northwestern State (NSU) to begin competency-based program bit.ly/2eIFnpq #nsula
Don't miss all of our Halloween-fied fun tonight beginning at 7pm in the student union # @NSU_SA
Halloween Carnival

Read about the 5 Ways to Stand Out In the Classroom: hubs.ly/H04z7vz0
Discover some highlights of our Associate
Figure 16:

Miss SUNO will be crowned tonight.

Figure 17:

TCU - Texas Christian University

TCU Box was held today for faculty/staff families on the Campus Commons.

Send Message
Figure 18:

![Twitter screenshot](https://twitter.com/TCU2016/status/790633658906386432)

What an honor it is to partner with @PultizerCenter! #BeatTech &HFrogs https://twitter.com/TCU2016/status/790633658906386432

TCU is proud to partner with @PultizerCenter! #BeatTech &HFrogs

TCU boasts the only student/faculty staff member in the world of digital by @TCU2016

Figure 19:

![Twitter screenshot](https://twitter.com/TCU2016/status/790633658906386432)

What an honor it is to partner with @PultizerCenter! #BeatTech &HFrogs https://twitter.com/TCU2016/status/790633658906386432

TCU is proud to partner with @PultizerCenter! #BeatTech &HFrogs

TCU boasts the only student/faculty staff member in the world of digital by @TCU2016
Texas Tech University Breaks Ground on Campus in Costa Rica

Texas Tech and Costa Rican officials recently broke ground on the new San Jose campus where Central American students will have the opportunity to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Texas Tech University Breaks Ground on Campus in Costa Rica

Sofia Chapman
200.336 people have been here

Graduate & Professional Open House
November 12, 2011
 Trinity OC Admissions

Come Join the fun! Open House and more information!

Trinity OC Admissions

Texas Tech University Breaks Ground on Campus in Costa Rica (2)
Thanks @BDNMaine for covering this joint research study on ticks and moose health - UMPI is proud to be involved!

There are major concerns about the status of moose herds and the increasing prevalence of vector-borne diseases.

Come see all the fun that happens during UMPI's homecoming and fall traditions. There's food, music, and more on campus. You might even catch a glimpse of our mascot!
Figure 26:

Our food is actually pretty awesome. There are two dining halls, one on campus, with a variety of options for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. During meal times, we serve the food in a very informal setting. The dining halls are open 24/7, and we always have a variety of food options available.

There are two 4-meal dining halls: North Dining Hall (NDH) and South Dining Hall (SDH). The NDH is open from 7:00 AM to 9:00 PM, and the SDH is open from 7:00 AM to 10:00 PM. Both dining halls offer a variety of food options, including vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options.

Figure 27:

On this #PhotoFriday, we want to remind you that even on the rainiest of days, there's always a silver (or golden!) lining. Happy weekend!
There's a lot going on on campus before Notre Dame Football takes on Miami this afternoon. Check out these events that are free and open to the public:

- 8 am: Hit the ground running this morning with the Game Day Run Club and Game Day Yoga. Pre-registration is required for the run, but yoga takes place at the Jordan Hall sundial until 9 am.
- 10 am: Take a break on Main Quad and listen to the -era's Cantilon play the Alma Mater.
- 10:30 am: Prof. Lawrence Cunningham speaks. See More.

Let's rise up and embrace the mission for our time to build a better Notre Dame and a better than ever -era. -era, Notre Dame president. 155,364 people like this and 155,961 people follow this.
REFERENCES


doi:10.1037/1938-8926.1.2.95


