Sociology of Education Association Proposal

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Overview

This study uses social network methods to analyze off-campus recruiting visits to U.S. private high schools by a sample of public research universities and selective private colleges and universities. Analyses are informed by three broad research questions. First, which types of private high schools receive visits from which types of colleges and universities? Related, to what extent do colleges and universities visit private high schools that share similar characteristics with the college (e.g., geographic region, religious affiliation, academic reputation, and racial composition)? Third, how does the off-campus recruiting network of public research universities compare to that of selective private colleges and universities?

Our focus on private high schools is motivated by previous research on recruiting visits by public research universities, which found that a majority of universities made a disproportionate number of out-of-state visits to private schools (Author, 2019). The motivation for comparing the behavior of public and private colleges/universities is based on the idea that out-of-state visits to private high schools are antithetical to the stated mission of public research universities. By contrast, recruiting visits to private high schools are consistent with the mission of private colleges and universities. We suggest that out-of-state visits to private schools by public research universities is an example of "privatization." A weakness of the privatization literature is that few empirical studies compare public and private institutions with respect to particular behaviors associated with privatization (McClure, Barringer, & Brown, 2019). Therefore, by comparing the (mostly out-of-state) visits to private high schools by public research universities to those of private colleges and universities, we hope to develop new insights about the privatization of public higher education.

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 (2007) and Khan (2011) 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, making it suitable for social network analyses.

Literature review and theory

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). Stevens (2007) provides an ethnography of the admissions office at a selective private liberal arts college. 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 (2010) analyzed recruiting from the perspective of an elite private boarding school in order to understand "how such schools continue to get comparatively under-qualified students into top colleges and universities." Private high school counselors face pressure to send *all* students to the best college possible. Selective colleges want high achieving students who can pay tuition and donate and they also want low acceptance and high yield rates to move up the rankings. For both sides to attain their goal, it is essential that colleges get information from high schools about which schools students actually wish to attend.

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. 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.

Data and methods

Our project collected data about off-campus recruiting visits made in 2017 by a convenience sample of colleges and universities. We collected visit data by "scraping" URLs (e.g., "Coming to a neighborhood near you" pages that post recruiting events) once per week from college/university admissions websites and – for the sample of public research universities – by issuing public records requests. 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). We narrowed the sample down to universities that we were able to collect complete recruiting events data on. Our final analysis sample consists of 17 public research universities, 13 private research universities, and 13 private liberal arts colleges. We merged the recruiting events data to the following secondary data sources: 2017-18 NCES Private School Universe Survey (PSS); 2017 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS); 2020 Best Private High Schools ranking by Niche; and 2020 Best Colleges ranking by U.S. News & World Report.

A social network consists of a set of actors – referred to as "vertices" – and the connections – referred to as "edges" between these actors. Whereas "one-mode" networks consist of vertices of the same "type" (e.g., in a publication network each vertex is an author), "two-mode" networks consist of vertices associated with one type of actor/entity having connections to vertices of another type. For example, an actor-movie network consists of actors (mode 1) who appear in movies (mode 2), and an actor shares an edge with a movie if the actor appears in the movie. The social network analyzed in this study is a two-mode network, where vertices consist of colleges/universities (mode 1) and high schools (mode 2), and an edge is defined as a visit from a college/university to a private high school (e.g., high school i shares an edge with college j if high school i received at least one visit from college j). This (weighted) network is represented as a school-by-college matrix (e.g., a 500×40 matrix if our network contains 500 high schools and 40 colleges/universities) in which matrix cell $a_{i,j}$ identifies the number of visits that high school i received from college j.

Findings

With the page limitation of this proposal, we won't be able to discuss results in detail; however, we have included some preliminary examples of the type of analyses we are working on.Figure 1 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 institution. Figure 2 shows a two-mode network plot consisting of visits by public and private colleges and universities to private high schools. Table 2 shows characteristics of the top 20 most visited private high schools by these institutions.

Significance

The vast majority of research on enrollment management behaviors focuses on the final stages of the enrollment funnel, specifically which applicants are admitted and the use of financial aid "leveraging" to convert admits to enrollees (e.g., Alon, 2009; Doyle, 2010; Karabel, 2005; Karen, 1990; McPherson & Schapiro, 1998; Posselt, 2016; Waddell & Singell, 2011). By contrast, the enrollment management industry expends substantial resources on marketing/recruiting activities that target earlier stages of the enrollment funnel (Noel-Levitz, 2020). With the notable exception of a small sociological case-study literature (Holland, 2019) – the research community has ignored a great number of enrollment management practices that plausibly affect access to higher education. As a consequence, enrollment management remains an opaque industry to policymakers and the public. We argue that developing thoughtful policies about enrollment management depends on researchers collectively developing empirical literature that document enrollment management practices and evaluate the effects of these practices on opportunities for students.

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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%
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%
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%

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

school_name	city	state_code	region	religion	pct_blacklatinxnative	ranking	ranking_numeric	degree	strength
GREENHILL SCHOOL	ADDISON	TX	3	nonsectarian	16.679718	A+	64	31	32
ST IGNATIUS COLLEGE PREP	CHICAGO	IL	2	catholic	24.253460	A+	298	30	38
KENT DENVER SCHOOL	ENGLEWOOD	CO	4	other_religion	6.370370	A+	122	29	31
EPISCOPAL HIGH SCHOOL	ALEXANDRIA	VA	3	other_religion	16.447368	A+	141	29	49
JESUIT COLLEGE PREP SCHOOL	DALLAS	TX	3	catholic	18.140794	A+	235	28	46
CHOATE ROSEMARY HALL	WALLINGFORD	CT	1	nonsectarian	15.882353	A+	8	27	42
MCDONOGH SCHOOL	OWINGS MILLS	MD	3	nonsectarian	22.320769	A+	311	27	27
URSULINE ACADEMY OF DALLAS	DALLAS	TX	3	catholic	23.174971	A+	344	27	31
HARVARD-WESTLAKE SCHOOL	STUDIO CITY	CA	4	other_religion	16.708385	A+	6	27	28
PHILLIPS ACADEMY	ANDOVER	MA	1	nonsectarian	11.759505	NA	NA	26	37
STRAKE JESUIT COLLEGE PREP SCHOOL	HOUSTON	TX	3	catholic	29.076621	A+	191	26	45
THE KINKAID SCHOOL	HOUSTON	TX	3	nonsectarian	8.654545	A+	89	26	31
THE ATHENIAN SCHOOL	DANVILLE	CA	4	nonsectarian	12.213741	A+	106	24	26
LAKE FOREST ACADEMY	LAKE FOREST	IL	2	nonsectarian	12.183908	A+	126	24	30
THE BRYN MAWR SCHOOL	BALTIMORE	MD	3	nonsectarian	18.491124	A+	98	24	25
DALTON SCHOOL	NEW YORK	NY	1	nonsectarian	12.718964	A+	32	24	30
GEORGETOWN PREPARATORY SCHOOL	NORTH BETHESDA	MD	3	catholic	17.741936	A+	162	24	31
ST MARK'S SCHOOL OF TEXAS	DALLAS	TX	3	other_religion	13.584475	A+	2	24	30
BROPHY COLLEGE PREPARATORY	PHOENIX	AZ	4	catholic	32.099644	A+	335	23	30
PINE CREST SCHOOL	FORT LAUDERDALE	FL	3	nonsectarian	10.000000	A+	52	23	29

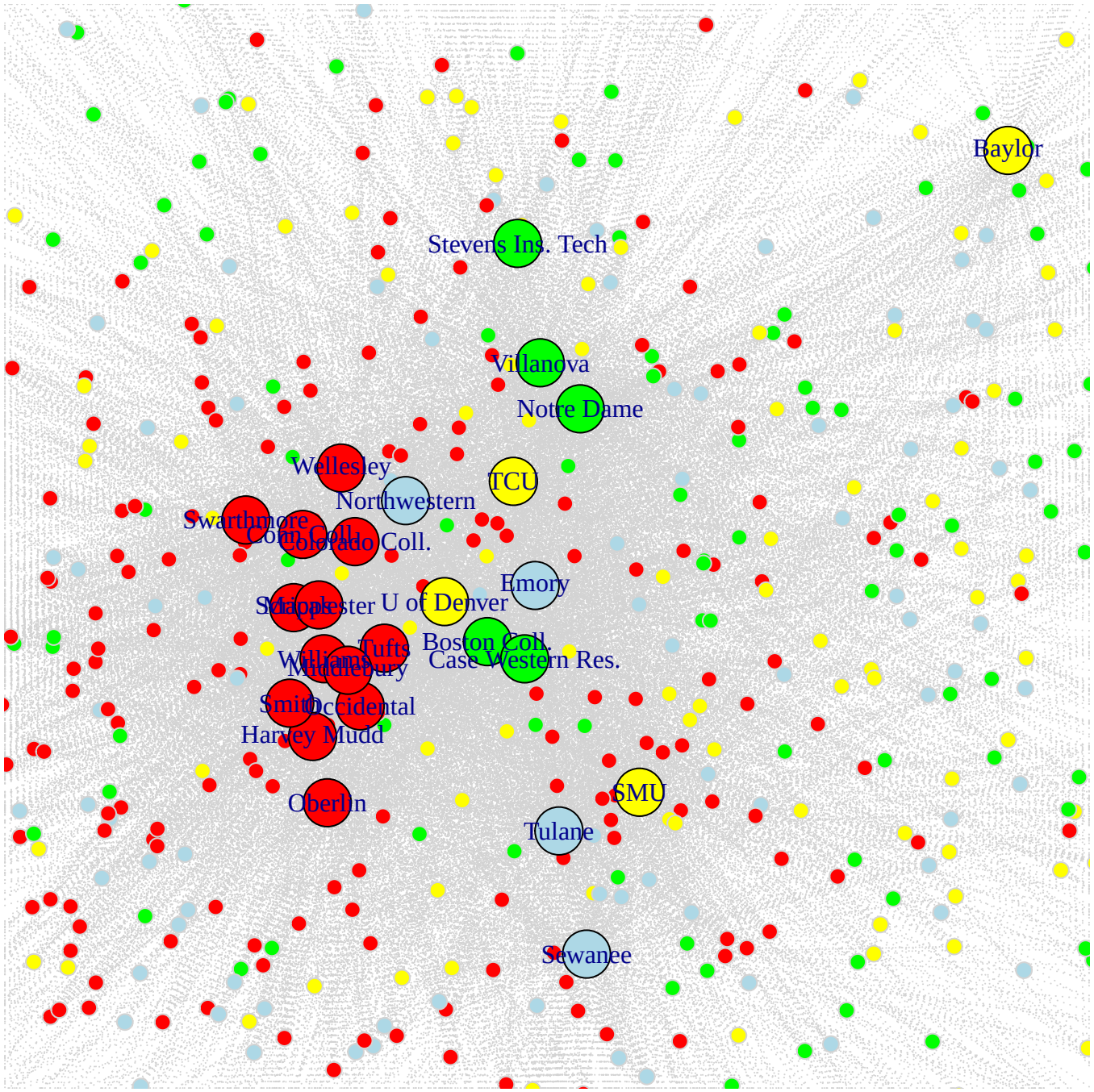

Figure 1: 2-mode network plot consisting of visits by private colleges and universities to private high schools

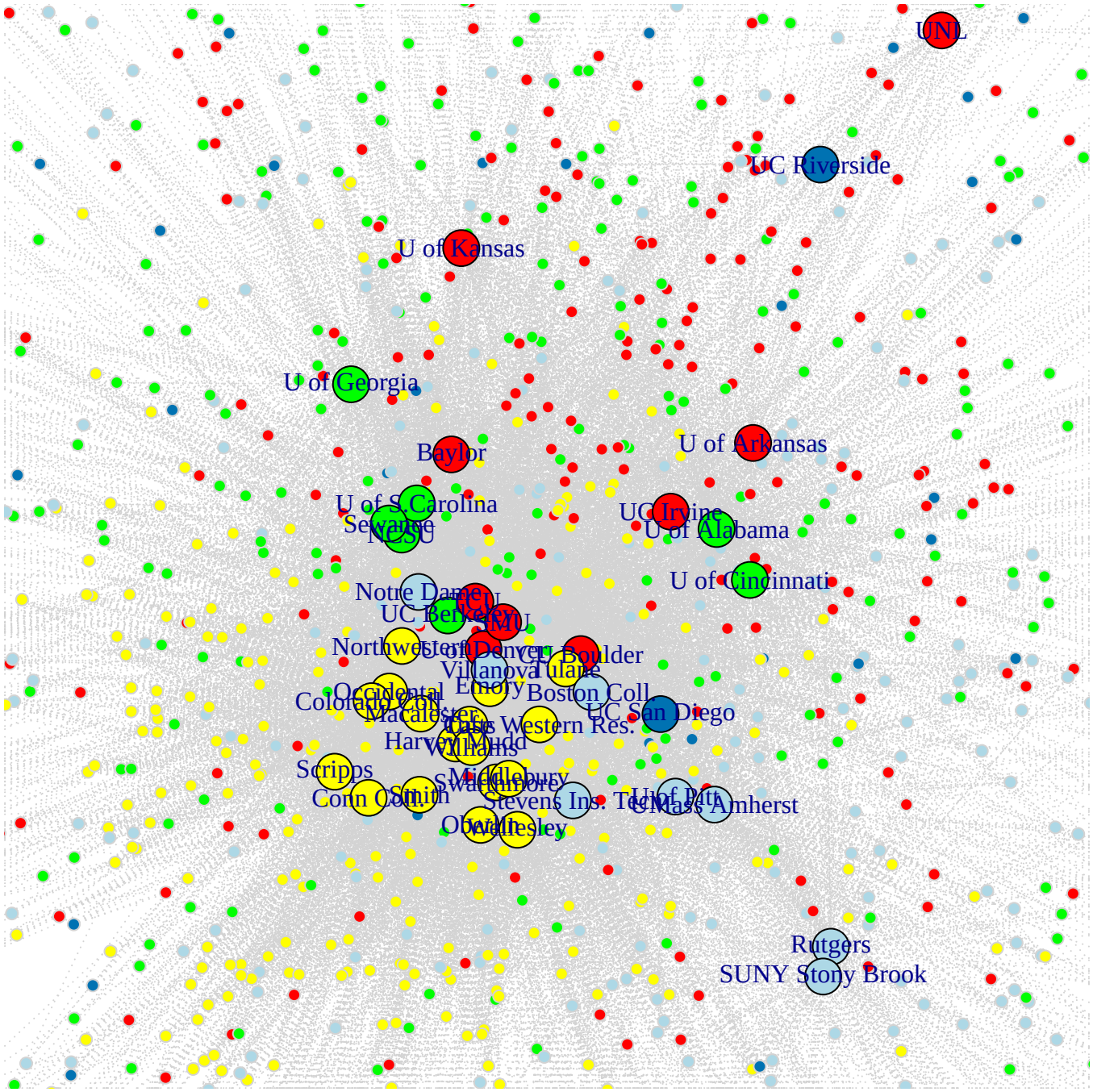

Figure 2: 2-mode network plot consisting of visits by public and private colleges and universities to private high schools