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Major Revisions requested RIHE-D-23-00009

Research in Higher Education <em@editorialmanager.com>

Mon, Jun 12, 2023 at 3:03 PM

Reply-To: Research in Higher Education <karthika.athilingam@springer.com>

To: Ozan Jaquette <ozanj@ucla.edu>

Dear Dr. Jaquette,

We have received the reports from our advisors on your manuscript, "The Private School Network: Recruiting Visits to Private High Schools by Public and Private Universities", which you submitted to Research in Higher Education.

Based on the advice received, I feel that your manuscript could be reconsidered for publication should you be prepared to incorporate major revisions. When preparing your revised manuscript, you are asked to carefully consider the reviewer comments which can be found below, and submit a list of responses to the comments. You are kindly requested to also check the website for possible reviewer attachment(s).

In order to submit your revised manuscript, please access the Editorial Manager website.

Your username is: ozanj

If you forgot your password, you can click the 'Send Login Details' link on the EM Login page at

<https://www.editorialmanager.com/rihe/>

We look forward to receiving your revised manuscript before 10 Sep 2023.

With kind regards,
Frimpomaa Ampaw
Associate Editor
Research in Higher Education

COMMENTS TO THE AUTHOR:

Reviewer #1: The manuscript provides a valuable examination of off-campus recruiting strategies in a sample of public and private universities. To further enhance the clarity and impact of the research, there are several areas that could be improved:

1. It appears that the author has written a separate paper focusing on off-campus recruiting visits made by public research universities to public high schools. To enable a comprehensive comparison of off-campus recruiting behaviors between public and private universities, it is necessary to consider visits to both public and private high schools. At the very least, it would be beneficial to compare the findings of the earlier study with the results presented in this manuscript to identify any notable differences or similarities.

2. The manuscript could benefit from some reduction in length without compromising its quality. For example, in section 2.2, instead of providing extensive descriptions of various studies, the author could reorient the focus of this section to highlight the specific contributions of these studies to the present research. Additionally, combining sections 3 and 4 and providing a concise description of the social network analysis in the Data and Methods section would enhance the overall readability and coherence of the paper.

3. The results section currently includes overly detailed and occasionally irrelevant information, making it challenging for readers to grasp the overall patterns and implications. In sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2, the purpose of conducting network analysis within public and private universities is unclear. It is important to provide a clear rationale for analyzing these specific institutional types and explain how it contributes to understanding the differences in recruiting strategies. Additionally, some results seem specific to the sample of universities under study, and it would be valuable to provide broader insights into the disparities between public and private institutions.

4. The analysis conducted in section 5.3.3—which is central to this study—does not provide a clear indication of the differences or similarities between public and private institutions in terms of their recruiting strategies. However, the finding that certain groups of public and private universities have more in common with each other than with other universities of the same control suggests the possibility of confounding factors such as geographic proximity, rankings, etc. Incorporating an analysis of these confounding factors would strengthen the study and likely require additional data

analysis.

5. The cross-sectional nature of the data limits the ability to draw conclusions about the direction of change in recruiting strategies between public and private institutions. This is especially significant given the convenient sample of institutions used in this study. These limitations should be discussed.

Reviewer #2: This paper examines the recruiting behaviors of a sample of public and private institutions in the U.S. This paper employs a unique dataset and uses descriptive techniques that are not commonly used in higher education literature. The paper is well-written and makes an interesting contribution to the literature. I do have a few suggestions, which I lay out below. Chiefly, as written, this paper lacks some practical grounding. The authors set up the paper by arguing that public and private institutions serve two different missions- one serves social reproduction and the other serves social mobility. They then argue that these priorities drive recruiting practices. While this is a useful way to frame behavior, I think the paper would benefit from an additional discussion about the practical benefits of recruiting students from private schools, especially for public institutions. One place to start is to consider how private and public-school students pay for college. Do private school students generate more revenue for the institution? This same feedback applies to the summary/conclusion section. While the authors do a good job talking through their findings, they did not discuss the implications of their findings for research, practice, or policy. As such, I left feeling like this paper had some interesting findings, but could not name any clear ways in which this paper makes a contribution to educators or education research. That being said, I do not think my ask is insurmountable by any means, therefore I recommend a revise and resubmit.

Introduction

"The "Chetty" data on parental income by college show that the overwhelming majority of students at selective private institutions have parental income in the top quintile (Burd, 2017; Chetty, Friedman, Saez, Turner, & Yagan, 2020)." P. 3 Instead of saying "Chetty" data, can you be more descriptive here? This sentence assumes a lot of prior knowledge for the reader. "Data linking IRS records to"

I'm a bit off put by your blanket statement that private institutions prioritize social reproduction while public institutions prioritize social mobility. I understand that you're using this as a framework to set up your study, but some additional language qualifying these remarks would improve your argument. I can think of many examples where private institutions serve social mobility and where public institutions serve social reproduction. For example, we know that private institutions in many states are a vital path to a college degree for low-income students, as they can more easily discount the cost of attendance. Conversely, public institutions in some states do not give any aid to undocumented students. It might help to just note that we cannot fully capture colleges' priorities or sort them into these two buckets just based on their status as public or private, but that this framework is used to conceptualize behavior.

Your argument that the recruiting behavior of colleges at private secondary schools is an indicator of the social reproduction mission could use some strengthening. As school voucher programs become more common, it's possible that, by recruiting at private secondary schools, IHEs are reaching those who are high achieving, but less affluent. Is there any data that tracks the prevalence of voucher use in your sample over time? Do you have any descriptive data on the secondary schools in your sample that could speak to this? If not, it might be worth naming school vouchers as a recent(ish) trend and heading off concerns like mine.

I have some reservations about this sentence: "By contrast, for public research universities, visits to private high schools - particularly out-of-state schools - are antithetical to the mission of social mobility for high-achieving, low-income state residents." (p. 3). Is it really the mission of public universities to serve high-achieving, low-income state residents? The emphasis on high-achieving, low-income students is where I take issue. I'd argue the mission is more generally to educate state residents and keep them within the borders of the state regardless of ability or SES.

I think what's missing in the introduction is a conversation about the practical advantages of recruiting students from private institutions from the university's perspective irrespective of "mission." Outside of reproducing or generating social mobility for its' patrons/stakeholders, why might an institution want to recruit from private secondary schools? I imagine that IHEs might want to do so because students who attend private secondary schools would be less likely to require need-based aid from the institution. Resource dependency theory would suggest that if recruiting high-paying students is critical to keeping the lights on, then institutions will try to get as many of these students in the door as possible. I think the conversation around the mission of the institutions is important; however, right now the grounding for the study feels very high-level and lacking some practical considerations.

Similarly, I find myself craving some context around the broader implications for this study in the introduction. I think you start to get to this in your conversation around social reproduction, but it would help draw the reader in if you could lay out what the findings of this study could mean for policy and practice.

Section 2

Is there any literature about the impacts of COVID on recruitment strategies? In particular, are in-person site visits to secondary schools more or less common than they were prior to 2020? Has there been any investment in virtual recruiting, such as zoom calls to schools? This kind of information will help enrich our understanding of the landscape of recruitment laid out in section 2.1.

Section 3

It may help the reader understand network analysis concepts if the authors include some visualizations attached to their examples in the beginning of the section. This is especially true when the authors discuss the networks related to this study.

The authors rarely cite materials when explaining network analysis. Some citations would be helpful for those unfamiliar with the technique.

On page 15, you lay out the different private school characteristics that are the focus of this study. I also wonder if the authors thought about looking at recruiting at private secondary schools in states neighboring the college in addition to the region analysis. I imagine that public institutions would have quite the incentive to recruit out-of-state students, as they are revenue generators for the institution. These institutions may target folks from surrounding states because a) it's cheaper to send a recruiter to a neighboring state rather than one in another region b) because the college likely has more name recognition in neighboring states than states in another region and c) if we believe that the purpose of public colleges' is to strengthen the state's economy by keeping highly educated workers in the state, it might follow that graduating students from neighboring states may be more likely to work in the college's state than graduating students who are much further from home.

Section 4

Can you walk us through why you used two different sources to choose colleges (Carnegie for publics and USNWR for privates)? If we want to examine samples of public and private colleges that are similar, wouldn't it make sense to use one classification method to pick schools? You get at this a little bit later, but I'd still like to know your logic.

What are the drawbacks of a convenience sample? The authors do a great job breaking down network analysis techniques, so I want to ensure that they aren't assuming knowledge elsewhere.

How are you certain that the colleges in your final sample posted all of the recruiting events they hosted/took part in? Did you double-check with admissions offices?

I would love to know what software/packages you used to scrape websites? This would be helpful for others who would like to build off your work.

I'd also like to know how the universities in your final sample compare the universities that were in your original sample. Of course, you aren't making any causal claims in your paper, but I do wonder where you think the reader should tread lightly when extrapolating the results to other institutions. In other words, is there anything special about your sample when compared to other colleges that may be driving the patterns you're seeing?

Section 5

The results are well-organized and clear

Section 6

The authors state that "a weakness of the scholarly literature on privatization is that few studies compare public and private universities with respect to a behavior that is associated with private universities." Can the authors elaborate on why this weakness is important? In other words, help us understand why this gap in the literature deserves to be interrogated?

The authors do a good job of summarizing their findings, but I'm, again, wanting a conversation about the implications of these findings for practice and future research. What do these findings mean for students? For admissions professionals? What are your thoughts on avenues for future research?

Why do you think public universities are "playing the private school game?" This connects back to earlier suggestions about fleshing out the practical reasons why public institutions are targeting private schools students.

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