

Sociology of Education Association Proposal

Ozan Jaquette

Associate Professor

University of California, Los Angeles

Moore Hall 3038

310-206-3030

ozanj@ucla.edu

Our research analyzes off-campus recruiting visits by college and university admissions staff. Market research conceives of off-campus visits as a means of identifying prospects, deepening engagement with prospects already being targeted through mail/email, and maintaining relationships with guidance counselors at “feeder schools” (Clinedinst & Koranteng, 2017; Noel-Levitz, 2020; Ruffalo Noel-Levitz, 2018). With respect to expenditure, Noel-Levitz (2020) found that private (non-profit) 4-yr institutions spent an average of 17% of their undergraduate marketing/recruiting budget on “travel” to high schools and college fairs, a higher percentage of budget allocation than any other marketing/recruiting activity. Public institutions spent an average of 16% of their budget on travel, second only to “prospective student communications” at 17%.

A sociological case-study literature develops helpful insights about the mechanisms and functions of off-campus recruiting visits. Holland (2019) analyzes visits from the perspective of students at two racially and socioeconomically diverse public high schools. Holland (2019) found that high school visits – including college fairs, instant decision events, and small-group representative visits – influenced where students applied and where they enrolled. This finding was strongest for first-generation students and underrepresented students of color, who often reported that “school counselors had low expectations for them and were too quick to suggest that they attend community college.” This trust vacuum created an opportunity for colleges because these students were drawn to colleges that connected with them and “made them feel wanted.” Holland (2019) describes a high-achieving, first-generation, African American student who was admitted by a highly selective liberal arts college but chose to attend a less selective college that “seemed to want him more.” By contrast, affluent students with college-educated parents were less taken by such overtures and more concerned with college prestige.

Scholarship also highlight the relational function of visits. Stevens (2007) provides an ethnography of the admissions office at a selective private liberal arts college. During the autumn “travel season,” admissions officers visited selected high schools across the country “to spread word of the institution and maintain relationships with guidance counselors” (pp. 53-54) because “the College’s reputation and the quality of its applicant pool are dependent upon its connections with high schools nationwide” (Stevens, 2007, p. 54). The College tended to visit the same schools year after year because recruiting depends on long-term relationships with high schools. The high schools they visited tend to be affluent schools – in particular, private schools – that enroll high-achieving students who can afford tuition and had the resources and motivation to host a successful visit. Recruiting visits may affect outcomes such as inquiries, applications, and matriculation through their affect on high school guidance counselors. The logic is that a guidance counselor who views a college favorably will steer students to the college.

Khan (2011) also argues that the desire by colleges for trustworthy information about applicant intentions creates an opportunity for high school counselors to advocate on behalf of their students. This opportunity depends on guidance counselors having personal relationships with university admissions offices and on having small enough caseloads to advocate for each student individually. There needs to be a relationship where the college can trust statements made by the high school counselor and vice versa. This relationship is the product of repeated interactions over many years.

In sum, off-campus recruiting visits are necessary for the maintenance of strong relationships that enable colleges and high schools to negotiate and send trustworthy information to one another. Without face-to-face visits, it is less likely that a college admissions counselor will “take the call” of a guidance counselor. Simultaneously, a recruiting visit between a college and a high school can be conceived as an indicator. First, the fact that the college took time and effort to make the visit suggests that the college wants to enroll students from the high school. Second, the fact that the high school hosted the visit suggests that the high school likely views the college as a desirable destination for some of its students. Third, the presence of the recruiting visit indicates that the high school and the college have a relationship and suggests the probability of additional interactions (e.g., phone calls).

Our project collected data about off-campus recruiting visits made in 2017 by a convenience sample of colleges and universities. Our analysis sample is based on three different lists of post-secondary institutions: all public research-extensive universities as defined by the 2000 Carnegie Classification (N=102); all private universities in the top 100 of U.S. News and World Report National Universities rankings (N=58); and all private colleges in the top 50 of U.S. News and World Report Liberal Arts Colleges rankings (N=47). For

each of these institutions, we investigated their admissions website for pages that provided the details of upcoming off-campus recruiting visits. For institutions that posted such pages, we scraped the pages once per week throughout the 2017 calendar year. Many colleges and university only posted certain kinds of events (e.g., hotel receptions and national college fairs) but not others (e.g., day-time visits to high schools). These institutions are excluded from the analyses. Of the remaining public universities, we also issued public records requests asking for recruiting events data as a means of quality assurance. Our final analysis sample consists of 17 public research universities, 13 private research universities, and 13 private liberal arts colleges.

We utilize network methods to analyze the recruiting visits data for two, related reasons. First, social network analysis privileges the relationship between actors. The discussion of Stevens and Khan suggests that for private school students, “it is not just the quality of the students that gets them into college but the quality of the relationship between elite high schools and colleges” (Khan, 2011, p. 175). Second, a visit from a college/university admissions counselor to a high school can be conceived as a “network tie” connecting two actors in a social network.

We will focus on network analyses of visits by colleges and universities to private high schools. Analyses are motivated by two, related research questions. First, which types of private high schools receive visits from which types of colleges and universities? Second, to what extent do off-campus recruiting visits by colleges and universities to private high schools exhibit homophily versus heterophily with respect to the vertex characteristics of geographic region, religious affiliation, academic reputation, and racial composition?

Figure 1 shows a two-mode network plot consisting of visits by public and private colleges and universities to private high schools.

Figure 2 shows a two-mode network plot consisting of visits by private colleges and universities to private high schools.

Table 1 shows characteristics of private high schools visited by each private college and university.

Table 2 shows characteristics of the top 20 most visited private high schools by private colleges and universities.

Table 3 shows characteristics of private high schools by number of private colleges and universities that visited.

References

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Table 1: Characteristics of private high schools visited by each private college and university

ID	University	Cluster	Type	Rank	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	Catholic	Conserv	Nonsect	Other	c1_lt10	c2_10to25	c3_25to50	c4_50+	c1_top200	c2_A+	c3_A	c4_ltA
168342	Williams	1	lib arts	1	22.1%	13.7%	24.2%	19.5%	23.2%	0.5%	46.8%	8.9%	22.6%	46.3%	4.7%	5.8%	34.7%	31.6%	8.9%	2.1%
216287	Swarthmore	1	lib arts	3	25.8%	7.5%	25.3%	21.0%	18.3%	0.5%	49.5%	11.3%	25.3%	42.5%	5.9%	5.9%	33.3%	31.7%	8.6%	3.8%
168218	Wellesley	1	lib arts	4	30.2%	7.1%	19.8%	24.6%	21.4%	0.0%	50.0%	10.3%	26.2%	46.0%	5.6%	4.0%	35.7%	27.8%	10.3%	4.8%
230959	Middlebury	1	lib arts	9	32.4%	6.9%	23.9%	17.0%	14.3%	0.0%	53.3%	12.7%	31.7%	41.7%	5.8%	1.2%	30.1%	40.2%	5.4%	2.3%
167835	Smith	1	lib arts	15	29.7%	3.2%	18.1%	27.7%	12.3%	0.6%	54.2%	11.6%	22.6%	46.5%	7.7%	1.9%	34.2%	38.1%	2.6%	1.3%
126678	Colorado Coll.	1	lib arts	25	26.0%	10.7%	19.2%	25.3%	13.2%	1.8%	53.0%	13.2%	29.5%	42.7%	5.0%	3.9%	31.7%	40.2%	3.9%	2.1%
115409	Harvey Mudd	1	lib arts	25	11.1%	7.4%	27.8%	36.1%	18.5%	0.0%	49.1%	14.8%	21.3%	45.4%	10.2%	5.6%	43.5%	30.6%	4.6%	1.9%
173902	Macalester	1	lib arts	27	21.9%	15.0%	12.3%	30.5%	12.3%	0.5%	56.1%	10.7%	28.3%	44.4%	4.8%	2.1%	38.0%	33.7%	4.8%	1.1%
123165	Scripps	1	lib arts	28	6.4%	10.9%	11.8%	56.4%	20.0%	1.8%	55.5%	8.2%	26.4%	42.7%	12.7%	3.6%	35.5%	40.0%	4.5%	1.8%
204501	Oberlin	1	lib arts	36	30.4%	12.3%	16.8%	21.4%	17.2%	0.3%	51.8%	11.7%	30.1%	42.4%	6.1%	2.3%	29.1%	40.1%	7.8%	0.6%
120254	Occidental	1	lib arts	40	21.3%	5.1%	18.8%	36.0%	21.8%	1.5%	46.7%	11.2%	26.4%	42.1%	10.2%	2.5%	31.0%	38.1%	7.1%	2.0%
128902	Conn Coll.	1	lib arts	51	45.5%	5.4%	9.0%	20.4%	14.0%	0.4%	53.8%	12.2%	32.3%	42.3%	3.9%	1.8%	31.5%	38.0%	6.5%	1.1%
168148	Tufts	1	univ	30	24.7%	6.5%	24.0%	27.2%	19.0%	0.0%	49.1%	14.3%	28.7%	44.1%	6.5%	3.2%	30.5%	43.4%	4.7%	2.2%
221519	Sewanee	2	lib arts	47	17.7%	7.0%	52.6%	4.9%	19.5%	2.9%	41.1%	18.8%	31.2%	45.3%	4.9%	0.8%	15.6%	46.6%	15.6%	2.9%
147767	Northwestern	2	univ	9	14.0%	19.1%	30.6%	20.9%	29.4%	2.6%	41.1%	11.4%	25.7%	46.3%	10.0%	2.6%	26.0%	41.4%	11.7%	3.1%
139658	Emory	2	univ	21	11.2%	9.2%	46.9%	18.1%	22.3%	1.9%	45.0%	16.2%	33.1%	43.5%	8.5%	0.4%	21.9%	48.8%	11.2%	2.7%
160755	Tulane	2	univ	41	17.0%	11.2%	39.7%	15.7%	28.7%	1.0%	39.9%	14.0%	28.7%	42.6%	9.5%	2.7%	22.2%	43.1%	11.5%	4.2%
152080	Notre Dame	3	univ	19	21.2%	20.7%	24.4%	19.5%	56.6%	1.5%	20.3%	7.2%	28.9%	39.7%	11.6%	5.5%	12.6%	35.3%	25.7%	10.4%
164924	Boston Coll.	3	univ	35	21.4%	11.8%	25.1%	25.4%	40.6%	1.9%	34.7%	6.5%	26.0%	41.5%	11.1%	5.0%	22.6%	37.8%	14.6%	5.3%
201645	Case Western Res.	3	univ	42	22.5%	15.1%	30.7%	15.6%	28.4%	0.9%	39.0%	15.6%	30.3%	44.0%	6.9%	2.8%	23.9%	45.0%	11.9%	1.8%
216597	Villanova	3	univ	53	30.0%	16.8%	31.0%	7.5%	49.3%	1.8%	26.0%	8.2%	28.2%	43.6%	9.7%	3.8%	12.3%	39.4%	22.3%	9.2%
186867	Stevens Ins. Tech	3	univ	80	52.3%	1.3%	20.8%	11.4%	40.9%	1.3%	30.2%	13.4%	26.2%	47.0%	12.1%	0.7%	16.8%	41.6%	21.5%	2.7%
228246	SMU	4	univ	66	14.9%	11.5%	41.3%	14.5%	30.2%	4.4%	33.3%	14.3%	27.5%	40.3%	11.1%	3.3%	15.9%	43.6%	16.3%	3.3%
223232	Baylor	4	univ	76	0.0%	6.7%	55.8%	20.5%	30.4%	21.0%	11.2%	20.5%	24.6%	39.3%	15.6%	3.6%	5.4%	36.2%	27.2%	11.6%
228875	TCU	4	univ	80	13.9%	11.8%	36.9%	23.7%	39.8%	5.3%	26.9%	14.4%	26.6%	42.7%	12.9%	4.1%	12.5%	47.0%	20.9%	4.6%
127060	U of Denver	4	univ	80	18.9%	18.5%	18.5%	28.0%	30.7%	2.0%	40.6%	10.6%	35.8%	37.4%	8.7%	2.0%	18.9%	47.6%	11.8%	2.4%

Table 2: Characteristics of the top 20 most visited private high schools by private colleges and universities

school_name	city	state	region	religion	pct_blacklatinxnative	ranking_score	ranking_numeric	degree	strength
KENT DENVER SCHOOL	ENGLEWOOD	CO	4	other_religion	6.370370	A+	122	23	24
CHOATE ROSEMARY HALL	WALLINGFORD	CT	1	nonsectarian	15.882353	A+	8	21	34
HARVARD-WESTLAKE SCHOOL	STUDIO CITY	CA	4	other_religion	16.708385	A+	6	21	22
THE LAWRENCEVILLE SCHOOL	LAWRENCEVILLE	NJ	1	nonsectarian	15.911873	A+	10	20	22
ALBUQUERQUE ACADEMY	ALBUQUERQUE	NM	4	nonsectarian	15.862069	A+	83	20	22
DALTON SCHOOL	NEW YORK	NY	1	nonsectarian	12.718964	A+	32	20	26
UNIVERSITY PREP	SEATTLE	WA	4	nonsectarian	9.683099	A+	249	20	22
ST IGNATIUS COLLEGE PREP	CHICAGO	IL	2	catholic	24.253460	A+	298	20	24
GREENHILL SCHOOL	ADDISON	TX	3	nonsectarian	16.679718	A+	64	20	20
THE BISHOP'S SCHOOL	LA JOLLA	CA	4	other_religion	0.000000	A+	43	19	19
THE ATHENIAN SCHOOL	DANVILLE	CA	4	nonsectarian	12.213741	A+	106	19	21
THE HOTCHKISS SCHOOL	LAKEVILLE	CT	1	nonsectarian	14.006515	A+	17	19	30
MARET SCHOOL	WASHINGTON	DC	3	nonsectarian	23.112481	A+	100	19	19
THE BRYN MAWR SCHOOL	BALTIMORE	MD	3	nonsectarian	18.491124	A+	98	19	19
PHILLIPS ACADEMY	ANDOVER	MA	1	nonsectarian	11.759505	NA	NA	19	30
OREGON EPISCOPAL SCHOOL	PORTLAND	OR	4	other_religion	4.470588	A+	135	19	19
EPISCOPAL HIGH SCHOOL	ALEXANDRIA	VA	3	other_religion	16.447368	A+	141	19	32
THE KINKAID SCHOOL	HOUSTON	TX	3	nonsectarian	8.654545	A+	89	19	21
HEAD ROYCE SCHOOL	OAKLAND	CA	4	nonsectarian	16.628959	A+	42	18	18
MARIN ACADEMY	SAN RAFAEL	CA	4	nonsectarian	9.669811	A+	129	18	18

Table 3: Characteristics of private high schools by number of private colleges and universities that visited

Degree	Count	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	Catholic	Conservative Christian	Nonsectarian	Other	<10%	10-25%	25-50%	50%+	Top 200	A+	A	<A	rank_NA
15+	79	20.3%	13.9%	31.6%	34.2%	13.9%	NA	69.6%	16.5%	27.8%	62.0%	7.6%	2.5%	68.4%	29.1%	1.3%	NA	1.3%
10-14	153	29.4%	13.1%	30.1%	27.5%	29.4%	1.3%	56.9%	12.4%	31.4%	57.5%	6.5%	4.6%	30.1%	58.8%	6.5%	1.3%	3.3%
5-9	243	27.2%	11.1%	39.9%	21.8%	44.9%	3.3%	37.4%	14.4%	39.9%	43.2%	14.0%	2.9%	8.2%	66.3%	21.4%	2.1%	2.1%
4	87	28.7%	12.6%	43.7%	14.9%	59.8%	6.9%	17.2%	16.1%	41.4%	42.5%	12.6%	3.4%	1.1%	51.7%	41.4%	3.4%	2.3%
3	114	27.2%	26.3%	39.5%	7.0%	54.4%	5.3%	26.3%	14.0%	32.5%	49.1%	12.3%	6.1%	NA	34.2%	43.9%	13.2%	8.8%
2	171	28.7%	21.6%	33.9%	15.8%	55.6%	8.2%	19.3%	17.0%	39.8%	33.3%	19.9%	7.0%	1.2%	24.6%	43.9%	25.1%	5.3%
1	272	21.7%	21.3%	42.3%	14.7%	55.1%	13.2%	16.2%	15.4%	31.6%	38.6%	18.4%	11.4%	0.4%	22.4%	33.5%	39.0%	4.8%

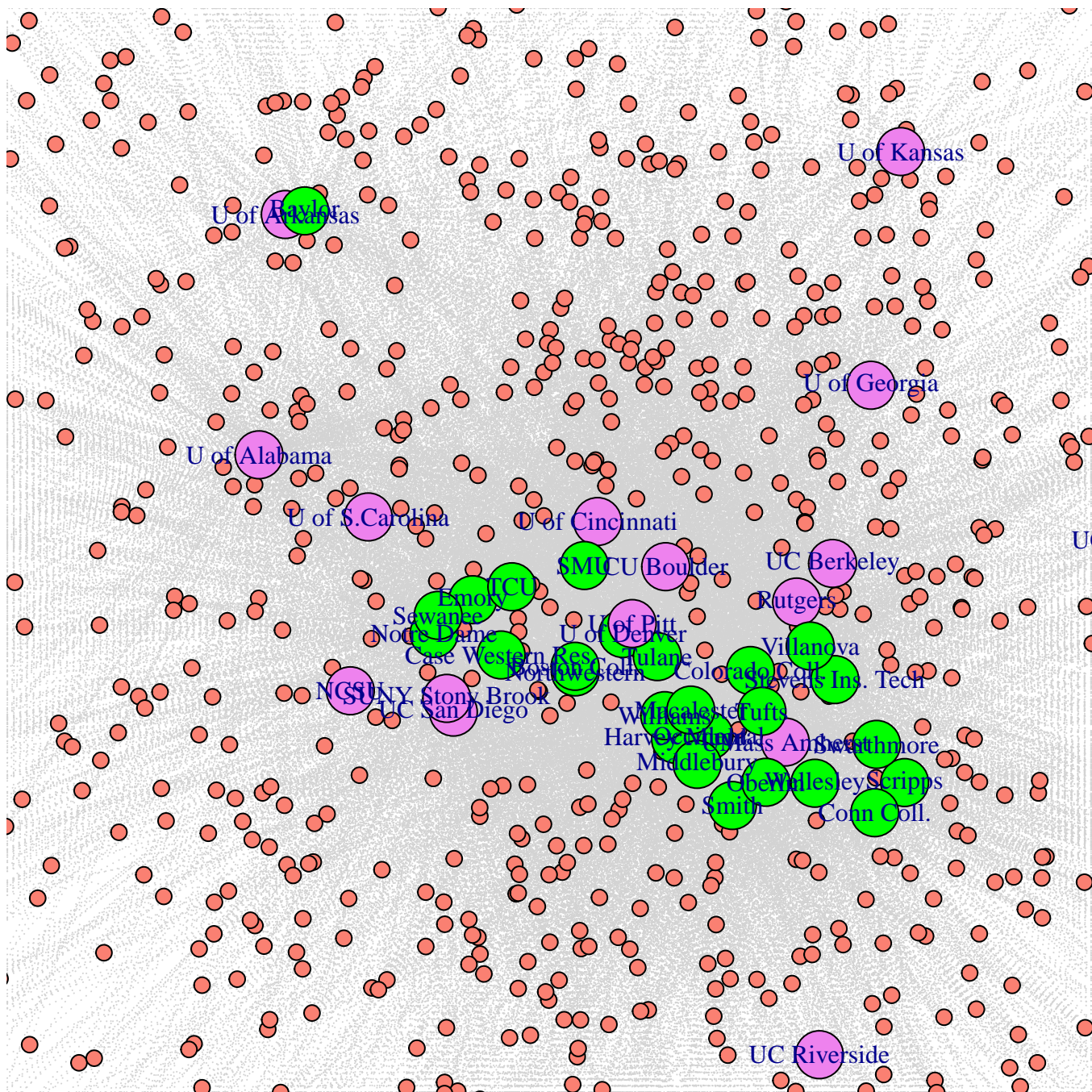


Figure 1: 2-mode network plot consisting of visits by public and private colleges and universities to private high schools

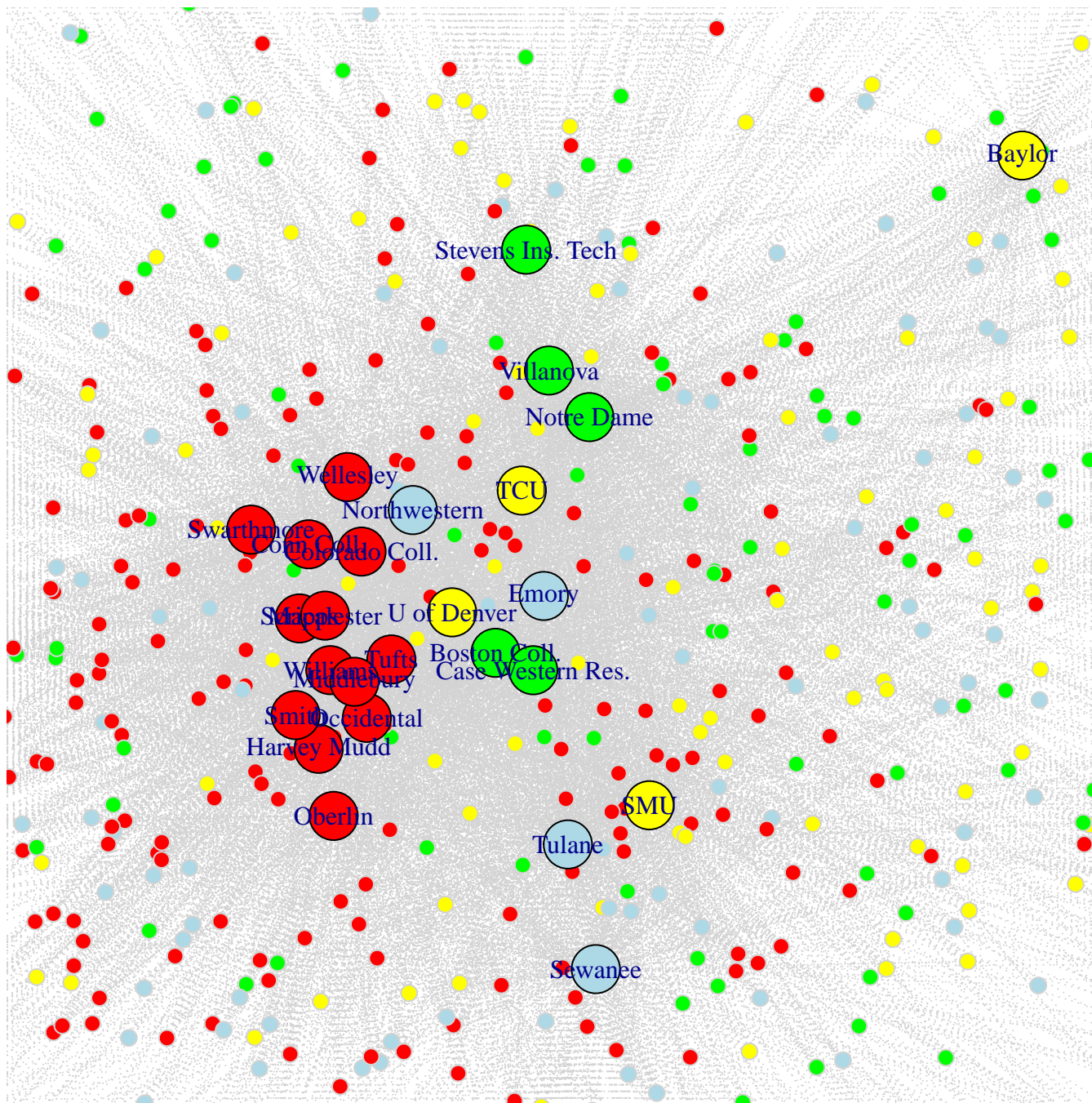


Figure 2: 2-mode network plot consisting of visits by private colleges and universities to private high schools