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EXAMINING THE INFLUENCES OF UNIVERSITY IMAGE AND CAMPUS VISITS ON

STUDENTS' COLLEGE CHOICES

A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Higher Education

The University of Mississippi

by

JENNIFER LEA MCCLURE

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study provides qualitative data in the areas of university image, campus visits, and college choice. The purpose of the study was to examine the value of university image and campus visits in students' college choices. Twenty matriculated freshmen at the University of Mississippi who participated in campus visits as prospective students and who applied for admission in the months of October through April were selected via purposeful sampling to participate in open-ended interviews about the images that they hold of the university, their campus visit experiences, and their college choice processes. The data collected show that students place great value on university image and campus visits in their college choices. Three themes emerged in this study: (a) college choice influences, which include university image, campus visits, and institutional factors, all of which influenced students' college choices; (b) college choice influencers, which include members of the UM community, taxpayers, and non-stakeholders that influenced students' college choices; and (c) students' feelings. The perceptions and experiences that students shared illustrate the overlap in factors contributing to university image, campus visits, and college choice as students identified influences, influencers, and feelings in all of those areas.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IHL   Institutions of Higher Learning

IRB   Institutional Research Board

NCAA   National Collegiate Athletics Association

R-1   Research 1

SEC   Southeastern Conference

UM   University of Mississippi

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Competition for students, employees, and donors has risen among institutions of higher education in the United States as a result of changes in governmental funding models and the increasing globalization of the higher education marketplace. Hiltonsmith and Draut (2014) found that as of 2012, American public universities and colleges covered 44% of their operating expenses with tuition revenue; that number was only 20% in 1987 (p. 1). Students now have more options than ever before for obtaining further education. According to Eagan, Lazano, Hurtado, & Case (2013), data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Survey of Freshmen show that students are increasingly applying to four or more institutions (p. 9). The Common Application organization confirms that one million students use their online application service to submit 5.5 million applications to 900 member institutions annually (About, n.d., The Common App Impact, n.d.). Students are now considering and applying to institutions that they may not have before considered due to the ease of applying through the Common Application. As a result, institutions now have competitors that administrators may not have considered in the past. "Therefore, attracting enough eligible high school graduates who are willing to pay full tuition becomes a difficult task for many colleges and universities" (Han, 2014, p. 120). Institutions must develop and implement successful strategies to position themselves in the higher education marketplace. Understanding prospective student characteristics, how to connect with them, and what they are looking for in institutions of higher education is critical to enrollment success (Hossler & Bean, 1990).

As my positions at the university have involved work in the areas of marketing and recruitment, I have become very interested in the role of university image, how it is impacted by students' experiences during the campus visit, and, ultimately, how it factors into students' decisions to attend. I enjoy hearing students' stories about why they chose the University of Mississippi, and I allow my conversations with them to inform my marketing and recruitment efforts. My work in the Department of Student Housing as Assistant Director for Marketing included oversight of student housing tours, which are a component of campus visits scheduled with the Office of Admissions by potential students and their families. My work in the Patterson School of Accountancy as Director of Master's Programs includes recruitment of graduate as well as undergraduate students.

In an informal study of new students from 2011-2017, the campus tour was frequently identified by students at the University of Mississippi as a major factor in their decisions to attend (McClure, 2017a). During this informal study, students enrolled in a section of the freshman year experience class were asked what made them choose to attend the university. Responses given most frequently discussed campus visits. Often included in responses related to the campus visit were mentions of the beauty of campus, the vibe of campus, how the student felt he or she would feel at home on campus, and the family atmosphere. Students also frequently mentioned athletics factors like Southeastern Conference football and tailgating as well as sorority/fraternity life. While informal, this research aligns with published research on university image, college choice, and campus visits.

University image.

University image, defined by Treadwell and Harrison (1994) as "individuals' idiosyncratic representations of an organization at any given point in time," is a valuable,

intangible asset if individuals collectively have positive perceptions of the institution (p. 64).

Considerable resources are devoted to enhancing image at colleges across the country as

institutions are looking to successfully compete for students and donors. While available

research on university image is limited, Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska (2003) conducted a study to

determine which factors significantly predict the image of universities among college students.

The results of the study include academic factors, athletic factors, and the extent of news

coverage of the university (p. 97).

Campus visits.

Scholars have consistently agreed that "the campus visit is the most influential piece of

the college search process" (Brown, 2010; Cohen, 2009; Greenough, 2003; Hesel, 2004; Hoover,

2009, 2010a, 2010b; Kuh, 2009; Magolda, 2000; Swan, 1998; Yost & Tucker, 1995 as cited in

Okerson, 2016, pp. 11-12). College choice models by Chapman (1981); Hanson & Litten,

(1982); Hossler & Gallagher (1987); Perna (2006); and Vossensteyn (2005) provide evidence of

the impact of a student's interaction with a college campus (Okerson, 2016, p. 12). Brown

(2010, as cited in Okerson, 2016) found that students who visit institutions are twice as likely to

enroll compared to students who do not visit. Okerson (2016) found that aesthetics of the

campus environment, community/general vibe of campus, and personal interactions impacted

their college choices the most (p. 131).

College choice.

When analyzing the relationship between university image and college choice,

researchers have consistently found that university image plays a critical role in the process of

college choice (Han, 2014, p. 122; Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry, & Kelly, 2008, p. 97; Morse, 2011;

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Kotler & Fox, 1985, as cited in Hossler et al., 1989, p. 243; Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011, as cited in Merchant, Rose, Moody, & Mathews, 2014, p. 26; Stevens, McConkey, Cole, and Clow, 2008, p. 100). College choice research is plentiful, and many researchers have built on foundational research by Anderson, Bowman, & Tinto (1972, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987); Alexander (1978, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987); D. Chapman (1981, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987); Jackson (1982); Litten (1982); R. Chapman (1984, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987); and Hossler & Gallagher (1987). In their respective studies on college choice, Anderson et al. (1972, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) and Alexander (1978, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) found that the characteristics of educational institutions, including high schools and colleges, influence the college choice process. College choice studies by Lewis & Morrison (1975); Tierney (1980); D. Chapman (1981); Jackson (1982); Litten (1982); Manski & Wise (1982); Litten, Sullivan, & Brodigan (1983); and R. Chapman (1984) analyze the interaction of student background characteristics, aspirations, and achievements with students' expectations of college (as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

The studies by D. Chapman (1981), Jackson (1982), Litten (1982), and R. Chapman (1984) have described college choice as a developmental process (as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Jackson (1982) and Litten (1982) suggested that the college choice process has three phases that begin with a predisposition and end with selecting an institution to attend (as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Litten (1982) proposed a three-phase model of college choice (as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The first phase includes the desire to attend a college followed by the decision to attend. The second phase includes investigation of potential colleges. The final phase of the model includes application for admission; actual admission; and enrollment. The model proposed by Jackson (1982) is similar to the one proposed by Litten

(1982) and begins with the student's interest in attending college; is followed by exclusion, or development of the choice set—the institutions in which the student is interested; and ends with evaluation, during which the student evaluates the choice set and makes a selection (Hossler & Gallagher (1987).

Building on this research, Hossler & Gallagher (1987) proposed a widely-referenced three-stage model of college choice, "an interactive model which takes into account the nature of higher education options and some of the organizational factors at both the pre-college and the college level (p. 209). In this developmental model, "students move toward an increased understanding of their educational options as they seek a postsecondary educational experience," with individual and organizational factors influencing each phase of the process (p. 208). The first phase of the model, predisposition, recognizes individual factors (student characteristics, significant others, and educational activities) and organizational factors (school characteristics) as students search for college options and other options. The second phase, search, looks at the influences of individual factors (student preliminary college values and student search activities) and organizational factors (college and university activities related to searching for students) as students develop their choice sets, or the institutions to which they will actually apply. In the third phase of the process, labeled choice, individual factors (the student's choice set) and college and organizational factors (college and university recruitment activities) influence the students' ultimate choice of which institution to attend. Hossler's & Gallagher's model (1987) "reveals the potential impact of state and federal policymakers, as well as the possible impact of individual institutions, at each phase of the choice process" (p. 209).

As administrators are looking to gain competitive edges and stand out among students' myriad higher education options, marketing strategies are developed to achieve recruitment and

enrollment goals. Understanding the connections between university image, college choice and campus visits is critical in the development of successful marketing strategies. Valuable insight can be gained from collectively examining the images held by students, how those images are shaped by campus visits, and how images held by students and campus visits ultimately influences students' decisions to attend.

Significance of Study

With such great importance placed on campus visits by students and the amount of resources allocated to student recruitment via campus visits, there is value in learning how campus visits influence students' decisions. In addition, gaining a better understanding of the factors that currently contribute to student decision-making will aid administrators in developing strategies to compete in the global higher education marketplace.

> While schools cannot and should not attempt to be everything to everyone, recognizing characteristics that students deem as important might help schools address these key factors, thereby providing students with relevant information necessary to inform their selection process. Doing so may contribute to a more positive organizational image by potential members. (Pampaloni, 2010, p. 25)

In conducting research for various courses in my doctoral curriculum, I found that there is not a large amount of research in the area of university image, and there is even less research aimed at understanding how image is upheld and how factors related to image are communicated during campus visits, which greatly influence college choice.

My interest in the intersections of university image, campus visits, and college choice prompted me to conduct research in those areas for a qualitative methodology class that I took as

a requirement for my doctoral degree. Using the factors found by Arpan et al. (2003) and

Okerson (2016) as frameworks, I conducted a qualitative research study to attempt to answer the

following question: How and to what extent does the campus visit at the University of

Mississippi reinforce the three factors of university image among students: academics, athletics,

and news coverage? The data collected in the aforementioned study (McClure, 2017b) align

with scholarly literature on campus visits, university image, and college choice (see pp. 2-5 of

the current prospectus). While the study does provide relevant information on students'

experiences and perceptions and shows that the factors are reinforced on campus visits, the

extent to which the three factors of image are reinforced during the campus visit is not clear.

Below is a summary of the study's key results (McClure, 2017b):

- University image was a factor in the college choices of all students.

- These additional factors influenced the college choices of students:

  o Campus environment

  o Social life

  o Greek life

  o Size

  o Athletics

  o Academics

  o Student housing

  o Safety

- All students had favorable perceptions of what Okerson (2016) deems the most

  influential components of the campus visit: campus appearance, campus vibe, and

  personal interactions.

- Two of the three predictive factors of university image—as found by Arpan et al., 2003, p. 97—were strongly reinforced by campus visits:
  - Academics
  - Athletics
- Academics and athletics also contributed positively to the university's image.

Encouraged by the experiences, raw data, and findings of the unpublished, qualitative study previously referenced—McClure 2017b, I used it as a framework and guide for the current study, which also explores the intersections of university image, campus visits, and college choice. In conducting the aforementioned study, I found opportunities to improve the research questions and processes. I ultimately determined that the results could be more transferable if data collected from both female and male subjects were included. For this study, I decided to interview matriculating (instead of visiting) students to ensure completion of the college choice process at the time of the study. Since this study examines the perceptions and experiences at the University of Mississippi, an institution that has historically been challenged in maintaining positive images among stakeholders as well as national and global audiences, interview participants were given opportunities to share how the university's history has shaped their individual images of the university and how those images, in turn, have influenced their college choice processes.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the bodies of research on university image, campus visits, and college choice by providing exploratory research that focuses on the influence of campus visits and university image on students' college choices. Expanding the body of research in the areas of university image and campus visits is important due to the limited

amount of research available in those areas. Evaluating how university image and campus visits impact the college choices of first-time, incoming freshmen is a valuable endeavor. In conducting this study, my goal was to provide research that is helpful to administrators in developing and implementing marketing strategies aimed at enrollment maximization. The results of this study also provide university professionals who manage communications, branding, enrollment, recruitment, and admissions processes with research that is useful in developing effective strategies for student recruitment. In providing qualitative research in these areas, I am aiding readers in better understanding students' perceptions, experiences, and college choice decisions by sharing their actual words and sentiments.

Research Question

Qualitative research was conducted to gain insight into how students' college choice decisions are shaped by university image and campus visits. Specifically, this study answered the following research question:

- How do students describe the value of university image and the campus visit in their decisions to attend the University of Mississippi?

Overview of Methods

This study adds to existing research by evaluating the links between university image, campus visits, and college choice. I collected data via open-ended interviews with matriculated undergraduate students at the University of Mississippi who participated in campus visits through the Office of Admissions as prospective students and who applied for admission within the months of October-April prior to the year of enrollment. Campus visits at the University of Mississippi include a group information session with an admissions staff member, a group

walking tour of campus, and a group tour of student housing. In addition, students have the option to schedule appointments with staff and faculty in specific offices and departments. Because (a) university image is a perception held by the individual student and (b) students' college choice processes and campus visit experiences may vary, valuable, unbiased information was gained in conducting individual interviews. In utilizing a case study approach with a phenomenological perspective, I was able to provide rich, detailed descriptions of these students' perceptions and experiences as related to college choice.

Terms & Definitions

Definitions of the main concepts related to this study vary among researchers. Clarification of other terms is helpful in understanding the scope of this study. Below are operational definitions of key terms used.

- Campus visit - official visit to campus managed by university staff; generally includes a campus tour and information session with an admissions professional
- Choice set - set of alternatives to which the student will apply and from which the student will eventually choose (Jackson, 1982, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 209)
- College - four-year institution of higher education located in the United States; used interchangeably with university; does not include vocational, technical schools, or community colleges
- College choice - "the process through which students decide whether and where to go to college" (Bergerson, 2009, as cited in Iloh, 2018, p. 228)
- Consideration set - the institutions that individual students are considering attending
- Freshman - first-year domestic student at a college or university

- Ole Miss **-** term of affection for the University of Mississippi used by members within and outside of the university community; brand of the University of Mississippi

- Southeastern Conference **-** athletics division that includes the University of Mississippi and public institutions of comparable size that are located in the South

- University **-** see college

- University image **-** individuals' idiosyncratic representations of a university at any given point in time; these representations include individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and impressions about the university and its behavior (based on organizational image definitions by Treadwell & Harrison, 1994, p. 64, and Arpan et al., 2003, p. 97).

Delimitations

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, matriculated undergraduate students from only one university, the University of Mississippi, were interviewed. These students participated in formal campus visits at the institution prior to attending. Further, the study is delimited to students who applied for admission to the institution between the months of October and April in the academic year prior to enrollment. This decision was based on the findings of a study conducted at the University of Mississippi in which the researcher determined that students who apply earlier in the application process are more likely to attend (Phillips, 2019). As such, the decisions of students who apply for admission from October to April may provide the institution with greater opportunity to influence their college choice decisions.

Students who participated in dual enrollment programs at their respective high schools were included in this study. Transfer students who attended other institutions of higher learning after high school and before enrolling at the University of Mississippi were excluded regardless

of classification. This study focuses on the college choice processes of first-time freshmen and does not evaluate the college search processes of transfer students.

Results are less generalizable than those produced via quantitative research methods but could be transferred to institutions with students who possess similar backgrounds and characteristics and with similar institutional cultures. Data were collected from students who chose to attend the institution. Results could vary if students who did not choose to attend the institution were included. Results could also vary if students' informal visits were analyzed in addition to formal campus visits through the Office of Admissions at the University of Mississippi.

Limitations

The use of standardized open-ended interviews may have negatively impacted naturalness and relevance of questions and answers. The results of this study are meant to provide the reader with an introduction to the intersections of campus visits, university image, and college choice. Therefore, a small sample of current students was used.

Organization of the Document

The next chapter of this document provides a review of the literature. Included are sections on marketing strategy, which includes university image, as well as college choice and campus visits. Topics are organized in a way that illustrates overlaps in the literature and how the topics are related. General and relevant historical and contextual information about the University of Mississippi and Oxford, Mississippi, the city in which the university is located, is also provided. The third chapter in this document provides details on the design of the study. Included are sections on research design, the research question, setting, participants, data

collection, and data analysis. Findings from this study are presented in the fourth chapter as

participant information, case studies, additional data organized by topic, and analytic themes.

The fifth chapter includes a summary of findings, discussion, implications for the University of

Mississippi, implications for higher education, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of the literature provides a foundation for research related to university image, campus visits, and college choice. Information was sourced from books, websites, journal articles, and other periodicals. General searches were conducted on the internet and within the offerings of the University of Mississippi library. Many sources were found within the references of other sources. The information from these sources has been organized and synthesized to provide a base of knowledge for this research study.

The first section, which provides an overview of marketing strategy, includes subsections on target markets, product, brand, university image, and communication. The next section examines the research on college choice and demonstrates the relationship between college choice and university image. The third section discusses campus visits and also illustrates the relationships between campus visits, college choice, and university image. The fourth section provides an overview of the history of the University of Mississippi and provides context for the setting of this study.

Marketing Strategy

"Marketing has long been part of the true story of American colleges and universities" as marketing principles have been used by higher education administrators since the early 1800s (Litten, 1980, as cited in Newman, 2002, p. 16). In order to attract resources and students,

institutions of higher education utilize marketing strategies to successfully compete (Goldgehn, 1982; Litten, 1980; Mulnix, 1989; and Uehling, 1980, as cited in Newman, 2002; Han, 2014). These strategies are often corporative in nature as institutions strive to rise above the competition. According to Pampaloni (2010), universities have some of the same organizational characteristics as corporations; however, the business of higher education institutions is very different, and institutions function under different parameters (p. 20). Therefore, marketing strategy development and institution positioning is of critical importance. Smaller schools and those that are not well-known have "an added burden because image has greater significance when consumers have had minimal direct experience with an organization" (Pampaloni, 2010, p. 20).

In their case study on the role of corporate identity in the higher education sector, Melewar and Akel (2006) stated:

> In a market where students are recognized as customers, universities have to implement strategies to maintain and enhance their competitiveness. Competitive advantages based on sets of unique characteristics must be developed. Furthermore, universities need to communicate these characteristics in an effective and consistent way to all of the relevant stakeholders. (p. 41)

A marketing strategy is developed through identifying the target market and employing the principles of marketing, often called the 4 Ps of Marketing. The 4 Ps, which were identified by marketing researcher E. Jerome McCarthy, include product (or service), price, promotion, and place (Goi, 2009, p. 2). Higher education marketers, for whom price and place are often well-defined, generally focus their efforts on the other two Ps: product (service) and promotion.

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Promotion includes all activities related to selling, image enhancement, branding, and communication.

Understanding how marketing strategies are developed and implemented in the higher education marketplace is key for administrators who wish to work effectively with marketers to successfully market their institutions. Gaining a more in-depth understanding of organizational image, branding, and communications can be helpful in exploring the ways that various stakeholders interact with an institution. By working collaboratively with marketers, administrators can realize gains in critical areas such as enrollment, retention, and fundraising.

Target markets.

Before beginning work in the areas of product and promotion, marketers must complete a holistic evaluation of the market, defining the target market by identifying potential consumers. Dividing the target market into subgroups in a process known as market segmentation allows marketers to direct specific marketing efforts to groups of consumers with similar characteristics, needs, and desires. For colleges, the market should first be divided into stakeholder groups. Commonly identified stakeholder groups in higher education include students, family members, employees, alumni, donors, taxpayers, and employers. These groups are often further divided into subgroups (current and potential students, current and potential donors, etc.). Clearly-identified target markets inform the decisions marketers make in the areas of product and promotion. Institutions that effectively utilize market segmentation and "monitor the perceptions of those markets through positioning studies are presumably better able to evaluate whether repositioning is desirable and/or possible and are more likely to maintain a focus on their mission" (Zemsky, Shaman, and Shaprio, 2001, as cited in Newman, 2002).

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Product.

Because the needs and desires of consumers vary across target markets, the actual product or service marketed may vary. "The challenge of marketing for higher education lies in the intangible nature of education" (Anctil, 2008, as cited in Han, 2014, p. 124). Since education is not a tangible product, but rather a service, "successful marketing in higher education requires identifying tangible characteristics of an institution and distinguishing them from the tangible characteristics of competitors" (Anctil, 2008, as cited in Han, 2014, p. 124). Most commonly, university marketers utilize the following to differentiate their institutions: "academics; campus appearance and social life; alumni and current students (showing the benefits of attending this school); outcomes of attending a college (the job placement rate, the acceptance rate to graduate schools, and the average earnings of alumni); and athletics (Anctil, 2008; Clark & Hassler, 1990, as cited in Han, 2014, p. 124).

Brand.

Institutional branding is a tool utilized by college marketers to enhance organizational image. The brand of an institution is, at the core, an expression of organizational value and visual identity. De Chernatony (as cited in Stephenson & Bell, 2014) offers this definition of branding: "the practice of enhancing the perceived value of an entity by augmenting a 'cluster of functional and emotional values'" (p. 177). Researchers agree that institutional branding is critical to the recruitment process (Cook and Fennell, 2001; Rosen, Curran, & Greenlee, 1998a and 1998b; and Sevier, 2002, as cited in Newman 2002).

In the corporate definition, which is applicable to institutions of higher education, an effective brand is a powerful asset that represents "the essence of a company, outlasting the

company's specific products and facilities" (Pinar, Trapp, Girard, & Boyt, 2011, p. 724). Further, Pinar et al. (2011) suggest that an effective brand "promises to offer a specific value proposition and image that target consumers desire to experience" (p. 729). Another hallmark of an effective brand is differentiation from the competition. Building a successful branding strategy allows for the development of brand equity. According to Toma, Dubrow, and Hartley (2005), the equity of a university brand name includes: "awareness of an institution, recognition of what an institution is known for, a sense of loyalty toward the institution, an understanding of the institution's worth, and the desire to pay a premium price to be associated with it" (p. 4).

Brand strategies must be developed in a way that is mindful of the collective value of the organization as well as the needs and desires of various target markets. Complicating brand strategy is the idea that branding focuses on a singular institutional identity whereas universities were likely founded on numerous values and priorities set across multiple departments with diverse functions (Waeraas & Solbakk, 2008, p. 453). Because of the long-term, equity-building nature of branding and the potential negative impacts of ineffective branding, brand strategies must be skillfully developed and managed (Pinar et al., 2011, p. 724).

University image.

With increased competition in the higher education marketplace, valuable intangible assets such as university brand and image are now the foci of higher education administrators and marketers who seek to differentiate and elevate their institutional offerings and attract new students. Since the 1970s, marketing units that organize and control marketing efforts have emerged at institutions; these units have been established to influence institutional image (Han, 2014, p. 124; Hossler & Bean, 1990, p. 3). Research has shown that a good institutional

reputation, which is the aggregate perception held by all stakeholders, allows organizations to increase market share, achieve higher sales, and maintain loyal customer relationships (Shapiro, 1982; Robertson, 193; Yoon, Guffey, & Kijewski, 1993, as cited in Merchant et al., 2014; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990, as cited in Sung & Yang, 2008). As such, administrators are aware that the development of successful strategies to enhance the university's image is critical. Researchers have also found that image is a critical component in student retention (Fielder, Hilton, & Motes, 1993, as cited in Landrum, Turrisi, & Harless, 1999). There is a consensus among researchers that "the examination of image criteria used to evaluate universities is an important and timely endeavor, as universities are increasingly subjected to criticism regarding their focus on research, (mis)use of resources, and amount of service to the public, and are in great need of building and communicating positive images among and to key constituents" (Kazoleas, Kim, & Moffitt, 2001; Phair, 1992; and Theus, 1993, as cited in Arpan et al., 2003, p. 97).

In strategizing image enhancement, marketers need to gain a clear understanding of university image. According to Kotler and Andreasen (1993, as cited in Sung & Yang, 2008), image is typically defined by researchers as "the sum of beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, ideas, relevant behaviors, or impressions that a person holds regarding an object, person, or organization" (p. 360). In this study, Treadwell's and Harrison's (1994) similar definition of organizational image will be utilized: "individuals' idiosyncratic representations of an organization at any given point in time" (p. 64). In other words, organizational image includes individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and impressions about the organization and its behavior (Arpan et al., 2003, p. 97). Clearly evaluating organizational image is a difficult task due to the fact that "the concept of organizational image…shifts form and shape about as often as an amoeba"

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(Arpan et al., 2003, p. 97). Adding further complexity to organizational image identification, Kazoleas, Yungwook, and Moffitt (2001) determined that "multiple changing images exist within each individual," and those images are affected by personal, environmental, and organizational factors (p. 205). Put simply, university image is not determined by the university itself; "the real image makers are the publics" (Avenarius, 1993, p. 66).

Research on organizational image in higher education is not plentiful, and there is no consensus on the critical factors in university image (Sung & Yang, 2008, p. 359). However, research has provided valuable information on the factors of university image in relation to various groups. In a survey of local adults, Landrum, Turrisi and Harless (1999) found that academic and athletic factors are significant components of the image model (p. 66). Arpan et al. (2003) determined that three factors significantly predicted the image of universities among a sample of current university students: "academic factors, athletic factors, and the extent of news coverage of the university" (p. 97). Further, the researchers determined that the following four factors significantly predicted the image of the same universities among a sample of adult non-students: "a combined factor including all university attributes (including academic and athletic), the extent of news coverage, the education level of respondents, and the respondents' level of sports fanship" (Arpan et al., 2003, p. 97). A study by Theus (1993) determined that university administrators believe institutional image to be comprised of the following: "size of the institution, location, appearance, scope of offerings, excellence of faculty, extent of endowments, diversity of students, campus morale, athletic prowess, service to the community, institutional visibility, and prestige" (as cited in Arpan et al., 2003, p. 99).

Communication.

Marketing communication is the strategic dissemination of information to target markets. To communicate effectively, marketers employ various media and channels of communication in order to achieve specific goals. Arguably the most critical component of marketing strategy, communication is often synonymous with strategic implementation.

University marketers today have many more communication tools at their disposal than in the past. While there is still reliance on traditional marketing channels such as print media and television advertisements, emerging social and other media continue to provide new ways to communicate with audiences. With new opportunities, however, comes further stratification of communications efforts as marketers work to reach all target audience members. Regardless of medium or channel used, marketers across all sectors agree that consistency in messages and visuals is the foundation for effective marketing communication.

College Choice

Hossler, Gallagher, and Coopersmith (1989) defined student college choice as "a complex, multistage process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university or institution of advance vocational training" (p. 234). A more concise definition was developed by Bergerson (2009), who described college choice as "the process through which students decide whether and where to go to college" (as cited in Iloh, 2018, p. 228).

Multiple types of college choice models have been created and utilized by researchers. Econometric models have been used to predict enrollments and analyze individual student behaviors related to college choice (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989, p. 234).

Sociological models "have focused on the identification and interrelationship of factors which influence aspirations for college attendance" (Hossler et al., 1989, p. 237). Combined models employ the applied-research tradition to look at econometric and sociological, or status attainment, factors to analyze consumer decision-making behavior and recruitment efforts (Hanson & Litten, 1982, as cited in Hossler et al., 1989, p. 239). The conceptual framework created by combining methods uses the most powerful indicators in the decision-making process, developed in previous models, to predict the effects of policy-making interventions; in other words, "the models attempt to describe the various economic and social forces that affect decision making in order to find opportunities for intervention in the student college choice process" (Hossler et al., 1989, p. 240-241). Contributions to the combined models via institutional and market research have identified the difference between student perceptions of institutional characteristics and objective institutional indicators and have shown how institutional actions in areas such as recruitment, financial aid, and admissions impact college choice (Hossler et al., 1989, p. 240). As such, the combined models provide valuable information to aid in the development of enrollment strategies (Hossler et al., 1989, p. 247).

The most noticeable influence of marketing on student behavior in the college choice process is the communication that is utilized by students in the search and choice phases of Hossler's and Gallagher's (1987) three-stage behavioral model of college choice, which has provided a conceptual framework for many studies on college choice. In this model, based on previous works by D. Chapman (1981), R. Chapman (1984), Jackson (1982), and Hanson & Litten (1982), students work through stages that include predisposition, search, and choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 208). Students in the predisposition phase decide whether they plan to pursue postsecondary education (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 209). In the search

phase, students "search for the attribute values that characterize the college alternatives…(and search) may also entail learning about and identifying the right attributes to consider" (R. Chapman, 1984, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 209). During this part of the process, students identify the choice set, or the set of alternatives to which the student will apply and from which the student will eventually choose (Jackson, 1982, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 209). The search phase provides institutions with the greatest opportunity to influence students' choices (Hossler & Gallagher,1987, p. 209). In the third phase, choice, the student chooses an institution and completes the enrollment process. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) note that the three-stage model "does not exclusively focus upon the attributes of students. It is an interactive model which takes into account the nature of higher education options and some of the organizational factors at both the pre-college and college level" (p. 209). Further, the researchers note the influence of previous studies by Alexander (1978, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987); Anderson et al. (1972, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987); and D. Chapman (1981, as cited in Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), that demonstrate "the characteristics of educational organizations, e.g., high schools and colleges, influence the student college choice process" (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 209).

> During the choice stage, institutional policy-makers can use an enhanced understanding of college choice to improve both marketing activities and student-institution fit. Research on the choice stage provides institutional policy-makers with a reverse lens that enables institutions to see themselves as students see them. This ability to see oneself through students' eyes could be used to recruit prospective students who are more likely to find that the institution meets their expectations. (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989, p. 281)

"Based on D. Chapman's model, many studies have identified numerous factors that influence the decision for choosing a specific institution. Some factors are associated with the student characteristics and some factors are associated with the institution characteristics" (Han, 2014, p. 121). Student characteristics include socioeconomic factors of family income and parental education as well as academic achievement, aspirations, and expectations (Chapman, 1981; Griffith & Rothstein, 2009; Jez, 2014; Kinsler & Pavan, 2011; Kinzie, Palmer, Hayek, Hossler, Jacob, & Cummings, 2004; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, as cited in Han 2014). Throughout the literature, five influential institutional characteristics are repeatedly identified—reputation, majors/programs offered, costs/financial aid, activities/athletics, and campus attributes; those factors are consistent across gender, geography, and socioeconomic status (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Coccari & Javalgi, 1995; Comm & LaBay, 1996; Galotti & Mark, 1994; Henrickson, 2002; Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999; Kelpe Kern, 2000; Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, & Palmer, 2003; Mattern & Wyatt, 2009, as cited in Pampaloni, 2010, p. 23). "Paulsen (1990) proposed that the student characteristics interacting with the institutional characteristics would determine the college decision process" (as cited in Han, 2014, p. 121).

While institutional branding is a common marketing practice in the higher education marketplace, little research has been dedicated to this topic. Some researchers have analyzed the brand choice framework, but no higher education marketing studies prior to the one conducted by Stephenson, Heckert, and Yerger (2016) have examined the college choice process by utilizing the consumer decision framework with specific attention given to the consideration set, which includes the institutions that individual students are considering attending. From the consideration set emerges the choice set, or the alternatives from which the student will actually

choose. The study also looks at brand-related constructs that help to move the university from consideration set to ultimately the college of choice (Stephenson and Yerger, 2016, p. 389). "Specifically, the data highlight reasons for selecting the institution including major, price, visits, perceptions of relevant others, size, and location, as well as campus environmental factors" (Stephenson and Yerger, 2016, p. 497).

College choice and university image.

Stevens et al. (2008) determined that "while tuition and tangible elements influence a student's decision to attend a particular university, the intangible elements, such as the image of the university, have a significant effect on the decision" (p. 100). Researchers agree that university image plays a critical role in the process of college choice (Han, 2014, p. 122; Stevens et al., 2008, p. 100; Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry, & Kelly, 2008, p. 97; Morse, 2011; Kotler & Fox, 1985, as cited in Hossler et al., 1989, p. 243; Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011, as cited in Merchant, Rose, Moody, & Mathews, 2014, p. 26). Further, image is a major component of an institution's competitive advantage (Hayes, 1993 as cited in Stevens et al., 2008, p. 102; Chapleo, 2011 as cited in Merchant et al., 2014, p. 26; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2008 as cited in Merchant, et al., 2014, p. 26). It is not uncommon for image to be used as a "positioning instrument" to influence college choice (Milo, Edson, & Mceuen, 1989; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Weissman, 1990 as cited in Sung & Yang, 2008, p, 361).

Arpan, Raney, and Zivnuska's (2003) found that the following factors significantly predicted the image of universities among a sample of college students: academic factors, athletic factors, and the extent of news coverage of the university (p. 97). Furukawa (2011 as cited in Okerson, 2016) determined that 10 significant factors of influence impact a student's college choice decision: family, peers, school counselors, rankings, institutional communication,

institutional fit, institutional characteristics, selectivity, institutional actions, and additional influences (p. 45). Similar studies further illustrate the overlap in research that demonstrates the significance of university image on the college choice process.

Campus Visits

Hoover (2010) offers this on the importance of the campus visit (pp. 35-36):

This ritual has never been more important, for colleges and applicants alike. In a bleak economy, tuition-dependent institutions face increasing competition for paying customers, and administrators are pulling out all the stops to recruit them. In turn, the choices applicants make have lifelong consequences—and often come with big price tags. For both parties, the tour is crucial. Research shows that nothing influences a student's decision about where to apply and enroll as much as the visit. So plenty's at stake when families pack up the minivan and drive from college to college, hoping to glean something at each stop.

Campus visits and college choice.

The importance of the campus visit in the college choice process is undeniable. Scholars agree that "the campus visit is the most influential piece of the college search process" (Brown, 2010; Cohen, 2009; Greenough, 2003; Hesel, 2004; Hoover, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Kuh, 2009; Magolda, 2000; Swan, 1998; Yost & Tucker, 1995 as cited in Okerson, 2016). Historic college choice models (D. Chapman, 1981; Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Vossensteyn, 2005, as cited in Okerson, 2016) provide a foundation of information "demonstrating the impact of a student's interaction with a college campus" (p. 12). Underscoring the importance of the campus visit in the college decision, additional research

findings show that students who visit institutions are twice as likely to enroll compared to students who do not visit (Brown, 2010 as cited in Okerson, 2016). Research that explores how students perceive campus visits and which elements of those visits matter most as students make college choices is not widely available.

Campus visits and university image.

Research that evaluates how image is reinforced on the campus visit is lacking. Magolda (2001) indicates that marketers often focus attention on the technical aspects of the visits, such as recruiting capable tour guides, instead of the values that are communicated during those visits (p. 2). Okerson (2016) attempted to fill some of this research gap by conducting a study that examined the influence of various aspects of the campus visit and determined that "so much of the impression of the campus visit is left up to chance. The weather, the time of the year, the students and faculty members that a student may interact with on any given day each made an impression on interview participants" (pp. 117-18). Okerson (2016) found that the impact of certain factors, which include the aesthetics of the campus environment, community/general vibe of campus – "what students wear, how they spend their time, and their general attitude about life on campus," and personal interactions with college community members, friends, and alumni impacted their decisions the most (p. 81). During the study, participants discussed the similarities among their college visits – from format to information presented, illustrating the need for differentiation by higher education marketers. Okerson's research is a start but makes it clear that there is much more to learn about how various factors in the campus visit impact the college choice process. Since students' perceptions and images of the university are greatly impacted by their visits to campus, which can, in turn, influence their college decisions, there is

value in studying the relationship between campus visits and university image and how communication that shapes image is transmitted during tours.

The University of Mississippi

With challenges in overcoming its racist past and working through lingering issues in the present, the University of Mississippi provides an interesting setting for this study. Those challenges have had lasting impacts on the images that are held of the university by many members of the public. Relics of a bygone era in the form of Confederate iconography are seen by students who participate in campus visits. As such, students' images of the university and their college choice decisions may be impacted by the institution's history and current challenges. Currently, there are a number of institutions across the United States that are working through similar challenges.

In 1848, the University of Mississippi (UM), the state's flagship institution of higher education, welcomed its first 80 students to campus ("About UM," n.d.). Now, with over 24,000 students and 15 academic divisions, UM is the largest institution of higher education in the state of Mississippi ("About UM," n.d.). The Carnegie Classification (of Institutions of Higher Education) has designated the university an R-1 doctoral university, which indicates the institution's standing among the nation's doctoral universities with the highest level of research activity. The university serves students on the main campus located in Oxford, Mississippi, as well as several regional campuses. UM has a major medical school as well as nationally recognized schools of accountancy, law, and pharmacy. The university is "affectionately known to alumni, students and friends as Ole Miss" ("About UM," n.d.). With its lush landscaping, historical buildings, and pristine appearance, the Oxford campus has been ranked on a number of national lists of most beautiful campuses.

The Oxford and regional campuses are guided by the following mission:

The mission of the University of Mississippi is to create, evaluate, share, and apply knowledge in a free, open, and inclusive environment of intellectual inquiry. Building upon a distinguished foundation in the liberal arts, the state's first comprehensive university serves the people of Mississippi and the world through a breadth of academic, research, professional, and service programs. The University of Mississippi provides an academic experience that emphasizes critical thinking; promotes research and creative achievement to advance society; uses its expertise to engage and transform communities; challenges and inspires a diverse community of undergraduate, graduate, and professional students; offers enriching opportunities outside the classroom; supports lifelong learning; and develops a sense of global responsibility.

Founding.

When the University of Mississippi opened its doors in 1848, White males, the sons of Mississippi's (and neighboring states') elite, were the only students served by the institution. Although established as a public institution, it was created to educate the state's future leaders in a location closer to home and in a manner that complied with the ideals shared by the vast majority of White Mississippians. Like their colonial counterparts, many Southerners, including Mississippians, feared that education abroad or in the North would unduly inundate their male offspring with views and lifestyle choices that violated their own (Glover, 2003, p. 43). The South's wealthy families wanted to ensure that their sons were educated enough to rise to power in the greater, increasingly meritocratic American society while simultaneously being trained to maintain the Southern way of life built upon the "persistent belief in gentry entitlement and racial hierarchies" (Glover, 2003, p. 44).

White women were admitted beginning in 1882 ("History," n.d.-a). The university, under the force of the federal government, allowed James Meredith, its first student to identify as Black or African-American, to enroll in 1962 amid deadly protests and campus occupation by the National Guard. From that time, UM has been open to any academically eligible student who wishes to enroll. However, the university, like many across the country, has yet to successfully sever all ties to its racist roots.

Racism and Confederate Iconography at UM.

Racism, white supremacy, and segregation have been recurring themes on many college campuses throughout their histories, but none has received the infamy for such that the University of Mississippi has. Widespread attitudes and overt instances of prejudice and racist behavior have plagued the university since its founding (Cohodas, 1997). In 2020, the university still struggles with challenges resulting from Confederate iconography on campus and racist actions by members of the campus community.

The impact of the Civil War was immense at the University of Mississippi. The majority of the students enrolled when the war began joined in the fight, calling themselves the "University Greys." Most of them were killed in battle. Shut down due to lack of students, the university was used during the war as a hospital for injured Confederate soldiers, saving it from demise by General Ulysses S. Grant and his army (Cahodas, 1997, p. 10).

Several years after the war, once the university had reopened, the United Daughters of the Confederacy placed a monument depicting a Confederate soldier at the entrance of the Circle on campus in memory of the soldiers who had died and were buried at the university (Cahodas, 1997, p. 11). In honor of the University Greys, the women of Delta Gamma sorority had a

stained-glass window placed in Ventress Hall that has these words: "In honor of those who with ardent valor and patriotic devotion to the Civil War sacrificed their lives in defence of principles inherited from their fathers and strengthened by the teachings of the alma mater" (Cahodas, 1997 p. 11). Students who had fought in the war wore parts of their Confederate uniforms to class (Cahodas, 1997, p. 12).

The university yearbook was named "The Ole Miss" (arguably a derivation of the term "Old Missy," which was used for the mistress of a plantation) in the late 1800s. Ole Miss quickly became a moniker for the university that implied one's affection for the institution. In 1936, the name Rebels was chosen for the university's sports teams (Cahodas, 1997, p. 161). Shortly after, a new mascot was introduced: Colonel Rebel. With the appearance of a plantation master, Colonel Rebel was yet another sanctioned symbol of the university's ties to the Confederacy.

The Confederate flag became a fixture on the University of Mississippi campus after World War II when the States' Righters political party, called the Dixiecrats, began to pass the flags out to football fans to wave at home games (Cahodas, 1997, p. 34). The Dixiecrats used Confederate iconography and themes in promoting their views, which were based on segregation in education, using "Dixie" as their theme song and the flag as a unifying symbol among their supporters (Cahodas, 1997, p. 34). This only served to strengthen the university's ties to its Confederate past (Cahodas, 1997, p. 34).

Cheerleaders began parading onto the field with Confederate flags and tossing mini flags to the crowds at football games after the Dixiecrats had introduced their presence (Cahodas, 1997, p. 162). The university band wore Confederate-style uniforms, played "Dixie," and unfurled a large Confederate flag in their halftime performance. Majorettes waved mini flags.

In a more sinister use, Confederate flags were waved in 1962 in protest at James

Meredith, the first man who identified as Black or African-American to attend the university.

Publications by underground student organizations with the sole purpose of getting rid of the

university's only student who identified as Black or African-American featured images of the

flag (Cahodas, 1997). In addition, flags were hung on dormitories and other buildings by defiant

students during that time. The widespread use and appreciation of Confederate symbols and

iconography on campus did not decline once integration-related tensions began to ease and the

presence of minority students on campus was slowly more accepted. Their popularity failed to

wane even as minority students held positions as athletes and student-elected cheerleaders and a

student who identified as Black or African-American was elected to the top male campus

personality honor, Colonel Rebel.

However, there have been a few notable dissenters. In 1982, John Hawkins, the

university's first cheerleader who identifies as Black or African-American, refused to carry the

flag, creating controversy and endangering himself and his family (Cahodas, 1997, p. 200). The

football coach at the time, Steve Sloan, discussed the difficulties he experienced in recruiting

players due to prominent Confederate imagery on campus with the *Clarion Ledger,* a state-wide

newspaper (Cahodas, 1997, p. 201). Long aware of the threats to the recruitment of minority

faculty and the increase of minority students, the university's chancellor, Porter Fortune, issued a

public statement regarding the flag in 1984, stating: "This flag has never been adopted by the

University as an official symbol of this institution" (Cahodas, 1997, p. 216). He mandated that

the flag would not be used by official representatives of the university.

While it could not be used in an official capacity, students, alumni, and fans clung to the

Confederate flag, continuing to wave it at athletic events and including it as a focal point in

university memorabilia. In 1997, the current chancellor, Robert Khayat, banned sticks from the football stadium in an attempt to remove the flag from athletic events. In acts of defiance, local businesses and groups of students began producing flyers depicting the flag that could be held overhead. Chancellor Khayat, amid receiving death threats and rescindments of donor funds, responded by having anyone who possessed the flag removed from the stadium by security, effectively ending the era of football games celebrated with a sea of Confederate flags in the stadium. Outside the stadium, however, the flag remained ever-present, its presence only waning in recent years as some students, fans, and alumni have begun to display the Mississippi state flag, which features the Confederate flag as the cannon. The presence of the Mississippi state flag at tailgates and athletic events (as well as in dorm rooms and fraternity houses) has increased sharply after student leaders voted in 2015 to no longer fly the state flag on campus. The flag was removed from the flagpole on campus and placed in University Archives.

The university's mascot, Colonel Rebel, was removed in the early 2000s in a largely unpopular move by the university's next chancellor, Dan Jones. A student-led process resulted in the election of a new mascot, but a majority of the students, alumni, and fans failed to embrace it. In 2017, under the leadership of Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter, the university adopted the landshark as its official mascot, a decision that was met with much controversy. Although he has not been the on-field mascot or an official symbol of the university in over a decade, Colonel Rebel remains an unofficial symbol of the university, gracing memorabilia, tables in the Grove, front yards, wedding receptions, local parades and everything in between.

In another largely unpopular move during his tenure, Chancellor Jones forbade the band to play "Dixie" at sporting events after the refusal of students to refrain from chanting "The South will rise again!" at the end of the song. Since then, the university has removed additional

symbols of Confederate times, such as the name of Confederate Drive on campus, which is now Chapel Lane, and has worked to provide contextualization in the form of plaques to existing buildings and the Confederate statue. In 2019, after resolutions passed through student, faculty, and staff governments, the university began the process of relocating the statue to a less-traveled area of campus that is adjacent to the Confederate cemetery. The move requires approval from the Board of Trustees of the Institutions of Higher Learning of the state of Mississippi now that it has been approved by the state department of history and archives. Pro-Confederate and White supremacist groups have protested the movement of the statue. In response to a pro-Confederate rally on campus in February 2019, members of the basketball team kneeled during the national anthem. Relocation of the statue has been met with a mixture of responses from stakeholders, with some in strong support of relocation and others strongly opposing it.

Also in 2019, a racist incident that received national news attention negatively impacted the university. Three members of a fraternity posed in a photo with assault rifles next to the bullet-riddled historical marker memorializing Emmett Till, a young Black man visiting from Chicago who was tortured, maimed, and killed in the 1950s by a group of White men for allegedly whistling at a White woman; the photo was widely circulated on social media before being shown to university administration. The men were disciplined by the fraternity but not the university. The challenge of disciplining students who have participated in some of the racist acts that have occurred on our campus was explained by Chancellor Khayat during his tenure: "We have a serious First Amendment issue with regard to the state taking action on expression of any kind" (Bartlett, 2001). Precedent was set for this type of incident in the early 1990s in a case involving a fraternity skit that featured a blackface performance when, after a two-year legal

battle, a U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that the performance was protected by the First Amendment (Bartlett, 2001).

Higher education administrators, especially those in the South, are challenged today by the need to overcome the obstacles of racism, White supremacy, and segregation that haunt their institutions' pasts and persist in the present while providing current students with environments that promote equality and inclusion and that are free from race-based harassment and intimidation. The University of Mississippi has demonstrated its commitment to inclusion and diversity on campus with the development of a vice chancellorship for diversity and community engagement, the establishment of the Center for Inclusion and Cross Cultural Engagement, the recently-announced development of a new racial reconciliation center, and the implementation of many other diversity and inclusion initiatives.

> The University of Mississippi is committed to embracing the broadest definition of diversity, including race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religious choice, ethnicity, economic status, age and geographic affiliation. This commitment stems from our mission as a flagship institution in the state's higher education system, with the obligation to serve a diverse population through teaching, research and service. Moreover, as an institution with a marked history of struggle with racial diversity, the University of Mississippi today realizes its unique obligation to educate and lead the state with unquestionable and unwavering commitment toward the goal of embracing all aspects of diversity. ("Welcome!" n.d.)

Athletics.

Athletics have been part of the University of Mississippi experience since 1890, when the Athletic Association was formed to support the development of university football, baseball, and tennis teams ("History of Rebel Football," n.d.). Over the past 120 years, the athletics program has grown to comprise seven men's sports and nine women's sports. University athletics are governed by the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), and are part of Division I, which includes schools with the largest student bodies. Teams are part of the Southeastern Conference (SEC), a division that includes UM and other public institutions of comparable size that are located in the South. SEC schools are widely known as schools with strong football cultures with dedicated fans, large game attendance, and tailgating traditions. The university has a rich athletics history as one of the "winningest programs in the history of collegiate football" and has produced multiple professional players in the National Football League ("History of Rebel Football," n.d.).

In recent years, university athletics have been under scrutiny as the NCAA conducted an investigation for alleged conduct violations in football, women's basketball, and track and field. The university appealed some of the alleged violations and self-imposed a ban on postseason football play for 2017. After a six-year investigation process that ended in 2018, the NCAA imposed penalties including recruitment restrictions, a ban on postseason football play for 2018, vacation of specific wins, and disassociation from specified athletics donors.

Other Relevant Current News.

After the resignation of Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter in November 2018, the IHL Board of Trustees began a nationwide search for a new chancellor. In October 2019, Glenn Boyce, who

was a paid consultant in the search process and once served as IHL Commissioner, was named the university's eighteenth chancellor. What some stakeholders described as a lack of transparency and an inside hire resulted in protests and national news media coverage.

During the summer of 2019, the murders of a local woman, Dominique Clayton, and female student, Ally Kostial, shook the Oxford and University communities. With a violent crime rate of 1.50, well below the national average of 4.49, in 2018, Oxford is generally considered to be a safe city (Edwards, 2019). The trials of both alleged murderers, a former Oxford police officer and romantic partner in the case of Dominique Clayton and a former student and romantic partner in the case of Ally Kostial, are currently in process.

Oxford, Mississsippi.

Incorporated in 1837, Oxford, Mississippi, is located in Lafayette County, which is in the northern part of the state and is home to the University of Mississippi. Named Oxford after Oxford, England, in hopes of one day being home to a university, the city was chosen by the Mississippi Legislature in 1841 to be the location of the state's flagship university (History, n.d.-b). Much of the original city was destroyed during the Civil War. Since rebuilding, Oxford has thrived for nearly 150 years and is now home to approximately 24,000 residents. The city is now widely known as the home of Nobel Prize-winning author William Faulkner as well as the University of Mississippi. Oxford is considered by many as a dining and shopping destination as well as a place where the arts thrive. The idyllic courthouse square attracts tourists year-round who come for university events and city events such as the Oxford Film Festival, the Double Decker Arts Festival, and the Oxford Blues Festival.

Conclusion

While published research shows the importance of the campus visit and the influence of the visit on the student's decision to attend, exploring how the various aspects of the campus visit affect the college choice process is a worthwhile endeavor. With heightened competition for students, administrators and marketers of higher education institutions are looking to gain competitive edges and are increasingly employing corporative marketing strategies in order to do so. With an understanding of the connections between university image and college choice as well as campus visits and college choice, gaining an understanding of how institutional image is shaped by the campus visit, which is an integral factor in students' decisions to attend, is valuable in understanding, predicting, and growing the success of the most important tool in student recruitment. With the continuing challenges to position the university positively in the minds of potential students, stakeholders and others coupled with increased competition for students, UM provides a rich setting and context in which to examine the value of university image and campus visits in the process of college choice.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research confirms the connections between university image and college choice as well as campus visits and college choice. Therefore, gaining an understanding of how institutional image is upheld by the campus visit, which is an integral factor in students' decisions to attend, is valuable in understanding, predicting, and growing the success of the most important tool in student recruitment- the campus visit. Further, analyzing how university image and campus visits impact the college choices of first-time, incoming freshmen provides integral information for developing and implementing marketing strategies aimed at achieving enrollment goals.

This chapter includes a description of the research design and the research approval process. The research question is presented, and the setting for participant interviews is provided. Next, the population and sample are explained. Lastly, information about data collection, storage, and analysis is included.

Research Design

In order to contribute to the limited body of research on the intersections of university image, campus visits, and college choice, I conducted a qualitative research study that utilized purposeful sampling to select "information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Qualitative research provides the opportunity to study issues both in depth and in detail with the goal of producing "a wealth of detailed information" about a small number of people and cases

(Patton, 2002, p. 14). According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), "qualitative methodologies are critical for developing theoretical understandings of student-college-choice processes and for understanding the ways in which college-choice processes play out for individual students" (as cited in Perna, 2006, p. 120). Marshall and Rossman (1999) emphasize the importance of understanding the "influence of the context or setting on student college choice" (as cited in Perna, 2006, p. 123).

I used a phenomenological perspective focused on gathering data on participants' experiences during their campus visits and in their college choice processes. In collecting, organizing, and analyzing the data, I used a case study approach. I presented participants' individual experiences as case studies to provide "depth, detail, and individual meaning" (Patton, 2002, p. 14). Case studies are a valuable tool for "thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon- how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Inductive analysis was used to compare and contrast the case studies through cross-case analysis. Creative synthesis was used in developing and presenting findings and conclusions.

It is understood that the credibility of this research study "hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork—as well as things going on in a person's life that might prove a distraction" as the researcher is the instrument in this method of inquiry (Patton, 2002, p. 14). However, Guba and Lincoln (1981) point out that

Fatigue, shifts in knowledge, and cooptation, as well as variations resulting from differences in training, skill, and experience among different "instruments," easily occur. But this loss in rigor is more than offset by the flexibility, insight, and ability to build on

tacit knowledge that is the peculiar province of the human instrument. (p. 113, as cited in

Patton, 2002)

Research Approval Process

In order to obtain approval for my research study from the Institutional Research Board

(IRB), I was required to complete a Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)

program course on human research. Once I completed the course, I applied for IRB approval

through the UM Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning (IREP) office. My study

was categorized as exempt and was approved.

Research Question

This study answers the following research question:

- How do students describe the value of university image and the campus visit in their

  decisions to attend the University of Mississippi?

By conducting research to gain insight into how university image is influenced by

campus visits and how students' college choice decisions are shaped by university image and

campus visits, I offer basic qualitative research that contributes to the bodies of knowledge in

those areas and, more specifically, the intersections of those theoretical concepts.

Setting

Interviews were conducted in my office in Conner Hall on the University of Mississippi

campus. A quiet room was preferred to minimize distractions, but public areas were offered to

provide the most flexibility to interview participants. Although they had choices for interview

locations, all participants chose my office.

Population and Sample

Interview participants were selected via purposeful sampling in a process that included random purposeful sampling and maximum variation sampling, which added strength and credibility to the study. Matriculated undergraduate students at the University of Mississippi who participated in at least one campus visit hosted by the Office of Admissions prior to matriculation were identified as potential participants. Only students who applied for admission to the institution in the months of October-April of the academic year prior to the year of enrollment were included. This group of students was chosen because they are less certain in their college choice decisions as students who apply for admission in the months of August-September (when the application first opens) and may be more easily influenced in their decisions (Phillips, 2019).

In conducting maximum variation sampling, participants of both genders, of various races and ethnicities, and from multiple areas of the United States were identified. Potential participants in those subgroups were randomly selected to receive an invitation to participate in the study. A total of 325 potential participants were identified through analysis of campus visit records and student records; 218 were emailed invitations to participate in the study. The remainder of the students who were identified as potential participants were not contacted because I already had the number of participants needed who meet the same demographic criteria. It was important for the sample to be representational of the student body because of the nature and institutional specificity of this study. The interview invitation email is available in Appendix A. Twenty students participated in interviews (N = 20).

Data Collection

Data were collected via multiple methods: reviewing campus visit records, reviewing student records, and interviewing students. Campus visit records were reviewed to identify students who participated in campus visits with the Office of Admissions. Records of students who participated in campus visits were used to determine eligibility for the study based on when the students applied for admission and to collect demographic information.

To gain an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of each participant, standardized, open-ended phenomenological interviews were used to gather information. This interview structure was successfully utilized by Finch and Clopton (2017), who also employed the university image framework developed by Arpan, Raney, and Zivnuska (2003) in their study on the role of athletics in the development of university image among college students. Raw data collected in the form of direct quotations illustrate "respondents' depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions" (Patton, 2002, p. 21). Standardizing interview questions allowed for easier comparison of responses.

Prior to starting the interview process, participants were asked to sign a standard UM release form since the interviews were recorded. The release form is available in Appendix B. Release forms are kept in my office on campus and will be destroyed securely no less than five years after approval of this study. Participants were also asked to review a research information sheet that provides details about participation in the study and a statement of consent. The research information sheet is available in Appendix C.

During the interviews, I asked participants questions related to the following: campus visits, university image, and college choice. Questions that provided overlapping context and links between those frameworks were also included. Participants were asked to describe their campus visit experiences, their perceptions of the university's image, factors in their college choice processes, and how aspects of each were impacted by the others. The factors from the study on university image by Arpan, Raney, and Zivnuska (2003) were utilized as a framework for the questions related to university image; social media presence was added to the news coverage factor to reflect current information trends. Considering the history of the University of Mississippi, students were asked how the institution's history impacts their images of UM. The findings from Okerson's (2016) study on campus visits were utilized as a framework for the questions related to campus visits. Interview protocol is shown in Appendix B. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. There was very little variation in the data collected in the last several interviews. Following the interviews, I wrote field notes that provided contextual details. Participants were given their choice of an Amazon or Starbucks gift card in the amount of $25 for their participation.

Data Storage

I recorded the interviews on my iPhone and iPad and took notes as well. Recordings were uploaded to my university-issued Google Drive account and Dropbox so that they are password protected and available in cloud storage. Identifying information was kept in a single separate file; participants were assigned pseudonyms in all other files. Digital files will be destroyed no less than five years after approval of this research study. If I professionally transition from the University of Mississippi prior to that time, files will be transitioned to my personal Google Drive. Only I have access to the data.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2015), "transcribing all words will provide data that capture the details of an interview" (p. 238). Interviews were transcribed using REV, an online transcription service. In order to become familiar with the information collected in the interviews, I listened to each of the audio recordings a minimum of three times and read each interview transcript a minimum of six times. A hand analysis was conducted to achieve closeness to the data (Creswell, 2015). I also identified key quotes and reviewed notes taken during the interviews to provide contextual details. From the student records, my notes, and the interview transcripts, I developed a case study of each participant's experience during the campus visit process and the college choice process, noting to the influence of university image during those processes. The case studies illustrate participants' individual experiences with rich descriptions and direct quotes.

In further analyzing the data, I used inductive analysis to find emergent patterns. I created and used codes to categorize and compare the data collected and presented in the case studies. This allowed me to recognize major themes and information that aligns with the theoretical frameworks included in the study: campus visits, university image, and college choice. Additional findings are provided with data displayed in concept-clustered tables. The tables were developed to show the information collected in light of the constructs of campus visits, university image, and college choice. Creative synthesis was used in developing the findings and conclusions. Inductive analysis and creative synthesis strategies combined allow for "immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships" (Patton, 2002, p. 41). In interviewing this group of students, I was able to capture variations in their images of the university, their campus visits, and their college choices.

A common core did emerge as the interview participants shared commonalities in their images, visits, and decisions. Theory triangulation and methodological triangulation add strength to the results.

Delimitations

Matriculated undergraduate students from only one university (UM) were interviewed. Prior to attending, these students participated in formal campus visits with the office of admissions. The study is further delimited to students who applied for admission in the months of October through April in the academic year prior to enrollment. This decision was based on the findings of a study conducted at the University of Mississippi in which the researcher determined that students who apply during the first three months that the application for admission is open, July-September, are "more likely to be admitted and subsequently enroll at the University of Mississippi" (Phillips, 2019, p. iii). According to Phillips (2019), "being able to predict which students will attend the University of Mississippi based on application timeline will allow enrollment managers to target these areas earlier to help students apply sooner" (p. 11). By interviewing students who apply between October and April, I aimed to provide valuable information about students who are less certain about where they will attend college and whose decisions may be more easily influenced.

While students who earned college credit through programs offered at their respective high schools were included in this study, transfer students who attended other institutions of higher learning after high school and before enrolling at the University of Mississippi were excluded regardless of classification. This study focuses only on the college choice processes of first-time freshmen; the college search processes of transfer students are not evaluated.

Results are less generalizable than those produced via quantitative research methods. However, the results could be transferred to institutions with students who possess similar backgrounds and characteristics and with similar institutional cultures. Data were collected from students who chose to attend the institution; results could vary if students who did not choose to attend were included. Results could also vary if students' informal visits, including visiting friends and attending athletics events, were analyzed in addition to formal campus visits.

Limitations

Standardized open-ended interview questions were used, possibly negatively impacting naturalness and relevance of questions and answers. This study is intended to provide the reader with an introduction to the intersections of campus visits, university image, and college choice. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a small sample of current students was used.

Conclusion

In conducting this qualitative research study, my goal was to offer insights into students' experiences and perceptions as related to campus visits, university image, and college choice at the University of Mississippi. Very little research that evaluates all of these areas has been conducted. However, as competition increases for students, administrators are looking at factors that influence students' college choices and how those influences occur.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to contribute to the bodies of knowledge in the areas of university image, campus visits, and college choice and to examine the value of students' images of the university and their campus visits in their college choice processes. Participants in the study included current freshmen at the University of Mississippi who participated in campus visits with the office of admissions prior to attending and who applied for admission during the months of October through April. In conducting this study, I sought to answer this research question: How do students describe the value of university image and the campus visit in their decisions to attend the University of Mississippi? This chapter presents research findings, including participant information, case studies, additional data organized by topic, and themes that emerged through analysis of the data collected.

The results are strengthened by methodological triangulation and theory triangulation. Multiple data collection methods were used in this study: interviewing students, reviewing student records, and reviewing campus visit records. Further, participants were selected via purposeful sampling in a process that included random purposeful sampling and maximum variation sampling. This study included three theoretical frameworks: university image, campus visits, and college choice. The credibility of this study is based on (a) the rigor of techniques and methods used for gathering and analyzing data; (b) the credibility, competence, and perceived

trustworthiness of the researcher; and (c) the belief in the value of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002, p. 553).

Results

Data were collected for this study by analyzing campus visit records and student records, interviewing research participants, and taking notes before, during, and after interviews. After collecting the data, I wrote case studies, conducted an inductive analysis of the data, and used creative synthesis to develop and present the findings and conclusions.

Participants.

Twenty students were interviewed (N = 20). The collective demographic characteristics of the interview participants closely reflect the demographic characteristics of the 2018-19 undergraduate population at the University of Mississippi, which included the following gender breakdown: 55.32% females and 44.68% males; the following racial/ethnic breakdown: 77.59% White, 12.10% Black or African-American, 3.78% Hispanic or Latino, 3.60% Asian, 2.42% multi-racial, 0.29% American Indian, 0.11% Pacific Islander, 0.11% unknown; and the following residency breakdown: 54.10% Mississippi resident and 45.90% non-resident (2018-19 Mini Fact Book, 2019). Due to the nature and institutional specificity of this study, it was important for the sample to be representational of the student body. Of the 20 interview participants, 11 (55%) are female, and nine (45%) are male. Ten (50%) of the participants are Mississippi residents, and the remaining 10 (50%) are from other states in the U.S. Fifteen of the participants identify racially as White (75%), four identify as Black or African-American (20%), and one identifies as Hispanic or Latino (5%). Race/ethnicity categories used in this study are consistent with categories used in student data management software and in the UM Office of Institutional

Research, Effectiveness, and Planning fact book (2018-19 Mini Fact Book, 2019). Table 1

includes participant demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Home State
Alex	Male	18	White	Texas
Alicia	Female	18	White	Mississippi
Amy	Female	19	White	Tennessee
Bo	Male	18	White	Mississippi
Brian	Male	19	White	California
Carley	Female	18	White	Texas
Corbin	Male	19	Hispanic or Latino	California
Derrick	Male	19	Black or African American	Mississippi
Emily	Female	18	White	Mississippi
Hope	Female	18	Black or African American	Mississippi
Jane	Female	18	White	Mississippi
Justin	Male	19	White	Florida
K.J.	Female	18	Black or African American	Mississippi
Keely	Female	18	White	Georgia
Maddie	Female	18	White	Mississippi
Mary Grant	Female	19	White	Mississippi
Matt	Male	18	White	Georgia
Mitch	Male	18	White	Illinois
Preston	Male	19	White	Louisiana
Stephanie	Female	18	Black or African American	Mississippi

Case Studies.

Students perceptions and experiences as well as contextual data are presented as case

studies so that rich descriptions and meaningful quotes could be included. Pseudonyms and non-

specifying details are used so that students' identities are protected.

Alex.

Alex is an 18-year-old freshman from a mid-sized city in Texas. A general business major, he attended a public high school where he completed advanced placement and dual enrollment courses. He identifies as White. He became interested in visiting the University of Mississippi after being told that he would be eligible for an academic merit scholarship for his ACT score. Alex was reserved but cooperative.

After visiting campus in July prior to his senior year of high school, Alex applied for admission in October. He had not planned to attend UM prior to his visit. "I did not intend to come here at first, but, when I came, I thought I liked it, and then I looked at the scholarships and everything worked out." He called UM "one of the nicer campuses I've visited." He liked the vibe of campus and of Oxford. Alex was surprised at how friendly the people he encountered were.

Prior to his visit to campus, Alex held an image of the university of a "lower-tier school." His visit improved his image, especially when he learned of the honors college, of which he is now a member. UM's membership in the SEC had a positive influence on Alex's image of the university. News coverage has both negatively and positively impacted the image that he holds of UM; he referenced the Emmett Till sign photo, which negatively impacted the image he holds, and the positive influence of the university's Marijuana Project, which supplies marijuana to the federal government for research purposes. Alex was not knowledgeable of the university's history prior to attending. Now that he is a student and has become more familiar with the institution's history in his freshman-year experience class, he feels that the university has made progress. Since becoming a student, Alex's image of UM has improved. "Just experiencing all of the classes and the opportunities I have for different things…clubs and the football games and

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everything, just experiencing the Ole Miss student life has definitely put a positive impact, I'd have to say, for sure."

Alex began looking at potential colleges to attend during his junior year of high school. He applied to a number of Texas schools "and then kind of just applied to different schools I thought I might want to be in or were somewhat interested in." He estimated that he applied to 10-15 schools. He decided to attend UM in early spring of his senior year of high school, after he had heard from all of the schools to which he applied. The image that he had of academic opportunities at UM and his campus visit influenced his decision to attend. His parents encouraged him to choose the university because of the scholarship that he would receive as a student. He is pleased with his decision. "I've loved it so far, so it's been awesome."

Alicia.

Eighteen-year-old freshman Alicia is from a mid-sized city in central Michigan. She attended a small private Catholic high school, and she has not yet chosen a major. Alicia is the first student from her high school to attend the University of Mississippi. She identifies as White. Alicia was friendly, relaxed, and confident during our meeting.

When considering where she might attend college, Alicia knew that she wanted to go out of state and "try something new." She considered schools all over the country. While looking online for information about schools in the South, Alicia read reviews that said UM has a family environment. She said, "So that was my number one thing that I was looking for in a school. So I came down, and I instantly felt that, so..."

Alicia applied for admission and was accepted approximately two weeks before her campus visit. She applied to the University of Tampa in addition to UM. The purpose of her

visit was to experience the university in person, both the campus and the people, and assess fit. About her visit experience, Alicia said, "A lot of people say that it takes 15 minutes for a student to fall in love with Ole Miss. And I would definitely say that's what happened with me, so..." She was impressed by the lush landscape on campus. She felt that the students were kind and helpful. Members of the campus community have had a positive impact on her experiences as both a prospective and current student.

In analyzing her image of the university, Alicia determined that she likes the university because she feels that it is a large university with a small community feel. SEC athletics are also important to her. When asked how her visit impacted her image of the university, Alicia responded: "I think it was the people mostly. Obviously, the campus is gorgeous, but I think I've always thought that the people make the place."

Academics were not initially a factor in Alicia's image of the university. Now that she is a student, academics positively influence her image of the university because she feels that her professors care about her success. Athletics factor positively in her image of the university. Alicia loves sports and enjoys attending football, soccer, and volleyball games. She likes the traditions and community of UM athletics.

Most of the news that Alicia saw prior to attending was about athletics. She became uneasy when she learned about the Ally Kostial murder from a fellow passenger on her flight from Michigan to attend MPower, a summer leadership conference UM holds for incoming first-year students. Once she arrived on campus, she learned that type of crime is not a common occurrence in this area and once again became comfortable with her decision to attend UM. When asked about the university's history, Alicia talked about enjoying traditions and

appreciating alumni involvement on campus. Now that she is a student on campus, she says that she loves it even more.

Alicia began looking at potential colleges to attend during the fall of her senior year of high school. She first looked at locations of schools. Another factor in her search was the ability to "make a name for [herself]" on the campus. Alicia was working on establishing a chapter of a student philanthropy organization on campus.

She decided to attend the university immediately after her campus visit. The image that she had of the university was a positive factor in her college choice process. She is very happy with her decision to attend UM and has begun recruiting her little sister to attend.

Amy.

Amy, a native of Nashville, Tennessee, is a 19-year-old freshman. She attended a private all-girls Catholic school and is a dancer. She is majoring in biological science at UM and enjoys participating in her sorority. She identifies as White. Amy was comfortable and confident during the interview process.

Amy has grown up watching UM football games with her brother's godparents, who are alumni. She visited campus during her senior year of high school. At the time that she visited, she had been admitted to the university but planned to attend the University of Tennessee; she participated in the campus visit to please her mother. She remembered the openness and greenness of campus and the friendliness of people during her visit. She described the campus vibe as inclusive and shared that she felt very welcomed, especially in light of the fact that she wore a University of Tennessee t-shirt on her tour.

In discussing the image that she holds of UM, Amy talked about the commitment of UM alumni: "Anyone who comes here just loves it for the rest of their life." She initially held an image of the university as a party school, but that image has changed as she has seen that students are focused on other things. Since becoming a student, she has found that "people are definitely more focused…than [she] thought, and there are so many smart people here." Athletics factor into her image of UM; she enjoys football and tailgating and looks forward to attending baseball games. She appreciates how the city of Oxford supports UM's athletics teams.

Amy does not often watch the news, but she did hear about the Emmett Till sign photo prior to attending. She shared that it did not have a strong influence of the image that she has held of UM. Amy said, "…I was just kind of like, you know, there's never going to be a college that's like all good and all bad. So it seems like overall like Ole Miss was doing a good job getting involved in the community and had a bunch of good programs."

Prior to visiting, Amy had written a research paper on James Meredith for a school assignment. During her visit, she "wanted to make sure it wasn't still that kind of culture." She acknowledged that UM has changed since the integration of the institution, calling the university "one of the most inclusive places I've been." Further, she shared that the UM community is "very open to talking about things and discussing. Not being like, 'This is how it is, and this is what you're going to believe if you want to stay here,' because that's kind of how my Catholic school was…" In her time so far as a student, her positive image of UM has only improved. She is excited about having opportunities to make her own decisions and "be an adult in this environment."

Amy began looking at colleges to consider attending during the summer after her junior year of high school. While she had counselors at her high school, Amy worked with college counselors that her parents hired to assist with her college preparation, search, and choice processes. The consideration set that she developed with her college counselors included nearly 30 institutions. She then took online tours of those schools. Amy decided to attend UM on decision day at her high school, the day that seniors announce where they will go to college, which was in May of her senior year. All of her friends chose the University of Tennessee, but Amy wanted to do something different. She said, "And I just was like, 'You know what? I'm going to do the bold choice. Not the safe one.' So I picked Ole Miss."

The image that Amy has held of UM positively impacted her decision to attend, as did her campus visit. Friends who were current students also influenced her decision by sharing their positive experiences and telling her about the inclusive community at UM. In reflecting on her decision to attend UM, Amy shared that she is really happy here and loves it.

Bo.

Bo, an 18-year-old freshman, grew up in a small town located less than an hour from campus. He attended a public school and graduated in a class of less than 50. He is majoring in biological science with plans to pursue a career in the medical field. A fan of university athletics since childhood, Bo is a first-generation college student. He identifies as White. Bo was polite, friendly, and talkative during the interview.

Unlike all of the other interview participants who live in residence halls on campus, Bo commutes to campus; he lives with his father in Oxford. He discussed at length how his choice to live at home instead of in a residence hall has negatively impacted his experience as a first-

year student. He feels as though he has missed out on social opportunities, including participating in Greek life, and that he doesn't have the connection to campus that his peers who live on campus have. Bo also feels that he has less opportunities to develop independence because he lives with a parent.

Bo participated in a campus visit in October of his senior year. He knew that his high school class would be visiting later in the year but visited with his father because he wanted to participate in major-focused sessions, which were not an option during the tour with his high school class. The purpose of his visit was to become more familiar with campus since he had only been for football games. Bo had a positive experience on his visit and accomplished his goal of learning the campus. He mentioned seeing construction on campus and concluded that was a sign of university growth. He commented on how mature the students looked. The people with whom Bo interacted were nice, and he felt like he fit in with the campus community.

When asked about his image of the university, Bo's main focus was athletics. Emphasizing the value of a winning football season, he said, "Of course, if football is doing good, the school is doing good." He discussed how UM's teams have not performed well and how the university was investigated by the National College Athletic Association as a result of reported violations to athletics rules. "Of course, we're always getting in trouble over something, and we're always under a microscope…" He mentioned that negative behavior by fraternity members has impacted his image of the university. Bo shared that while the negative things he has seen about the university did not affect his decision to attend, those things have impacted his image of the university. Academic factors are part of Bo's image of the university. He values the opportunities available in health professions because the university has a medical school.

While his friends chose to attend Mississippi State University, Bo chose UM because of the academic quality of his major and the opportunities to students pursuing health professions. "So, of course, that factored in. If I really want to be a doctor, State's not necessarily what I'm really looking at." He also chose the university because of its proximity to where his parents live. Bo's image of the university is not greatly influenced by news and social media because he feels that stories can be negative or positive depending on who is sharing them. The history of UM has little impact on his image of UM because he does not know about very much of the university's history except for the story of James Meredith and football heroes Archie Manning and Eli Manning. Bo does not feel that his image of the university has changed since becoming a student.

Bo began looking at colleges to consider attending during his sophomore year of high school. He considered community colleges, Mississippi State University, and UM. He decided to attend prior to visiting; he applied and was admitted approximately two weeks after his visit. His image of the university did not impact his decision to attend. The financial benefit of living at home was the ultimate factor in his decision to attend the university. While he feels that he made the best decision academically in attending the university, he is considering transferring to Mississippi State University so that he can live away from home and have a more independent college experience. Bo said, "And I've told my advisor…now that I've been here, nothing that the school has done has really influenced me on this decision, but I've kind of thought about going to State just to get out there, the actual college experience, just being away from home."

Brian.

Nineteen-year-old freshman Brian grew up in a small city outside Los Angeles, California. He attended public school, where he participated in Junior Reserve Officer Training

Corps and played football. He is a general business major and participates in club sports on campus. He identifies as White. Brian did not seem relaxed during our interview and wanted assurance that there were no video recording devices in addition to the audio recording devices being used. He did not provide a lot of information in his answers to interview questions.

Brian remembers seeing Ole Miss for the first time as a freshman in high school while watching college football on TV. He applied for admission in January of his senior year of high school and visited campus in March, while he was on spring break. The purpose of his visit was to see the campus and what he liked about it; he had a positive visit experience. Brian noted that the campus was well-landscaped. He felt a friendly vibe in his time on campus. He experienced a cultural difference from his home state, noting that people in the South "say 'hi' all the time."

In examining the image that he holds of the university, Brian shared that he has had a "pretty good image overall," but there are some things he wishes the university would do differently. He believes that the Confederate statue should not be moved from its current location in the center of campus. He also feels that the state flag should be placed in a museum with contextualizing information so that "we're still going to honor the Confederate soldiers but we're also going to acknowledge that their defeat would help with the end of slavery." (The state flag that was flown on campus is now in University Archives.)

Academics factor positively in his image of the university because he is successful in his classes and has received the student disability services accommodations that he needs. Athletics also positively factor as he enjoys attending football games and is a member of a club sports team. News coverage and social media have had little impact on his image of UM. He is proud of UM's history of medical research excellence and noted that the world's first human heart

transplant was performed at the University of Mississippi Medical Center. Brian's image of the university has not changed since becoming a student.

When looking at potential colleges to attend during his senior year of high school, Brian looked for schools with business programs and Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps programs. Attending school far away from home and "problems [he] had in high school" was also important to him. His choice set included schools all over the country.

Brian's campus visit influenced his decision to attend. His image of the university was not a factor in his decision. His parents and other family members discouraged him from attending because of the distance from home and because they hold "bad thoughts about Mississippi in general." So far, Brian is very happy with his decision to attend the university.

Carley.

An 18-year-old freshman general business major from the Dallas area of Texas, Carley attended a public high school where she was a member of the dance team. She identifies as White. Her father is in the military, so she has lived in many places in the South and Texas. She "visited every Texas school" but knew that she wanted to go out of state. Carley was friendly and relaxed while answering questions.

When identifying colleges to consider attending, Carley looked at location, financial aid, and Southeastern Conference athletics. She visited UM in April of her junior year so that she could learn more about the campus and to assess the campus vibe by seeing "how the students were when they were on campus." She applied for admission in October of her senior year. Carley described the vibe in this way: "When I came here people always smiled at us…You could tell that they liked to be here…and they loved the college." She felt welcomed ("everyone

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constantly smiles at you") and described the feeling of family that is present at UM. Carley described the campus as the prettiest she had visited. She especially liked that the tulips, her favorite flowers, were blooming.

The city of Oxford, Mississippi, where the University of Mississippi is located, has shaped Carley's image of the university. She likes the laid back, hometown vibe of Oxford and that it is a small city. While she considers UM a good school, academic factors do not influence her image of the university. However, when reflecting on her choice at the end of the interview, Carley discussed how much she likes all of her professors. When asked about athletics, she stated that she has "never been a big college football fan or college sports fan," but she specifically looked at SEC schools when considering schools to visit. She did speak positively about tailgating and athletic traditions. The contradictory nature of her answers suggests that Carley may not be certain about her feelings regarding various aspects of the university, that she did not fully understand the questions being asked, or that she has adopted aspects of the images of others instead of forming her own.

During the summer prior to her freshman year at UM, Carley attended JumpStart, a summer program during which incoming freshman live on campus, take classes, and participate in workshops and activities to acclimate them to campus and college life. In the weeks leading up to her time on campus, she saw news stories about the Ally Kostial murder and the Emmett Till sign photo. She described the incidents as upsetting but said that her image of the university was not impacted by the reports. When asked about the university's history, she emphasized the importance of learning from history and talked about how the university and the state have progressed. In her time so far as a student, Carley's image of UM has improved. Emphasizing the value that she puts on the community aspect of her experience, she said, "I'm like a part of

the Ole Miss family now." In describing the value of university image in her college choice process, she focused on the people: "I just like how it kind of feels like a tight-knit family here. Although the campus is pretty and like Oxford is like a good college town, too, it was honestly more about the people I was going to meet here and if I knew I can hold onto those like relationships for a long time…"

While she described her visit as short and said that she did not get to see much of the campus, she also described her visit as one of the better visits she had and the most influential factor in her choice to attend. As a result of her campus visit, UM was the only school to which she applied. The University of Mississippi "checks all the boxes" for what Carley wanted in a college. She was encouraged to attend by a neighbor and close family friend who is an alumna. Her parents supported her decision to attend UM.

Corbin.

A history major participating in the early-entry program for law school, Corbin is a 19-year-old freshman. He identifies as Hispanic or Latino. He is from a small town located close to Los Angeles, California, and attended a public high school. He was born in Jackson, Mississippi, and grew up in a family of Ole Miss fans. Corbin was polite, friendly, and cooperative during the interview process.

Corbin visited the University of Mississippi in January of his senior year of high school. He applied for admission approximately a month after. The purpose of his visit was to assess the appearance of campus, which he described as gorgeous. He particularly enjoyed learning during his visit that the architect who designed Central Park in New York City, Frederick Law Olmsted, also designed the Grove on the UM campus. He described the campus community and vibe as

welcoming: "Honestly, it was just a crazy experience just to like actually have people talk to you, even if they don't know you or have never seen you in your life."

The image of the university that Corbin has held has changed over time. Before he visited campus, he perceived the students as very preppy and was not sure he would fit in. While on campus, he saw that UM has a student body that is very diverse in the ways that they dress. He shared that the diversity of clothing styles on campus "made [him] really think about how diverse this place really is." Further, he said, "I hear colleges saying how diverse they are and just…yeah, sometimes I just think it's numbers. But I really actually saw it when I got here."

His perception of students' focus on academics has changed since becoming a student, as he now sees that students at UM are dedicated to their studies. Athletics are a factor in his image of the university and attending a "big football school" was important to him. He looks forward to attending baseball games in the spring and is excited about experiencing the community surrounding the games.

When asked about news and social media coverage of UM, Corbin discussed seeing stories about the Emmett Till sign photo and the Ally Kostial murder. He shared that those things were somewhat frightening but that "it just kind of seemed like there was some bad apples that just kind of happened and it's not really like that here." Regarding UM's history, Corbin shared that he had heard stereotypes of Southerners as racists but feels that there is more racism in his home state of California than at UM. His image of the university has improved greatly since the start of his first semester as he has felt inspired to strive for academic excellence.

Corbin began looking at colleges to attend during his junior year of high school. He had scholarship opportunities at two California schools but "always had Ole Miss in mind." He

knew that if he got accepted to UM he would attend. He accepted his offer of admission immediately after receiving the email and without a final consultation with his parents.

The image that Corbin holds of the university influenced his decision to attend. He mentioned the history of the institution, the sense of community he feels, and his memories of attending football games as a child as positive aspects. Of his campus visit, Corbin shared, "Oh, it made me fall in love right away." Friends who were already attending UM also influenced his decision to attend. When asked to reflect on his decision to attend, he said that he has "no regrets." He elaborated, "Honestly, I don't think I've made a better decision in my life besides coming here. I believe this place has really flipped me around from the person I was back home. I…just thank what this experience has given to me."

Derrick.

Derrick is a 19-year-old freshman from a small town located close to Jackson, the capital of the state of Mississippi. He is a psychology major, and he attended a public high school. He identifies as Black or African American. He enjoys skateboarding and playing basketball in his free time.

After waiting for 15 minutes past the scheduled interview time, I called the cell number on file for Derrick, which was answered by his mother. (The reason for my call was not shared.) Within five minutes, Derrick arrived at my office, skateboarding from his residence hall. He apologized for being late because he was hanging out with some friends in his hall and lost track of time. Derrick was energetic, friendly, and cooperative throughout the interview.

Friends who were students at the University of Mississippi influenced Derrick to consider attending, but the opportunities available to him at the university influenced his consideration of

UM the most. He also considered Louisiana State University, but his mother planned to move to Baton Rouge with him if he attended, so he decided to "stay a little closer." (Derrick's hometown is approximately 180 miles from both Oxford and Baton Rouge.)

During his visit to campus in August prior to the start of his senior year of high school, Derrick wanted to see what the campus looked like and to interact with people. He described the campus as gorgeous and better than the Mississippi State University campus. He shared that the people he interacted with were "cool" ("It felt like everybody was…it wasn't no hate or nothing…"). He applied for admission in December of his senior year of high school.

When asked about university image, Derrick discussed seeing negative things online about the university: "Like the big racial thing that is going on. I'm not too sure on that part, but what I've experienced personally has been okay…I haven't felt anything, any type of vibes coming…" He also talked about seeing the Emmett Till sign photo as well as information about the Ally Kostial and Dominique Clayton murders on social media. When those stories were in the news, his mother questioned his decision to attend. The negative news and social media coverage that he saw, however, had little influence on his image of UM. He emphasized the importance of seeing things for himself and reiterated that he has not had any negative experiences on campus. When asked about the university's history, he shared that it had little influence on his image of the university. Acknowledging issues of the past, Derrick feels that UM is "moving into a better place."

His campus visit influenced his image of UM by showing him that it is different from the negative perceptions that some people have. He shared that some family members were critical of his decision to attend. However, when he visited campus, he experienced a "great community feeling" and felt accepted.

Academic factors have positively influenced his image of the university. Collegiate athletics do not factor into his image of UM, but he does enjoy intramural and recreational sports on campus. Derrick's image of the university has "upgraded" in his time as a student.

In considering colleges to attend, Derrick focused on the quality of his major program, alumni and current students he knows, and location. His image of UM had little influence on his decision to attend. His campus visit had a positive influence on his choice. Another factor in his decision to attend UM was the availability of a scholarship for children of university employees (his mother works at a University of Mississippi Medical Center facility located in Jackson). Derrick is pleased with his decision to attend UM and is especially enjoying the many student activities available.

Emily.

Emily, who is from a small town in the northern part of Mississippi, is an 18-year-old freshman and a musician in the university's marching band, the Pride of the South. She attended a public school and has not yet chosen a college major. She identifies as White. Emily was dressed neatly and was polite and talkative throughout the interview.

Growing up in a nearby town, Emily always considered the University of Mississippi as an option for college. During her senior year of high school, she participated in two campus visits with the office of admissions, one with her father and one with her mother. During her visits, she wanted to see more of the campus (she had only been once at the age of seven) and "get to know the people here." She likes that the landscape and appearance of campus make it "feel like home." Emily described the campus community and vibe as very welcoming and, in

discussing her interactions while visiting, described the people as kind, willing to help, and generous. She applied for admission approximately two weeks after her second visit.

Emily perceives the university as "very open" and acknowledged that the university has progressed beyond historical challenges. She said, "There's a lot of people who have different beliefs, but we all get along well." Prior to visiting campus, she perceived UM students as "really preppy," but found that "yeah, these people are sort of preppy, but they're very nice. They're not snobby."

Academic factors have a positive impact on the image that Emily holds of the university. While she was not interested in sports in the past, she has become interested in football and acknowledges the positive impact that athletic factors have on her image of UM. Emily does not follow news coverage or UM social media except for the accounts for the Pride of the South, so those things do not factor into her image of the university. When considering UM from a historical perspective, Emily mentioned segregation and the progress that the university has made since then: "Yeah, I think that we've come a long way, a very long way." Her time so far as a student has positively impacted her image of the school. She said, "…I really enjoy that type of atmosphere where people can be open about what they believe in but still civil about it because I don't think there's a lot of that in the world right now."

When considering colleges to attend, Emily looked at location and the fans of schools' athletics teams. She made the decision to attend after her second campus visit. Of her decision, she said, "No regrets." Her image of UM and her campus visit influenced her decision, and she mentioned kindness of the people with whom she interacted when asked about each. A close family friend also influenced her decision to attend. Emily said that she is very happy as a UM student.

Hope.

A Mississippi resident, Hope is from a small city located on the western edge of the state. She attended a public high school where she was a member of the dance team and is a theatre major. She is 18 years old and identifies as Black or African American. Hope was cooperative but reserved during the interview.

The University of Mississippi has been Hope's favorite college for many years because she has family members who attended. She visited during her senior year of high school to learn her way around campus and to learn more about the events and activities available to students. She had already been admitted to the university when she visited. When asked to describe her campus visit, she said, "On a scale of 1 to 10, 10." She discussed the beauty of campus and the feeling of community, although did not recall any interactions with people that influenced her visit positively or negatively.

When asked about her image of the university, Hope discussed the importance she places on treating others civilly, implying that, although she was provided with the definition of university image, she did not understand the question. When asked if civility was something that came to mind when thinking of UM, she responded affirmatively. In considering how her campus visit impacted her image of the university, she shared that some outsiders consider members of the university community to be racist but that she does not share that perception: "I was like, it's different than that. I experienced different…It's great. Something I wouldn't imagine it would be."

The many academic resources available on campus positively influence Hope's image of UM. The family aspect of athletics fanship also positively influences her image of the university. Her image has improved in her time as a student.

Hope began looking at colleges to attend during her junior year of high school. She was assisted by her school counselor, who directed her to schools to which she should apply based on her score on the ACT. Of that process, Hope said, "So Ole Miss was already my first choice. I was not going to get that out the equation. And I had other choices, and they were okay." The image that she holds of the university and her campus visit both positively influenced her decision to attend. She emphasized the importance of determining during her campus visit that UM is the place that she belongs. She reflected on her decision to attend the university by saying, "I'm glad that I attended Ole Miss because it's now making me grow into something that I want to be."

Jane.

Eighteen-year-old Jane grew up in Oxford, where the University of Mississippi is located. She attended a local public school and is a psychology major. She identifies as White. Jane was dressed whimsically in a holiday sweatshirt and knit hat. She answered questions in a straightforward manner and expressed little emotion.

Jane did not originally consider attending UM. However, she was not accepted to her first-choice school, a university in New York that specializes in the field in which she thought she wanted to major. She referred to that school as her only choice. Because she has chosen to pursue a different degree since beginning college, she is "kind of glad [she] didn't get in now, though…"

Jane participated in a campus visit in April of her senior year at her mother's insistence; she did not feel that she would benefit from visiting campus. Also, she was not looking forward to attending the university. Jane feels as though her mother wanted her to visit so that she would get excited about attending. She was admitted approximately two months prior to her visit. Of her campus visit, Jane said, "It wasn't anything special." She was complimentary of the appearance of campus and discussed how there were not many students on campus when she visited, which was a few days before the Easter holiday. Her interactions with people were "very minimal." Jane was disappointed that she only received information during her visit about social activities that included tailgating at football games and sorority and fraternity life. She would have liked to hear about other types of student organizations, such as an organization that hosts events for students who identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and those who identify in other ways).

In discussing the image that she holds of UM, Jane shared the factors that negatively impact her image.

> I've always felt like people think Ole Miss is so progressive and so forward-thinking and so open, but, really, it's not. I mean, the people here, they're fine. They're just like people everywhere, though, which is something that they try to step away from the crowd and be like, "Oh, we're different." No, not really that different. I mean, it's fine, but…you know what I mean. People just overhype it, kind of. Make it seem like something it's not.

When asked what she thinks is an accurate representation of the university, she responded, "It's just like school anywhere, really. I mean, you'd probably have the same school experience here that you'd have at Mississippi State." Jane then talked about the positive experiences her friends

who went to an area community college together are having. "And from what they've told me, honestly, their experience kind of sounds more fun. It's a closer community, and people there are kind of less…judgmental. People at Ole Miss are kind of, I don't know, if you don't fit in, it's weird." Jane feels as though her university experience is exactly like her high school experience, which she called "cliquey."

Jane's campus visit did not impact her image of the university. She feels that academics at UM are "pretty good." Athletics negatively factor in her image of the university. She is not interested in tailgating and attending football games and feels as though there are too few alternative activities. She also complained about the unavailability of the Student Union, where she prefers to eat with her meal plan, past halftime of a recent football game.

News coverage and social media do not factor into Jane's image of UM. She has seen negative news coverage but acknowledged that negative stories are the ones that get the most attention. She does not follow any university accounts on social media. The history of the university has not impacted the image that Jane holds. She did, however, talk about the negative image that some people outside the university community hold as they consider the UM community to be racist; she was not aware of this prior to attending.

Jane began looking at colleges to consider attending during her senior year of high school. She looked for a school with a specific degree program in which she was interested and selected one in New York to which she would apply. She only considered UM after she did not get admitted to that school. The image that she holds of the university did not factor into her decision to attend. Her decision was based purely on location, which was important to her because she helps take care of family pets at home and the doctors who treat her health conditions are here. Also, her best friend is a student at a local high school. In reflecting on her

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choice to attend the university, Jane said, "…I think I made the best choice by going here as opposed to anywhere else." She added, "Most people in Oxford absolutely love Ole Miss. I mean, I don't hate it, it's just…it's fine. It's my hometown, so it's not that exciting."

Justin.

A 19-year-old freshman, Justin is from a large city in Florida. He attended a private Roman Catholic high school and is an English major. He identifies as White. Justin was reserved and thoughtful.

Justin was interested in touring the University of Mississippi because it is a well-known school in the Southeast and he had been told that the university has a high-quality English program. UM was one of the first schools to send him recruitment communications, so he decided to apply in February of his senior year and then visit in April to determine if he wanted to attend. The purpose of his visit was to see the campus and learn his way around it. Justin liked that his visit included a full schedule of activities. He described the campus as beautiful and "kind of like I'd still be home." "Everyone was smiling and saying 'hello,' and it made me want to spend more time on campus."

In talking about the image that he holds of the university, Justin shared that he likes that while UM is an institution of learning, members of the community know how to have fun. "I didn't know that much about Ole Miss before I visited, but afterward I was completely hooked." He also mentioned that he likes the small community feeling of the campus and Oxford.

Academic factors impact his image of the university because he wanted to earn what he thinks others will consider a good English degree. "It really helped me decide on Ole Miss." That aspect of the image that he holds was also impacted by the instructors that he met during his

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campus visit. While athletic factors are not of great importance to Justin, he does like that UM has a strong tailgating tradition.

Justin became aware of the Emmett Till sign photo via news coverage, but the image he holds of UM was not impacted. "So some racist kids doing something bad I knew wouldn't represent the whole of the University of Mississippi." When asked about UM's history, he shared that he does not think that the current location of the Confederate statue is a benefit to the university community. "I don't think it's the university's intention to send that message, but I think that it unintentionally sends the wrong message, a bad message to its students."

In his time so far as a student, Justin's image of the university has improved. He feels welcomed as a member of the university community. He has had good experiences academically: "It sticks out to me as a place where people are enthusiastic about passing on knowledge and helping you obtain that knowledge."

Justin began looking at colleges to consider attending during his junior year of high school. He knew that he wanted to attend a school in the Southeast that has a good English program. After viewing an online tour of the campus with his parents, he decided to apply and that he would attend if accepted.

The film *The Blind Side*, which tells the story of a UM family's adoption of a student in need who later became a member of the Ole Miss football team and afterward played in the National Football League, positively influenced the image that Justin held of the university prior to applying. The recruitment communications he received also shaped the image that he holds. Justin especially liked that some of the communications he received "didn't even mention applying for college, as if they were just trying to show me how nice everyone here already was

before I even decided to attend." In reflecting on his decision to attend UM, Justin shared that he is happy with his decision and feels that what he has learned already in his English courses has been beneficial.

K.J.

K.J. is from a small city in central Mississippi and went to a public high school where she was a cheerleader. She is an 18-year-old freshman who is a psychology major. She identifies as Black or African American. K.J. was soft-spoken and friendly.

The University of Mississippi was of interest to K.J. to visit because she likes the welcoming environment. She visited campus as a high school senior and had already been admitted. During her visit, she wanted to learn where the resources she would need are located. She described the campus as clean and beautiful. She was excited by the all of the activity that she saw on campus, and she liked that it was easy to interact with people.

In response to being asked to describe the image that she has held of the university, she stated, "Despite of all the things people say about Ole Miss, it's completely the opposite. It's exactly how other people will say it's like home. That's how it is. It's like home." When asked to share some of the things that people say, K.J. shared, "Ole Miss a part of a hick town and this racism. I tell people, and I can, they weren't racist to me. Ain't nobody that's here racist. It's just people and their thoughts, and they don't really just know what they're talking about."

K.J.'s visit to campus influenced her image of the university as she determined that she can pursue her dreams at UM. Academic resources on campus positively influence her image of the university. Athletics do not factor into her image of UM. Social media coverage positively impacts her image of the university. Of the value of social media, K.J. said, "Social media really

does help people who really just don't know what all we do here." At the time of the interview, K.J. was excited that a photo of her participating in an event on campus was featured on the homepage of the university website. When asked how history has influenced her image of the university, she said, "It's that any people with any race or any ethnic background or any religion can come here." Her image of the university has not changed since she began attending.

In considering colleges to possibly attend, K.J. looked at the quality of academic programs. One of the factors in her decision to attend UM was that she has family members who live here. Her positive image of the university factored into her decision to attend. She described how helpful university staff were when she was a prospective student. She also found members of the campus community to be helpful to her during her campus visit, which influenced her college choice. Her desire to be a member of a diverse community was a factor in her decision to attend UM. As she reflected on her decision to attend the university, K.J. became excited and said, "…it was really the best decision I made…Go Rebels! Everyone should attend."

Keely.

Keely is an 18-year-old freshman from a small suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. She attended a public high school and has not yet chosen a college major. As a student at the university, she enjoys participating in sorority life. She identifies as White. Keely was dressed in trendy athleisure clothing and was confident and somewhat aloof.

After visiting Oxford and the university multiple times to see friends who are current students, Keely participated in a campus visit with the Office of Admissions in March of her senior year of high school at her best friend and roommate's insistence. She applied and had

been admitted approximately a month prior to her visit. The purpose of Keely's visit was to see more of campus and learn about the university. She described her visit as welcoming. She found the campus to be attractive, and she felt at home during her visit.

In describing the image that she has held of the university, Keely mentioned fun and academics. She said, "I mean, it is a fun university for sure. But studies come first. So I mean, I guess it's a good mixture. It has very good studies, but, if you want to have a good time, this is also a good place to be." She had a positive campus visit experience, and her visit positively impacted her image of the university. Athletics factor positively into Keely's image of UM, as she enjoys tailgating at football games and going to baseball games. The messages that she saw posted on social media about the university by students who are friends also positively impacted the image that she holds of the university. UM traditions are the aspect of the institution's history that shapes her image of the school. The Walk of Champions, where the football team walks through the Grove (the tailgating epicenter on campus) prior to games, is a tradition that she especially likes. Keely's image of UM has not changed in her time as a student. She is, however, unhappy with her residential experience in a hall that has community bathrooms.

When Keely first began looking at colleges to consider, she had planned to play soccer in college. However, an injury prevented her from being able to play. The factors in her search for colleges were academics, campus appearance, and her images of the schools. Keely describes the university as diverse, which she values and did not see at other institutions she considered. She knew that campus visits could greatly influence her college choice process: "Because they say don't visit Oxford if you don't want to go here because then it will change your mind…" Keely is happy with her decision to attend UM. She shared that her favorite thing about the university is Greek life.

Maddie.

Maddie is an 18-year-old freshman majoring in criminal justice. She is from a suburb of the state capital that is close in size to Oxford, Mississippi. She attended a public high school. She identifies as White. Throughout her childhood, she participated in tailgating and attended football games at UM with her family. She always knew that she might attend the university. Maddie was friendly, confident, and cooperative during her interview.

In March of her senior year of high school, Maddie participated in a campus visit with the Office of Admissions while she was in Oxford visiting her sister, who was a student at the time. The purpose of her visit was to determine if, in fact, UM was the college she wanted to attend. She wanted to "see it through the eyes of this is a potential college instead of just this is where I'm coming just for the weekend." The student ambassador who led the campus tour portion of the visit was a high school acquaintance, which positively impacted her experience.

Maddie was complimentary of the landscape on campus, stating, "…there's literally nowhere else that's this pretty all the time, so…" She noted that people in the campus community were kind and friendly: "Every person you saw would kind of smile or wave, and so I just felt welcomed…" Maddie especially liked having the opportunity to ask a female student she knew about her own experience at UM.

When asked about university image, Maddie shared that she has always considered the University of Mississippi to be a "home away from home." UM is a comfortable and safe place for her. Her visit impacted her image of the university in that it made her certain that UM was the best fit for her.

Academic factors impact her image of the university. She is interested in attending law school and considered that the University of Mississippi has a law school when choosing to attend. When asked how athletics factor into her image of UM, Maddie discussed that it was important to her to attend an institution that is a member of the SEC. As she considered how news and social media factor into her image of the university, Maddie said,

> Well, Ole Miss gets a bad rep sometimes for dumb people doing dumb stuff. But I guess since I go here and I see what happens every day and I see the people that are incredibly nice and just don't act like a fool like social media portrays Ole Miss students as being sometimes. Even though that's how it is in social media, it makes me feel better about going here because I know people don't usually act like that and it's not really like that.

When asked about UM's history, she referred to it as a "touchy subject" and "not a thing that you're proud of," but she also talked about how the progress that the university has made is something of which to be proud. Prior to attending, she considered UM a party school because of her tailgating experiences, but that is no longer her perception.

Maddie began looking at colleges to consider attending during her junior year of high school. At that time, she thought that she would like to go out of state and considered attending a school in Maryland, where her grandfather lived at one time. In the middle of her senior year, she realized that she wanted to be close to home and only considered schools in the South. She applied for admission to UM approximately two weeks after her visit and decided to attend at the end of her senior year of high school. Her older family members' questioning of her decision to attend a "party school" made her hesitant to commit to attending the university, but she ultimately decided that it was the right fit for her because she knew she would be welcomed.

Maddie shared that her campus visit made it easier to decide to attend. She was also influenced by her mother and sister, who are alumnae. She is pleased with her decision to attend.

Mary Grant.

A Mississippi resident, Mary Grant is from a suburb of Jackson, Mississippi. She attended a private Catholic school. She majors in public policy leadership. She is 19 years old, and she identifies as White. Mary Grant was less talkative than many of the other research participants. She seemed very comfortable but gave short answers to questions and was very matter of fact.

Mary Grant has had many experiences on campus as she has an older sister who attended. She participated in a campus visit in the summer prior to her senior year of high school. The purpose of her visit was to determine if UM was the best fit for her. She had a positive experience during her visit. She shared that the campus was one of the prettiest she had seen and that people were welcoming.

The image that Mary Grant holds of the university is that it is open and inclusive. She likes UM because "everybody can just be themselves and nobody really cares." Her visit to campus had little impact on her image of the university because she already held a positive image due to her experiences coming to football games prior to being a student.

Academics factor positively into Mary Grant's image of the university. She feels that her instructors and professors show that they care about her. Athletics are a positive factor in her image of UM because she enjoys the tailgating and football game experience. When asked about news and social media, she mentioned hearing about the chancellor and seeing photos on social media but stated that those things have little impact on the image she holds. In considering how

UM's history influences the image that she holds, Mary Grant talked about the image that some people hold of UM as a community of racists. "I mean, a lot of people could say they were racist or whatever, but I think really it's history. There's nothing we can change about it." She is proud of the resources that we have on campus to allow us to learn from history. In her time as a student, her image of UM has not changed.

Mary Grant began looking at potential colleges to attend during her sophomore year of high school. In identifying potential schools, she looked at distance, price, and majors. She visited Mississippi State and considered attending because of their biology program. She decided to attend UM in April of her junior year, prior to her campus visit and prior to applying. She did not apply until February of her senior year of high school.

Mary Grant's image of the university community as welcoming was a factor in her decision to attend. Her campus visit did not impact her decision. Her family ties to UM were influences in her college choice; her mother and older sister are alumnae, and her twin sister decided before her to attend the university. She has always felt "at home" when on campus and is pleased with her decision to attend.

Matt.

A resident of a small city in the Atlanta metropolitan area, Matt is an 18-year-old freshman. He attended a public high school and is a computer engineering major. In his free time, he enjoys playing the guitar and singing. He also participates in a campus ministry organization and serves as an Ole Miss Ambassador who gives campus tours to potential students. He identifies as White. Matt was neatly dressed in a UM polo and was enthusiastic and talkative throughout the interview.

Matt had always wanted to attend a school with a large football program, preferably one in the Southeastern Conference. Initially thinking that he would only be able to afford community college, he became interested in the University of Mississippi after receiving recruitment materials via mail and learning about merit scholarship opportunities. He was admitted to the university in November of his senior year of high school and visited the campus a few weeks later during a four-day whirlwind tour of SEC schools. The purpose of his multi-college tour was to "get a sense of where [he] belonged the most." His father attended a regional college, so Matt was the first person in his family to engage in a college search process. Of his visit, he said, "I fell in love immediately. I really did. I mean, to say 'magical' would be corny, but that's exactly what it was." He added that he felt an immediate sense of belonging. He noted that although it was 40 degrees outside and raining, the campus was gorgeous. "If you can do that on a day like that, then I feel like you can do it on any other day." Matt had positive interactions with members of both the campus and local communities.

Before visiting, Matt knew very little about the university. The many opportunities available to students have shaped his image of the university, and academics are the primary factor in his image of UM. He mentioned multiple programs such as the Center for Manufacturing Excellence and the Trent Lott Leadership Institute that he learned about on his campus visit. Matt also places importance on having a degree from a reputable institution. Athletics are an important factor in his image of the university. "As much as academics mattered to me, the thing that came second was student life and athletics, being in the SEC."

Now that Matt is a student, he feels that media coverage of the university is negatively skewed. "We have the outliers, and that's what the media likes to report on." He mentioned the chancellor search process that made national news. "You look at the news and it's, 'Oh, Ole

Miss has got another scandal.' It's really disappointing as somebody who loves the university as much as I do." Matt is excited by UM's history as he appreciates the university's organic traditions. His image of the university has not changed since becoming a student. He looks forward to the role he can play in helping grow the university.

Matt began looking at potential colleges to attend during his junior year of high school. He began his search by looking at schools with strong computer science and computer engineering programs. He also looked at which of those schools belonged to the SEC.

Demonstrating the success of Matt's campus visit, the most influential part of his college choice process, he said, "…Ole Miss was just where I wanted to go because I fell in love with it, kind of immediately." Other influences on his decision were the pedestrian aspect of campus and his father's encouragement to attend. "So the thing that he pushed me towards is, 'Do something that you love, and do something that you can be successful in.' And I can find that here." Of his decision to attend UM, Matt said, "It's the best decision I've ever made. Hands down, spare for my faith. I can't point to another decision that I've ever made and said, 'I did it right.'" He added that as an Ambassador

> I'm very proud of [the university], and that says a lot about what this university has to offer a freshman who didn't know a thing about the university, didn't know anybody coming here. I wanted to be a part of bringing other people in.

Mitch.

An 18-year-old freshman, Mitch is from a small suburb of Chicago, Illinois. He attended a public high school and majors in general business at UM. He identifies as White. Growing up,

Mitch dreamed of attending Northwestern University, located north of Chicago in Evanston, Illinois. Mitch was cooperative and very friendly throughout the interview process.

Mitch has friends who are current students at UM and participated in a campus visit because he came to town for a football game. What began as an activity to pass the time during the day on Friday became a pivotal moment in his college choice process. Mitch said, "…I just fell in love with it honestly." He described the beauty of campus, the Southern feel, and the city of Oxford. He also described the feeling of family he experienced during his visit and how people were friendly and smiled at him frequently.

In discussing the image that he holds of the university, Mitch shared that he "[goes] home gushing about it." His visit to campus positively impacted his image of the university as well as his college choice process. Academic factors influenced his image of UM as he researched the quality of the business and accounting programs and compared them to programs at other institutions in his consideration set. The university's membership in the SEC positively impacted his image of the school. He looks forward to attending baseball games in the spring. Mitch only follows sports-related accounts on social media and has positive perceptions of what he sees about UM.

When asked about UM's history, Mitch mentioned the Confederate statue and shared that a protest of moving the statue took place on campus when he visited for a second time during spring semester of his senior year. He also mentioned seeing the basketball players kneeling in protest during a game that took place on campus that weekend. Of those events, he said, "…but I wouldn't say it like really has impacted my image of Ole Miss that much." He continued, "But I do love…Every building I walk into I feel like a bunch of important people have been here, so I do like that part of it." During his time as a student, his image of the

university has improved. He is excited about all of the social events available to students, and he has positive relationships with his professors.

Mitch began looking at colleges to consider attending during his sophomore year of high school. During his junior year, he developed a list of 10 campuses that he planned to visit, but UM was not on that list. He visited schools that he thought would be fun, schools that he thought would be good fits academically, and schools located in places he would like to live. He applied for admission to UM after his first visit in November and decided to attend after his second visit in February. His enjoyment of the city of Oxford and the distance from his hometown (within a day's drive) were factors in his decision to attend the university.

The university's image was a large factor in Mitch's decision to attend. He placed great importance on how welcomed he felt when he visited and emphasized the fact that his visits to campus were critical in his decision to come to UM. He also emphasized the importance of football games and tailgating in his decision to attend. Mitch was strongly encouraged to choose UM by his friends who are current students. In reflecting on his decision, he shared that he is very happy with his choice. He is enjoying his classes and attending football games. He added that he is also enjoying his residential experience as a member of a residential college.

Preston.

Preston, a resident of Louisiana, is a 19-year-old freshman who identifies as White. He attended a magnet high school for math, science, and performing arts in a large city. At UM, he majors in political science. Preston was dressed neatly, and his hair was styled. He was open and cooperative during the interview process.

When identifying potential colleges to consider attending, Preston looked at flagship institutions located in the South that were within a day's drive of his hometown. Once he had decided to apply to UM, his mother shared with him that both she and her sister had attended, which enhanced his interest in the school. Also, he shared, "Blue looks good on me, so that never hurts."

He visited UM during his senior year of high school with the goal of learning more about the campus. Preston had planned to visit several schools to which he had been admitted in addition to the University of Mississippi. After his positive campus visit experience, he chose to attend UM and not visit any other schools. He discussed the beauty of campus and the friendly and open vibes he experienced while visiting. He described his interactions with people on campus positively.

Preston has held a positive image of the university, and that image has improved as he has spent more time on campus. Academic factors influence his image of the university, especially the Trent Lott Leadership Institute and the School of Law. The athletics fanship experience has impacted his image of UM. He said, "It's also another big reason I came here. You can tell everyone loves this school." Preston likes to follow UM on social media to find out about events that are happening around campus. He values the university's history and traditions and appreciates that UM was "built to last." Now that he is a student, he has found that college is more "laid back" than he expected.

To gather information about potential colleges to attend, Preston participated in college fairs held at his high school. In addition to location and flagship status, the availability of the Wesley Foundation, an organization for students who are members of the Methodist church, was important to him. The university's image influenced his decision to attend, and his visit to

campus was a major factor; Preston said, "I decided the day I set foot on campus." He is happy with his decision to attend UM and has "loved it so far."

Stephanie.

A Mississippian, Stephanie grew up in a small town in the northern part of the state, where she attended public school. She is 18 years old, and she identifies as Black or African American. She is majoring in accounting. Stephanie arrived to her interview early and was dressed neatly. She was polite and cooperative.

After saying that she would "never come to Ole Miss," Stephanie began considering UM as a potential school to attend when she came to the M.O.S.T. (Mississippi Outreach to Scholastic Talent) Conference, which is a leadership and recruitment conference held on campus each summer for African American high school students from Mississippi. When asked why she said she would never attend UM, she responded, "Because like the background. You know how everybody says it's racist or whatever." Attending the conference reshaped the image that she held of the school.

After being admitted in October, Stephanie participated in a campus visit in April to make sure that she still felt the same way that she felt during the conference. She had a positive experience during her campus visit and said that she felt at home. She commented on the friendliness of people she encountered on campus during her visit.

When asked to describe the image that she has held of the university, Stephanie said, "I think it's better than what, like how people talk about it. Like we're always in the papers, but it's really not like that when you get here. And then for the minority community, I feel like it's better. They try to acknowledge the problems instead of just sweeping it off…" Her campus

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visit positively impacted her image of UM. Academics also positively impact her image of the university; she looked at the accountancy school, which is the top in the state and ranked nationally, and the many academic resources available on campus. Athletics do not factor into her image of UM. In discussing news and social media coverage, Stephanie mentioned hearing about a Confederate statue protest that took place on campus and how she heard people saying "Ole Miss is racist." However, that did not change her perception as she feels that "…in reality, everywhere is racist." She also shared that the only way to know what is actually happening on campus is to be here. The school's history has not influenced her image of UM, and her image of the university has not changed in her time as a student.

Stephanie began looking at colleges to consider attending during her junior year of high school. She utilized resources at college fairs held at her high school to gather information. She also performed Google searches to learn more about academic opportunities at the schools in which she was interested.

Her image of the university, which was greatly shaped by her experience at the M.O.S.T. Conference, influenced her decision to attend. Her campus visit influenced her college choice, and, she participated in a second campus visit "for fun" five months after her initial visit, admittance, and decision to attend. In addition, the minority student organizations available at UM influenced her decision. Now that she is a student, Stephanie feels that she made the right decision.

Additional Data by Topic.

Additional information that is organized by topic was gathered through data analysis and cross-case analysis. This section includes aggregate information on university image, campus visits, and college choice.

University image.

Prior to being asked questions about university image, participants were provided with the definition of university image: your attitude, beliefs, and impressions about the university and its behavior (Treadwell & Harrison, 1994, p. 64, and Arpan et al., 2003, p. 97). Participants were then asked to describe the images that they have held of the university and were asked how their campus visits impacted their images, how UM's history has influenced the images that they have held, and if they had any thoughts about how their images of the university have changed because of their experiences. In the question about the impact of the campus visit, probe questions about academics, athletics, and news and social media coverage were used when needed. While including the probes allowed for determination of whether or not results aligned with the literature on university image, omission of probes may have provided more clarity in the aspects of the campus visit that participants valued; analysis could have included aspects that they failed to mention. Better data on the influence of social media could have been collected if participants were asked separately about information disseminated via institutional social media posts and posts by others.

When asked to describe images they have held of the university, all participants except one (Jane) indicated that they currently hold positive images. Among the words and phrases used to describe the images that they hold were the following: big school with a small school

feel, community, Southern hospitality, diverse, open-minded, civil, home, inclusive, opportunities, and respectable. When describing her image of UM, Amy talked about "die-hard fans." She feels as though "Anyone who comes here just loves it for the rest of their life." Keely shared these thoughts on her image of UM: "It has very good studies, but, if you want to have a good time, this is also a good place to be."

Multiple participants shared that they are aware that others hold negative images of UM. Alex's friends consider the university to be a lower-tier school academically. Some people in Bo's life have negative images of UM related to the performance of athletics teams. Hope shared: "The outsiders be like, 'Ah, they're racist.' I was like, 'It's different than that. I experienced different…'" K.J. has friends and family who think of UM has hick and racist. However, she has countered those statements when she has heard them. "I tell people, and I can, they weren't racist to me. Ain't nobody that's here racist. It's just people and their thoughts, and they don't really just know what they're talking about." Stephanie shared that UM is better than what people think and better than what is in the papers.

> I think it's better than what, like how people talk about it. Like we're always in the papers, but it's really not like that when you get here. And then for the minority community, I feel like it's better. [Members of the university community] try to acknowledge the problems instead of just sweeping it off, so that's how I feel about that.

The majority of participants felt that their campus visits positively influenced the images that they hold of the university. Prior to visiting, Carley and Corbin both expected students to dress in very preppy fashion but were pleased to see diversity in students' clothing choices when they came to campus. Corbin said, "I saw all those people like just weren't like going by like the whole prep boy look or the tennis skirts and all that. And like it made me really think about how

diverse this place really is." Before attending, Amy and Maddie considered UM to be a party school; however, their images have changed. Jane feels as though others think too highly of the school:

> I mean, it's supposed to be this really warm, welcoming family environment, but I don't have any friends here. I mean, nobody's talked to me. I don't know; the image of it, I feel like it's built up to be way more than it is. It's supposed to be a really great, fun place to be, but I mean, it's okay. I just think people…I don't know; it's overhyped.

In discussing how academic factors have impacted their images of the university, all participants shared favorable responses related to majors, accommodations, resources, and students' commitment to their studies. In considering the impact of athletic factors on their images of UM, all participants except two expressed positive thoughts about athletics, using words and phrases such as family, tailgating, school spirit, and the SEC. Chris, who does not consider himself a big sports fan, said

> I've never really been that big into sports, but it's hard not to get caught up into the game day at the Grove and tailgating. It does make the community a lot nicer and to see that they have this tradition of tailgating on the Grove and that people are genuinely nice and happy to see you when you show up to a tent. So, again, it's not a very big deal for me, but it helps me feel like I'm a part of a college community.

Jane feels that there is too much emphasis placed on football games and tailgating. Stephanie indicated that athletics do not impact her image of UM.

When participants were asked how news and social media coverage have factored into their images of UM, they shared responses that indicated awareness of recent news coverage and

the related conversations happening on social media. Only four of the participants chose to connect with the university via social media; one follows athletics, one follows the Pride of the South marching band, and two follow general university accounts. Social media was not a strong factor in the majority of participants' university images.

Multiple students discussed negative news regarding the university and the city of Oxford, including the Emmett Till sign photo, the Ally Kostial murder, the Dominique Clayton murder, the Confederate soldier statue controversy, and the chancellor appointment. However, all of the students who talked about negative news indicated that their images of UM were not impacted or were impacted very little by those events. Some of the participants spoke positively about the news and social media coverage they had seen. Several participants suggested that news coverage is skewed, that only bad stories get attention, and that the few bad stories do not represent the whole story of the university. According to Matt, "We have the outliers, and that's what the media likes to report on."

In considering how the university's history has influenced the images that they hold of the university, the participants responses were widely varied. Multiple participants used the word 'progress' in describing how the school's history has influenced their images; many of them discussed racial integration at UM. Some participants talked about traditions, eras of athletics success, and excellence in research. Corbin talked about his previous image of UM as racist:

> I definitely came in here thinking that it was going to be a little more on the racial side.
> Just because I'm from California. And we just hear those stereotypes about how the
> South is really just all racist. But, in all actuality, I find a lot more racism in California
> than I do here.

Jane and Mary Grant talked about the negative images of UM as a community of racists that others hold.

When asked for thoughts on how their images of UM have changed as a result of their experiences, the majority of participants (12) shared that their images have improved. The remainder of the participants' images have not changed. While her image has not changed, K.J. has determined that "it's a lot of partying."

Derrick shared this about the change in his image of UM:

I came here with an open mind. I was prepared in case anything happened, but it's really cool. You know what I'm saying? Nothing really bad happening. Nothing on campus I can say…so my perception is really…my perception of school has really upgraded, I could say. It's gotten really better because I'm living in it now.

Campus visits.

Nearly half (9) of the interview participants visited campus prior to applying for admission. The rest (11) visited after being admitted to the university. Participants' reasons for ordering their campus visits and applications as they did were varied and specific to the individuals. Three participants who had not applied prior to visiting did so and were admitted within two weeks of visiting.

In 2018, the University of Mississippi began offering students the option of applying via the Common Application, which allows students to apply to multiple schools at once, for the 2019-20 application cycle. Of the 20 interview participants, five applied using the Common Application. All of those students are residents of states other than Mississippi. Participants' visit and application process information is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Campus Visit and Application Information

Pseudonym	Visit Date	Admittance Date	Visit Prior to Application	Application Type
Alex	7/27/2018	10/25/2018	Yes	Common App
Alicia	4/18/2019	4/2/2019	No	UM App
Amy	4/5/2019	11/9/2018	No	Common App
Bo	10/4/2018	10/25/2018	Yes	UM App
Brian	3/20/2019	1/10/2019	No	Common App
Carley	4/2/2018	10/3/2018	Yes	UM App
Corbin	1/3/2019	2/19/2019	Yes	UM App
Derrick	8/1/2018	12/11/2018	Yes	UM App
Emily	4/3/2019	4/29/2019	Yes	UM App
Hope	4/23/2019	12/13/2018	No	UM App
Jane	4/16/2019	2/22/2019	No	UM App
Justin	4/24/2019	2/8/2019	No	Common App
K.J.	4/23/2019	11/20/2018	No	UM App
Keely	3/1/2019	2/5/2019	No	UM App
Maddie	3/4/2019	3/26/2019	Yes	UM App
Mary Grant	6/29/2018	2/19/2019	Yes	UM App
Matt	12/7/2018	11/20/2018	No	UM App
Mitch	11/2/2018	2/5/2019	Yes	Common App
Preston	3/1/2019	2/8/2019	No	UM App
Stephanie	3/6/2019	10/9/2018	No	UM App

Interview participants were asked questions about the purposes of their campus visits and were asked to describe their campus visits. Where needed, additional questions were asked about campus appearance, campus community and vibe, and interactions with people. When asked about the purpose of their campus visits, participants repeatedly gave the following: learn more, assess vibe, assess fit, assess appearance, and interact with people. Regarding the purpose of her visit, Alicia said that she came to campus

Just to see if I could see myself here because it's so different than schools in Michigan. I wanted to experience it firsthand with not only the people but just see the campus. Because photos can only do so much justice for the school.

Two participants visited to satisfy their mothers (Amy and Jane), and one participant visited campus to fill time during the day while he was in Oxford for a UM football game (Mitch). Four participants described the weather, positive or negative, during their visits. Two participants, Carley and Alex, described their visits as short and not in-depth. Of her visit, Jane said, "It wasn't anything special."

In describing their campus visits, positive language was used by most of the participants (great, enjoyable, fun, wonderful, interesting, informative, etc.). Hope gave a rating for her visit: "10 out of 10!" Preston "didn't tour another [school] after it." Justin described his campus visit this way:

It was very nice. Everyone was very friendly and outgoing. They were very receptive to the questions that I asked. And let's see…there was always something for us to do. With other campus visits, there was usually a period of, "We're going to this building. You can wander around in it and then just meet us here and we'll leave." But with this one, there was always information to be given or an activity to do, and it was very, very informative.

College choice.

In the framework of college choice, participants were asked about their processes for choosing a university to attend, which included identifying colleges, applying for admission, and deciding to attend. Participants were asked how their images of UM and their campus visits

influenced their decision-making processes and if there were other influences on their decisions. In addition, interview participants were asked for their initial reflections about their decisions to attend the university.

To achieve a better understanding of participants' college choice processes, they were asked when they began considering colleges to attend and when they made their decisions to attend UM. Three of the participants began their college searches during their sophomore year of high school. The majority of participants (12) began their searches during their junior year of high school. Five participants searched for colleges and made their decisions during their senior year. Only two participants made their college choices during their junior year. The rest (18) chose UM during their senior year. Timeline information for the development of participants' consideration sets and college choices are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Timeline Information for Consideration Set Development and College Choice

Pseudonym	Year Began Search	Decision to Attend UM
Alex	Junior	Senior
Alicia	Senior	Senior
Amy	Senior	Senior
Bo	Sophomore	Senior
Brian	Senior	Senior
Carley	Junior	Junior
Corbin	Junior	Senior
Derrick	Junior	Senior
Emily	Senior	Senior
Hope	Junior	Senior
Jane	Senior	Senior
Justin	Junior	Senior
K.J.	Junior	Senior
Keely	Junior	Senior

Pseudonym	Year Began Search	Decision to Attend UM
Maddie	Junior	Senior
Mary Grant	Sophomore	Junior
Matt	Junior	Senior
Mitch	Sophomore	Senior
Preston	Junior	Senior
Stephanie	Junior	Senior

Participants were asked questions about why they thought of UM as a potential college to visit and how they went about identifying colleges to consider attending. They identified the following categories of factors in developing their consideration sets, or lists of institutions that they considered attending: academics (majors and programs offered), costs and financial aid, activities and athletics, campus attributes (size, location, and appearance), people (family, friends, campus community and vibe), college counselors, recruitment efforts by admissions, university image, and fit. In identifying athletic factors, three participants specifically mentioned the SEC.

In discussing their college choice processes, some of the participants indicated which schools were in their consideration and choice sets. The schools in their consideration sets ranged widely. Schools in the SEC were listed by multiple participants. Six participants included Mississippi State University, the second-largest institution in the state and a member of the SEC. Two participants considered multiple Texas schools. One participant considered several California schools. Two participants listed area community colleges.

Participants' choice sets ranged widely in size from one school to fifteen schools. The following are schools students specified as part of their choice sets (in addition to the University of Mississippi): Auburn University, California State University, Itawamba Community College,

John Jay University, Louisiana State University, Mississippi Delta Community College, Mississippi State University, San Diego State University, University of Arkansas, University of Georgia, University of Tampa, and University of Tennessee. The wide range of schools in participants' choice sets is illustrative of the fact that the University of Mississippi competes for students within a diverse group of higher education options.

For the majority of the participants, university image was a positive influence on their college choices. Alex and Maddie shared that they were hesitant at first to choose UM due to Alex's image of the university as a "lower-tier school" and Maddie's consideration of other's images of UM as a "party school." Maddie shared:

> Well, okay…with the party school reputation that Ole Miss gets sometimes, my older family members were like, "Why do you want to go there?" And so I was…I didn't really know how to answer that question because I knew what they meant by…I didn't want them to think of me as someone that wants to go to this party school. But then I was like well, it's just a place that I know that I'll like feel welcomed at.

Bo and Jane said that their images of the university had no influence on their decisions to attend as their decisions were based on the university's proximity to their homes. Stephanie's image of UM had no influence on her decision. For Brian and Derrick, university image had little influence on their decisions to attend.

Interview participants were next asked to identify other influences that shaped their college choice process. Nineteen participants listed at least one additional influence. Some identified people, some identified institutional factors, and some identified both. In Table 4, the influences of university image and college choice as well as specific influencing factors in each

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area are listed. Influencers in participants' decision-making processes, including family, friends, and campus community and vibe as well as additional influences described by participants are also included.

Table 4

Influences & Influencers in Participants' College Choices

Pseudonym	University Image Influence & Factors	Campus Visit Influence & Factors	Influencers	Other Influence(s)
Alex	Made hesitant at first	Positive influence Still a bit hesitant after	Family	Costs/Financial Aid
Alicia	Positive influence	Positive influence People		Opportunities
Amy	Positive influence Social Media People	Positive influence People Campus attributes	Friends	
Bo	No influence	No influence Decided to attend prior		Costs/Financial Aid Location
Brian	Little to no influence	Positive influence		Location
Carley	Positive influence People	Positive influence	Friends	Location
Corbin	Positive influence History People Athletics	Positive influence	Friends Family	
Derrick	Little influence	Positive influence People	Mother	Costs/Financial Aid
Emily	Positive influence	Positive influence	Friends	
Hope	Positive influence	Deciding factor	Family	

Pseudonym	University Image Influence & Factors	Campus Visit Influence & Factors	Influencers	Other Influence(s)
Jane	No influence	No influence Decided to attend prior	Mother	Location
Justin	Positive influence Good reputation	No influence Decided to attend prior		Recruitment efforts
K.J.	Positive influence People	Positive influence People	Family	Diversity
Keely	Positive influence Diversity	Positive influence People	Friends	Location
Maddie	Hesitant at first	Positive influence	Family	Location
Mary Grant	Positive influence People	Positive influence		Fit
Matt	Positive influence	Deciding factor People	Father	Campus attributes
Mitch	Positive influence People	Deciding factor	Father Friends Family	Athletics Campus attributes
Preston	Positive influence	Deciding factor	Family	Student activities
Stephanie	No influence	Positive influence		

Reflections on their decisions to attend UM.

Of the 20 research participants, 17 are happy with their choices to attend UM, and three (Bo, Jane, and Stephanie) are satisfied with their choices. Bo thinks UM was a good choice for him, but he is regretful about choosing to live at home rather than on campus. He offered this advice for future students: "Go full-fledged. Don't hold back whatsoever. Get out there; get involved. There's plenty of opportunities. I just didn't take them. Stay in a dorm. Do not stay at home. I learned that…" Jane thinks that UM was "the best choice just because it's so close to home." Stephanie feels that she made the "right decision."

Alicia is "very happy with [her] decision to attend Ole Miss." "I couldn't see myself happier somewhere else, and, yeah, I would recommend it to anybody. My little sister's actually coming here this weekend, so…" For Amy, challenges in the first two weeks of school had her second-guessing her decision, but she is now happy with her choice. Corbin reflected on his choice by sharing:

Honestly, I don't think I've made a better decision in my life besides coming here. I believe this place has really flipped me around from the person I was back home. And honestly, if there's anything like I could do, just thank what this experience has gave to me.

Hope shared these thoughts about her decision:

I'm glad that I attended Ole Miss because it's now making me grow into something I want to be. Since my major is theater arts, I'm getting involved in acting, stage lighting, set up design, and all that stuff. So it's a great choice for me.

K.J. feels like choosing to attend UM is the "best decision [she] made…" Matt shared this about his decision: "It's the best decision I've ever made. Hands down, spare for my faith. I can't point to another decision that I've ever made and said, 'I did that right.'"

Analytic Themes.

Three themes emerged in analyzing the data: college choice influences, college choice influencers, and students' feelings. While the interview questions and topics varied, participants consistently wove these themes throughout their answers. The college choice influences theme looks at the factors in participants' decisions to attend UM and includes university image, campus visit, and institutional factors. The college choice influencers theme describes the ways

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in which others impacted participants' college choices. In the theme of students' feelings, examples of how students feel about various aspects of the university and their experiences with it are given. The following feelings are included: feeling welcome, familial feeling, feeling at home, falling in love with UM, feeling of being part of a small community at a big school, and feeling of being in a diverse and inclusive environment. Keyword searches and document analysis resulted in a list of keywords, phrases, and ideas expressed by participants. This list clarifies the data and is useful in illustrating the analytic themes. The list is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

List of Keywords, Phrases, and Ideas Expressed during Interviews

Numbers represent the number of times each keyword, phrase, or idea was mentioned by the participant.

Pseudonym	welcome welcoming	family	home	fell in love	big school with small feel	diverse	inclusive	racist racism
Alex								
Alicia		4		1	1			
Amy	1		2	1			3	
Bo								
Brian							1	
Carley	2	3	5	1	1			
Corbin	1			1		3		4
Derrick							3	1
Emily	2		1					
Hope	1		3				2	3
Jane								1
Justin	1		1		1			1
K.J.	1		3			1	2	3
Keely	7		1		1			
Maddie	3		1		1	2		

Pseudonym	welcome welcoming	family	home	fell in love	big school with small feel	diverse	inclusive	racist racism
Mary Grant	3		1				1	1
Matt	1			4	1			
Mitch	2	1		1	1			
Preston	1			1	1			
Stephanie			1					4

College choice influences.

College choice influences include university image, the campus visit, and institutional factors. Institutional factors discussed by participants included costs and financial aid, academics, location, recruitment efforts by the Office of Admissions, diversity, campus attributes, athletics, and student activities. Institutional factors, along with the influences of university image, and campus visits are shown in Table 4.

Analysis of the data collected on participants' college choices reveals that for a majority of participants (15) the image that they held of UM positively influenced their decisions to attend. Several participants discussed specific aspects of their images of the university that influenced their college choice processes. Justin described the value of UM's reputation in his image of the school. "This is a school that a lot of people know. This will be good for me personally if I attend here." Keely described the value of diversity in the image that she holds of UM. "So Ole Miss is the prettiest for sure, most welcoming, and basically you have a very good…when you see everyone you don't see the same kind of thing. It's a very diverse university."

When asked how their campus visits impacted the images that they hold of UM, the majority of participants indicated that their visits positively influenced their images. Four of the participants (Alex, Brian, Derrick, and Hope) felt that their images improved as a result of their visits. During her visit, K.J. saw that she "can really pursue my dreams here." Derrick saw that UM was different than the negative images that some others hold, and Hope saw that UM was "not racist." The images that Jane and Mary Grant hold were not influenced by their visits due to their previous experiences on campus.

Participants were asked how their campus visits affected their decision-making processes. For Bo, Jane, and Justin, their campus visits had no impact on their college choices; they had chosen to attend UM prior to visiting. Alex was still a bit hesitant to choose UM after his campus visit but said that the visit was a positive influence on his decision. For the rest of the participants (16), the campus visit was also a positive influence on their college choices. Amy shared this about the impact of her campus visit:

> I came here and I was like dead set on being like, "Oh, I'm going to UT. I'm just here to make my mom happy," and, instead, I was like "Oh, love the people, love the campus. I feel at home. I think I might want to go here."

Derrick shared this about the influence of his campus visit:

> It helped it. It improved it. The campus visit really improved it. Like I said, I came here with a clear mindset. There were no minuses, were no plusses, but it could have went either way with that visit. So it just added. It just helped. Positive, it was positive vibes all around, so I liked it.

For Hope, Matt, Mitch, and Preston, the campus visit was a deciding factor in their decisions to attend the university. Hope felt that her visit "really just put the icing on the cake…" Matt shared this about his campus visit:

My campus visit was probably the most influential thing in my process. I looked around campus. I did a bunch of research on my own. I knew everything they were telling me when I was on the visit. But you can't get those experiences from a website.

Mitch's visit "had a lot to do with [his college choice]," and Preston's visit "solidified" his choice.

When prompted to describe the campus appearance during their visits, the word beautiful was very frequently used. Other words used multiple times were clean, green and open. Corbin described the campus appearance this way:

Oh, it was gorgeous. Right as we got on campus, I was just in awe. And I was just staring at the Grove, and my dad was telling me about how it was designed by the same people that made Central Park and that just amazed me.

Alicia recognized the myriad opportunities available to her at the university.

Table 6 lists keywords and phrases from participants' descriptions of their visits.

Table 6

Keywords and Phrases from Participants' Campus Visit Descriptions

Pseudonym	Purpose of Visit	General	Campus Appearance	Campus Community/ Vibe	Interactions with People
Alex	Learn more	Good Didn't see much	Nice	Good	Friendly
Alicia	Assess vibe Assess appearance	15 min to fall in love	Beautiful	Kind Home	Positive
Amy	Satisfy mom	Interesting Tour Guide Tour Group	Beautiful Open space Green	Inclusive Friendly Open Tour Guide	Welcoming
Bo	Learn more	Very good Saw friends	Clean Green Construction	Professional	Nice
Brian	Learn more	Well done Tour guide	Nice	Friendly	Everyone speaks
Carley	Learn more Assess vibe	Short Not in-depth	Beautiful	Welcoming Everyone speaks Smiling Family	Everyone speaks Selling UM (positive)
Corbin	Learn more Assess appearance	Weather Learned about UM	Beautiful	Welcoming Everyone speaks	Everyone speaks
Derrick	Assess fit Interact with people	Great Tour Guide	Beautiful	No hate Helpful	Everyone speaks Cool people
Emily	Assess vibe Assess appearance	Enjoyable Weather	Green	Welcoming	Kind Helpful Generous
Hope	Learn more	10 out of 10	Beautiful	Helpful	Nothing major
Jane	Satisfy mom	Tour guide Wasn't anything special	Good	Pretty good	Very minimal

Pseudonym	Purpose of Visit	General	Campus Appearance	Campus Community/ Vibe	Interactions with People
Justin	Learn more	Very nice Friendly people Informative	Beautiful Open space	Open space Smiling Everyone speaks	Tour guide Open Nice
K.J.	Learn more	Fun Good Tour Guide	Beautiful Clean	Fun Exciting	Everyone speaks
Keely	Learn more	Very welcoming	Beautiful	Home Welcoming Big college/ small feel Southern	
Maddie	Assess fit	Good Tour Guide	Beautiful	Kind Smiling Welcoming	Smiling Tour Guide Kind
Mary Grant	Assess fit	Pretty nice	Beautiful	Nice Welcoming	Friendly Everyone speaks
Matt	Assess fit	Fell in love immediately Magical Weather	Beautiful	Feel like a part of community	Tour guide
Mitch	Something to do during the day (here for football game)	Weather Learned about UM	Beautiful	Family Friendly Southern hospitality Smiling	Friendly
Preston	Assess vibe	Amazing Beautiful campus Didn't tour another after	Beautiful Historic Construction	Friendly Open Southern hospitality Respectable Welcoming	Friendly
Stephanie	Assess fit	Wonderful Tour Guide	Huge	Home Everyone speaks	

In addition to their images of the university and campus visits, participants listed other factors that impacted their decisions to attend the university. Multiple students listed institutional factors that influenced their decisions. Three participants identified costs and/or financial aid as influential in their decisions. Preston listed student activities, and Mitch listed athletics as influences on their decisions to attend UM. For Bo, Brian, Carley, Keely, Jane, and Maddie, location was an influential factor. Maddie wanted to be far away from home but "not crazy far away," so she liked the location of UM. Brian wanted to be far away from his family, who live on the west coast. Bo lives at home to save money, and Jane helps take care of family pets. Two students listed campus attributes as influences. Justin was influenced by the recruitment efforts of the Office of Admissions:

> Other than sending me a letter saying that they'd like me to apply, they've sent me postcards and just generally nice things that didn't even mention applying for college. As if they were just trying to show me how nice everyone here already was before I even decided to attend.

K.J. valued the diversity of the campus community in her decision to attend UM. Matt was influenced by the pedestrian aspect of campus and encouraged to attend by his father. Mary Grant determined that UM was a good fit: "I just think since I came up here so much before, it was just normal for me to be up here. So it felt like home." Alicia was influenced by the opportunities available to her at UM, and Mary Grant felt that the university was the right fit for her.

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College choice influencers.

Participants shared throughout their interviews that many people – from people they encountered during their visits to campus to family members – influenced their college choice processes. When asked about additional influences on their college choices, 14 participants listed either family or friends or both. The people identified by the participants as influential in their decisions include friends and family members who are alumni, current students, and fans; some participants named a parent.

Hope was encouraged to attend by her cousins, who are alumni. Family friends who are alumni greatly influenced Amy's decision:

> They met here. They married here. They're my brother's godparents…oh, anytime there's an Ole Miss game it's like, "Oh, you're coming over to watch it."

> …The second they figured out I was liking Ole Miss, they were sending me stuff and they were like, "Oh, like this happened this year, and it was the coolest thing. My frat brothers were die-hard. We did the coolest things." Then his wife was like, "Yeah, my sorority was great. I'm still best friends with all of them. We go to lunch all the time." And I'm like "Oh, wow! Y'all are still invested in the college. It must be great if y'all are still loving it 30 years later!"

An alumni friend encouraged Emily to attend UM. Mitch was encouraged by his cousin and other friends to attend. Mitch's father, an alumnus of a college in Minnesota, encouraged him to attend because children of his friends also attend UM and, according to Mitch, "…he was thinking about all the guys trips that he could have coming here." A resident of Texas, Carley wanted to attend a college out of state, and an alumna who is a family friend encouraged her to

attend UM. Keely's best friend and future roommate influenced her decision. Maddie's mother and sister are alumnae and encouraged her to attend. Corbin had friends who were current students who, along with his parents, encouraged him to attend. Derrick was encouraged to attend by his mother, who is a university employee, because he could receive a scholarship for children of employees. Alex's parents encouraged him to choose UM because of the scholarships that he would receive. Preston looked forward to following in his mother's footsteps by attending.

When describing the influence of university image, multiple participants identified people as the most influential aspect of the images that they hold. Carley shared:

I just like how it kind of feels like a tightknit family here. Although the campus is pretty and like Oxford is like a good college town, too, it was honestly more about the people I was going to meet here and if I knew I can hold onto those like relationships for a long time and I already feel like that here now.

For Corbin, the people are an important aspect of the image that he holds of the university. "Honestly, I've always just wanted to come here. And I love the history behind everything, and just really the sense of community that I've always felt growing up, going to games here." Amy shared that social media and UM people were aspects of university image that influenced her choice process:

And so mainly I started looking at it, and I looked at your Instagram, and I watched YouTube videos of games and talked to people who had been here. They told me like, "Yeah, it's kind of crazy at times, but, overall, it's a great inclusive community where people get really close, and you find your best friends here, and you just love the

college." And that's why most people who come here ended up being diehard fans in their sixties and coming back for tailgates.

Interactions with people on campus were the most influential aspect of K.J.'s image of UM. "I did the campus visit, and I made calls with the given departments and stuff. They gave me information that was really helpful. I said, "Wow! This is where I want to be.""

When asked about the influence of their campus visits on their college choices, six of the participants described the impact of the people they encountered during their visits on the quality of their visits, which positively influenced their college choices. Responses by participants when specifically asked about campus community and vibe as well as interactions with people overlapped frequently, indicating that the participants considered those ideas to be overlapping and/or interchangeable. All of the participants positively described the interpersonal aspects of their visits. Discussions about how people frequently speak to visitors and each other and smile and wave emerged in most interviews. Mary Grant shared this: "Everybody was really nice and welcoming and we would walk and see people and they would just say, 'Hey,' you know, like that." Of the campus community and vibe, Mitch said:

It just felt like a family really. Everyone was like so friendly. This was actually the first campus I visited in the South, too, so I wasn't really knowing that Southern hospitality was really a thing. Everywhere I was walking, people were smiling at me.

When asked to describe her campus visit, Carley said:

When I came here people always smiled at us. Like as a tour group it was like "Hotty Toddy!" and just like if…For example, my tour guide, she saw a friend. Her friend

would say "hi" to her and everyone just looked nice here. You could tell that they liked to be here and stuff and they loved the college.

"Everyone speaks" is embraced as tradition at UM and has been used in the past as a university slogan. Many participants described the people as welcoming and friendly. Corbin said

Honestly, it felt extremely welcoming just because back home in California, not everyone's really open to talk to everyone. And it just felt like people were like willing to just come up to you and say "hi" or just have a conversation with you. Honestly, it was just a crazy experience just to like actually have people talk to you, even if they don't know you or have never seen you in your life.

Seven participants specifically mentioned how the tour guide (Ole Miss Ambassador) positively influenced their visits. Amy shared this about the Ambassador who led her tour:

She was very nice and was like…it made the tour seem more personal because she was like showing us like really cool tricks. Not just, "Oh, this is this building. This is this building." Instead, it was like, "Oh, this building has like the best seats," and it just felt more personal.

Keely emphasized the impact that the Ole Miss Ambassador who led her campus tour had on her visit: "I was just considering the school, so he definitely dragged me in. He was good. He did good." Matt's tour was similarly impacted by the Ole Miss Ambassador who led the tour: "…the experiences of a student who had fallen in love with the university is what really made me fall in love with it."

Interactions with people positively influenced Mitch's campus visit and his image of the university: "It definitely played a big part in it, just how, well, welcomed I felt here. That's probably what led me to it…is the image that I got after coming here, especially."

Two students expressed hesitation in choosing UM because of others' negative images of the university as "lower-tier" and a "party school." Multiple other participants acknowledged other's negative images of UM and how they did not allow those images to impact their images of UM. One participant described others' negative images of UM due to recent football performance. Eight participants described others' negative images of UM as a community of racists. In multiple cases, those with negative images of UM unsuccessfully attempted to influence the participants' college choices.

Students' Feelings.

Throughout the interviews, participants described the value of their feelings in relation to university image, the feelings they experienced during campus visits, and the feelings they experienced in their college choice processes. Thirteen of the participants mentioned feeling welcome at UM a total of 26 times. Feeling like part of a family was discussed by three participants. Mary said, "It was just how welcoming it felt. Because, you know, whenever people are like, 'Oh, you'll know.' I just knew." Carley shared this about the change in her image of the university:

> I'm like a part of the Ole Miss family now. I feel like I'm a part of something. I really
> like it. I've made so many friends here, and just like I've connected with both the
> students and the professors, too…everyone's just like willing to lend a hand and stuff.

Maddie said, "I mean, everyone was really kind and really…Every person you saw would kind of smile or wave and so I just felt welcomed…"

Half of the participants (10) described feeling at home at the university. Stephanie said, "Yeah, I feel like I was at home. Everybody was nice and everybody greeted you as you passed, and so that was nice…" About the effect of her campus visit on her decision-making process, Alicia shared, "Basically just being a part of the community and having people make me feel at home was pretty much what sold me."

Seven of the participants described falling in love with UM, implying that they experienced emotions toward the university that mimic some of the emotions that humans experience when they fall in romantic love (e.g. hopefulness, excitement, anticipation). According to Alicia, "A lot of people say that it takes 15 minutes for a student to fall in love with Ole Miss. And I would definitely say that's what happened with me, so…" Matt also described falling in love with UM during his visit: "I fell in love immediately. I really did. I mean, to say magical would be corny, but that's exactly…what it was."

Eight participants feel like part of a small community although they attend a large university. Three participants described feeling like part of a diverse community, and six described a feeling of inclusivity at UM. Mary Grant likes that at UM "everybody can just be themselves and no one really cares." Of the eight students who described others' negative images of the university, four described the university as feeling diverse or inclusive.

Summary

While participants' experiences and perceptions varied, they shared a common result of their college choice processes – choosing to attend the University of Mississippi. All

participants were certain that they had made good decisions for themselves in choosing to attend. The participant group was diverse in gender, race, residency, and major, but there were commonalities in their experiences, perceptions, and college choice processes. The content of participant's responses illustrates overlap in the factors that influence students' university images, their perceptions of campus visits, and their college choice processes. In each of those areas, students identified influences, influencers, and feelings; the extent to which each impacted participants' images, visits, and college choices varied by individual.

Most of the participants shared that their images of the university were positively influenced by their campus visits. For the majority, their images of the university were of great value as those images positively influenced their college choice decisions. Further, the majority of participants placed great value on their campus visits, which they described as positively influencing their decisions. Most of the participants were influenced by institutional factors in addition to the images that they hold of the university and their campus visits. Most participants were also influenced by people, including those they interacted with on their campus visits, other members of the UM community, and non-stakeholders. Participants were also influenced by the feelings they experienced during their campus visits and their feelings about the university. The participants in this study who were faced with others' negative images of the university did not allow those images to impact their own or their college choice decisions. Limiting participants to this small but strategically-selected group allowed for in-depth examination of their experiences, perceptions, and choices and provides valuable information on the university images, campus visits, and college choices of freshmen at the University of Mississippi.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide exploratory research on the intersections of campus visits, university image, and college choice and, more specifically, to examine the influences of university image and campus visits on students' college choices. In conducting this phenomenological study, I interviewed current first-year freshmen at the University of Mississippi in order to gain an understanding of their experiences, their perceptions, and the value that they place on their individual university images and campus visits in their decisions to attend the university. I sought to answer this research question: How do students describe the value of university image and the campus visit in their decisions to attend the University of Mississippi? This chapter contains a summary of findings, discussion, implications for the University of Mississippi, implications for higher education, and suggestions for future research.

Interview participants included first-year matriculated freshman who participated in a campus visit as prospective students and who applied during the months of October through April. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling that included both purposeful random sampling and maximum variation sampling. Participants included 20 UM students, of whom 11 (55%) are female and nine (45%) are male. Half of the participants are Mississippi residents, and the remaining half are from other states in the U.S. Fifteen of the participants

identify racially as White (75%), four identify as Black or African-American (20%), and one identifies as Hispanic or Latino (5%).

Most participants provided a wealth of information during their interviews. From the data collected during the interviews, thick, rich case studies were developed to illustrate students' experiences, perceptions, and college choice processes. Additional data organized by topic was also developed and presented. Inductive analysis and creative synthesis were used to analyze the data and develop research findings, discussion of the study, and study implications. The results of this study are strengthened by methodological and theory triangulation.

Summary of Findings

Participants' experiences and perceptions varied, but their college choice processes all ended with the decision to attend the University of Mississippi. All participants expressed their satisfaction or happiness with their decisions to attend. While participant characteristics varied across gender, race, residency, and major, there were also commonalities in their experiences, perceptions, and college choice processes. The overlap in the factors of students' university images, their campus visits, and their college choice processes are evident in participants' responses. Participants identified influences, influencers, and feelings as factors in university image, campus visits, and college choice. The extent to which each factor impacted each participant's image, visit, and college choice varied.

Analytic themes identified in this study are college choice influences, college choice influencers, and students' feelings. College choice influences include university image, campus visits, and institutional factors that impacted participants' college choices. The majority of participants indicated that their images of the university were positively influenced by their

campus visits. The university images that they held were of great value as those images positively influenced their college choice decisions. Additionally, great value was placed on campus visits by the majority of participants as they described their visits as positively influencing their decisions. Most participants described the influence of institutional factors in their college choice processes. College choice influencers include the people, both those affiliated with the university and those who are not, who impacted participants' college choices. Participants were influenced by people they interacted with on their campus visits, other members of the UM community, and non-stakeholders in their college choice processes. The participants in this study who were faced with others' negative images of the university did not allow those images to impact their own or their college choice decisions. Feelings about the university, feelings experienced during their campus visits, and feelings experienced during their college choice processes were influential as well.

College choice influences.

For a majority of participants (15), the image that they held of UM positively influenced their decisions to attend. Thirteen participants indicated that their decisions were positively influenced by their experiences during their visits. Underscoring the importance of their campus visits, four participants indicated that the campus visit was a determining factor in their decisions to attend the university. Participants were influenced to attend UM by other factors as well, listing institutional factors including costs and financial aid, student activities, athletics, location, and campus attributes as influential in their decisions to attend.

College choice influencers.

Participants were influenced by a wide array of people in their college choice decisions. Influencers included UM people (faculty, staff, students, alumni, and fans) encountered during campus visits and at other times who influenced six participants' images of the university and, in turn, their decisions to attend. Further, six participants described the impact of people they encountered on the quality of their campus visits, which positively influenced their college choices.

Fourteen participants listed family, friends, or a combination of both as being influential on their decisions to attend the university. Friends described by the participants included current students, alumni, and fans. The family members that participants listed included parents and other family members, some of whom are alumni, fans, or current students. Negative images of the university held by friends and family were described by multiple participants but caused only two participants hesitation in their decisions to attend.

Students' Feelings.

Participants' feelings were a central part of descriptions of their university images, campus visits, and college choice processes. Feeling welcome at UM was experienced by a majority of the participants (13). Feeling like part of a family is how three participants described membership in the UM community. Ten of the participants described feeling at home at the university. Seven of the participants described falling in love with UM.

The UM community feels small although it is large to eight participants. Nine participants feel they are a part of a diverse and/or inclusive community. Four of the eight

students who described others' negative images of UM described the university as feeling diverse or inclusive.

Discussion

This study was delimited to matriculated first-year students at the University of Mississippi who participated in campus visits with the Office of Admissions as prospective students and who applied for admission in the months of October through April. Findings are transferrable to institutions with students who possess similar backgrounds and characteristics and with similar institutional cultures. The findings of this study align somewhat with the literature on university image, campus visits, and college choice and also provide an updated view of those frameworks as current students develop university images, participate in campus visits, and make decisions about which colleges to attend.

Prior research on university image is very limited. Arpan et al. (2003) found that three factors significantly predicted the image of universities: academic factors, athletic factors, and news coverage. In this study, social media coverage was added to the news coverage factor to reflect current information trends. Participants were also asked about the influence of UM's history on their images of the university. Athletics, academics, and news and social media coverage factored into participants' images of UM to varying degrees, with athletics and academics being the most influential of those factors. The history of the university was not largely influential on students' images of the university. The vast majority of participants hold positive images of the university, and most of the participants have developed improved images of the university since starting the academic year. Prior to being asked specifically about the aforementioned factors, participants' initial descriptions of the images that they hold of the university were centered on people and feelings. This study contributes to the limited body of

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research on university image by demonstrating the influence of people and students' feelings on their images of the university. The results align with the finding of multiple researchers that university image plays a critical role in the process of college choice (Han, 2014, p. 122; Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry, & Kelly, 2008, p. 97; Morse, 2011; Kotler & Fox, 1985, as cited in Hossler et al., 1989, p. 243; Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011, as cited in Merchant, Rose, Moody, & Mathews, 2014, p. 26; Stevens, McConkey, Cole, and Clow, 2008, p. 100). Multiple participants in the study shared their knowledge of others' negative images of the university as a community of racists, as a party school, and as a lower-tier school academically; those others included taxpayers in the state of Mississippi as well as non-stakeholders. The students in this study chose to attend the university regardless of the feelings of the people in their lives who have negative images of the university. There is no way to easily estimate how many potential students may have chosen to listen to those with negative images of UM and choose to attend other institutions.

Research that analyzes how students perceive campus visits and which elements of those visits matter most as students make college choices has not been widely available. This study fills in some of that gap by providing data about specific elements and students' perceptions of the campus visit. The most frequently listed purposes for participants' campus visits were learn more, assess vibe, assess fit, assess appearance, and interact with people. The findings of this study align somewhat with Okerson's (2016) findings that campus appearance, the campus community/vibe, and interactions with people are the most influential aspects of the campus visit in students' college choices in that participants placed great value on the people aspect (community/vibe and interactions with people) in their college choice decisions.

The findings of this study align with D. Chapman's (1981) finding that both student characteristics and institutional characteristics influence students' decisions and supports Paulsen's (1990) assertion that student characteristics interacting with institutional characteristics determine students' college choices (as cited in Han, 2014). Furakawa (2011) determined that 10 factors influence students' college choices the most: family, peers, school counselors, rankings, institutional communication, institutional fit, institutional characteristics, selectivity, institutional actions, and additional influences (as cited in Okerson, 2016, p. 45). Stephenson and Yerger (2016) found that students have these reasons for selecting an institution: "major, price, visits, perceptions of relevant others, size, and location, as well as campus environmental factors" (p. 497). The findings of this study demonstrate the relevance of campus visits, university image, institutional factors, people (influencers), and students' feelings in their college choices. The findings of this study do not support findings in Okerson's (2016) study that school counselors, rankings, and selectivity influence students' decisions. It is important to note that the University of Mississippi has a high acceptance rate of nearly 80%, so it is understood that selectivity would not have likely been a factor in participants' college choices.

Only four of the 20 participants consider their campus visits as a deciding factor in their college choice processes. While the campus visit was a positive influence for the majority of participants, the findings of this study challenge the finding of multiple scholars (Brown, 2010; Cohen, 2009; Greenough, 2003; Hesel, 2004; Hoover, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Kuh, 2009; Magolda, 2000; Swan, 1998; Yost & Tucker, 1995 as cited in Okerson, 2016) that the campus visit is consistently the most influential factor in students' college choices.

Interestingly, none of the interview participants listed Greek life as a factor in the development of their consideration sets or in their decisions to attend the university. In the

unpublished qualitative study I previously conducted—McClure 2017b—Greek life was a factor in students' college choice processes. The university has a very active and nationally-known Greek system, with approximately 40% of undergraduate students belonging to sororities or fraternities. Multiple participants in this study are members of Greek-letter organizations. Other factors given by students in the aforementioned study I conducted previously (McClure 2017b) included safety and student housing, which also were not consideration set or college choice factors given by students in this study.

Another interesting finding of this study is that social media was not described by students as a source of information or influence in developing their consideration sets or choosing which college to attend. Institutions are spending increasing amounts to reach students via social media in the hopes of meeting students where they are, but the results of this study suggest that students may not wish to receive college-search-related information that way or are not interested in engaging with schools on social media.

This study answers the research question by illustrating through their own words the great value that students place on university image and their campus visits when deciding where to attend college. The analytic themes that emerged in this study illustrate the overlap of the frameworks of university image, campus visits, and college choice. University image, campus visits, and institutional factors (influences); members of the UM community and other people (influencers); and students' feelings are factors in university image, campus visits, and students' college choices.

Implications for the University of Mississippi

This study provides administrators and admissions professionals at the University of Mississippi with a current view of the perceptions and experiences of first-year freshmen. Hossler, et al. (1989) emphasize the importance of the opportunity to view the institution through a "reverse lens," stating that "this ability to see oneself through students' eyes could be used to recruit prospective students who are more likely to find that the institution meets their expectations" (p. 281). The findings provide valuable insight into students' images of the university, how they experience campus visits, and how they make their college choices. Further, the study illustrates the value that students place on university image and campus visits when making their decisions to attend the university.

While it is impossible to control the images that students and influential others have of the university, administrators can and should implement marketing strategies aimed at shaping positive images. Research has shown that image is a major component of an institution's competitive advantage (Hayes, 1993 as cited in Stevens et al., 2008, p. 102; Chapleo, 2011 as cited in Merchant et al., 2014, p. 26; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2008 as cited in Merchant, et al., 2014, p. 26). Further, university image is critical to recruitment success, and research has shown that image is a critical component in student retention (Fielder, Hilton, & Motes, 1993, as cited in Landrum, Turrisi, & Harless, 1999). The positive influences on images discussed by participants in the study, which include the feeling of being in a small community at a big school, Southern hospitality, diversity, open-mindedness, civility, home, inclusivity, opportunities, and respectability, provide suggestions for institutional factors that can be used to position the institution in the minds of prospective students, stakeholders, and others. The other institutional factors to which students respond positively (academics, athletics, campus aesthetics, and

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campus community) should be additional foci in developing marketing strategies. Emphasizing unique institutional aspects such as the small school feel within a big school, the culture of everyone speaks, and the university's widely-known football tailgating traditions would allow the university to develop a competitive advantage in the recruitment of students and differentiate itself from other institutions.

The findings of this study suggest that the people of UM (faculty, staff, students, alumni, and fans) are the institution's greatest resource. Prospective students' images, campus visits, and college choices are heavily impacted by their interactions and relationships with the people of UM. The consistency of the negative images held by some residents of Mississippi and others illustrate the ongoing need to implement strategies that shape the images of those outside of the university community. The findings of this study reveal an opportunity to combat negative images held by people with little or no experience with the university—get them to campus or take members of the university campus to them. If they sense the community and vibe and interact with people, their negative images may improve. Work in this area may be time-consuming and costly but constitutes a worthwhile undertaking that could result in community-building and providing opportunities for taxpayer stakeholders and prospective students to see the value in pursuing higher education in the state of Mississippi so that they remain in the state, contributing to economic improvement in Mississippi and building the university's legacy. Further, administrators should seize all available opportunities to attract positive attention and media coverage.

The findings in this study show that campus visits provide prospective students with experiences that are generally positive. Students place value on the campus visit experience, and it is a deciding factor for some. There are commonalities to students' purposes for campus visits,

but the variations in purposes provide opportunities to individualize students' campus visits to the extent that is possible. Gathering data on what students are looking to see and learn during their visits could inform strategies for individualizing components of the campus visit. The search process in students' college choices gives institutions the greatest opportunity to influence students' choices (Hossler & Gallagher,1987, p. 209).

In applying for admission, participants in the study used both the UM application for admission and the Common Application. This finding supports maintaining the availability of the Common Application to prospective students. The majority of the participants in this study began their college searches as high school juniors and made their choices as seniors. This finding could be used to inform the timing of recruitment strategies. It is important to keep in mind that the availability of the Common Application increases the number and variety of institutions with whom UM must compete for students. While the university's strongest competitors have historically been other institutions in the state of Mississippi and those in the SEC, UM can now consider itself a competitor with most institutions in the U.S.

In searching for colleges to attend, participants identified the following factors: academics, costs and financial aid, activities and athletics, campus attributes (appearance, size, location), people, college counselors, recruitment efforts by admissions, university image, and student-institution fit. Knowledge of the criteria used by students in their searches is valuable in connecting with prospective students. Collecting data on students' decision factors as they enter the prospective student funnel could allow administrators to individualize communications to better inform students' college choice processes.

When reflecting on their decisions to attend, a great majority of the participants in the study were happy with their decisions. The others were satisfied with their choices. In the

development of their images of the university, during their campus visit experiences, and during

their college choice processes, the participants were influenced by people with positive feelings

toward the university. This is in line with a central concept in the marketing profession: "The

best advertising is done by your satisfied customers" (Kotler, 2003, p. 3). Partnering with happy

stakeholders, both formally and informally, to recruit students and to influence the images

individuals hold of the university could produce positive results in not only student recruitment

but also in other areas such as athletics fanship and alumni giving. Treating stakeholders as

customers is controversial in higher education but is proving to be an increasingly valuable and

imperative approach as institutions have to compete for students in the era of decreased

governmental funding and myriad educational opportunities for students. Measuring student

satisfaction by evaluating what students expect from their university experiences and the extent

to which the university is meeting those expectations, which may vary widely between

individuals, may offer data to guide efforts in shaping the student experience in a way that

renders satisfaction or, better yet, delight, thereby increasing retention (Eddie, 2013; Kotler,

2003). In his study titled "Student Satisfaction and the Customer Focus in Higher Education,

Eddie (2013) stated, "At the centre of every education policy should be the question of how to

ensure the satisfaction of students. Just as satisfied customers are the indispensable part of a

successful business (Wright, 2008), satisfied students are crucial to the success of any institution

of higher learning" (p. 8).

Implications for Higher Education

The findings of this study offer additional knowledge in the areas of university image,

campus visits, and college choice that is valuable to administrators who are looking to achieve

enrollment success in the increasingly competitive and global higher education marketplace.

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The case studies in Chapter 4 paint a picture of the diverse group of students who make up our student bodies by sharing their perceptions and experiences in their own words. Understanding the current generation of students is critical in developing strategies to recruit students of their generation. Further, the results of this study can be of value as participants' perceptions and experiences will shape the involvement that they have as students, alumni, and, in most cases, parents in the college choice processes of others in the future. Understanding the current generation of college students will allow administrators to develop effective strategies to market to them as influencers in the future.

Evaluating factors in university image, campus visits, and college choice in the frameworks of influences, influencers, and students' feelings offers a new approach to higher education marketing wherein administrators can develop strategies to recruit students based on their needs and desires as well as influential others in their lives. In addition, with knowledge of feelings that influence students' perceptions and decisions, administrators can develop and implement strategies aimed at generating those positive feelings.

The strong influence of people and of students' feelings on their images of the university offers an updated view on the factors of image that are most important to students. The purposes for campus visits listed most frequently by participants (learn more, assess vibe, assess fit, assess appearance, and interact with people) provide an updated view of the campus visit and provide new insight into how that experience impacts the college choice process. The timelines of participants' search and choice processes and the experiences that they shared provide a current look at how and when students at a large public institution with a high acceptance rate move through the college choice process.

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Higher education administrators should take note of the importance participants in this study placed on people. Other people, including members of the UM community, taxpayers, and those outside the university, both influenced and attempted to influence students' decisions. The influences of others shaped students' images, campus visits, and college choices. Administrators should consider that student recruitment should perhaps not be entirely aimed at the prospective student but also include influencers in student's college choice processes. Satisfied members of the UM community (faculty, staff, students, alumni, and fans) are extremely valuable in the process of student recruitment. Further, developing positive images among taxpayers who contribute to public institutions can be beneficial in recruiting students.

The findings of this study illustrate the need to gather data on student's needs, desires, and preferences in order to not only segment the market for marketing strategy development and implementation but also develop data systems that allow for the delivery of both personalized communications, which are common in the higher education marketplace, and customized marketing solutions that include communications and campus visits. Consumers, especially those who have grown up in the digital age, have come to expect consumer experiences to conform to their individual needs, desires, and preferences. Data collection and management approaches that use artificial intelligence offer promise in allowing for the development of fully personalized customer experiences. Artificial intelligence is employed in the corporate world and yields results as an effective means of offering a high-quality customer experience that promotes customer engagement and enhances customer retention (Kumar, Rajan, Venkatesan, and Lecinski, 2019). When communications and experiences are fully personalized, a bond is created with consumers; that bond allows great potential for the creation of value in the minds of consumers (Kumar et al., 2019, p. 137). Further, the relevance of those consumers'

communications and experiences is greatly enhanced. 'Curation' is the term used by Kumar et al. (2019) to describe a strategy that focuses on practices that select, maintain, and manage information in ways that make that information accessible and easy to use in the future (p. 137). "In the context of personalized engagement marketing, curation refers to the automatic machine-driven selection of products, prices, website content, and advertising messages that fit with an individual customer's preferences" (Kumar et al., 2019, p. 138). Artificial intelligence has capabilities of generating fully personalized marketing approaches comprising exactly what prospective students want and need to see, hear, and experience in order to choose an institution and, further, maybe even a major, a residence hall, and student activities that meet their needs and desires.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this study begins to fill the gaps in literature in the areas of university image and campus visits, more research is needed in those areas. In addition, continued college choice research that considers the perceptions and experiences of current generations of prospective students will be of value. In order to reach and recruit prospective students, harnessing the power of positive university images and campus visits that offer positive and influential experiences is critical. Administrators must ensure that their strategies are current, timely, and aligned with students needs and desires.

The results of this study are transferable to institutions with similar cultures and similar student bodies. Additional research should be conducted to determine the commonalities and differences in students' perceptions, experiences, and decisions that exist across institution types, sizes, and locations in order to better understand how to attract this generation of students and how their perceptions and experiences may impact future generations of students. Collecting

longitudinal data on students' university images, campus visits, and college choices could be valuable in measuring how students' perceptions and satisfaction with their college choices change over time. The data could be used in developing strategies aimed at customer satisfaction that allow institutions to capitalize on satisfied customers, involving them in the recruitment of future students and increasing the likelihood that they support the institution as alumni.

In addition, timely research that looks at how and when prospective students engage with institutions on social media is needed. Institutions are increasing the use of social media and the importance that they place on it as a way to reach students via channels that they value. While most students use social media often, they may not be using it in the ways that administrators think they are. Data illustrating how prospective students are using social media would be valuable in developing marketing strategies that deliver results.

Lastly, research that explores how artificial intelligence may be used to inform and implement marketing strategies in higher education should be conducted. This technology has proven to offer long-term benefits to corporations in the area of customer experience and retention. The widespread use of artificial intelligence in the corporate world represents a paradigm shift in the field of marketing. It will likely become a valuable tool in student recruitment and institutional marketing in general.

Conclusion

In conducting this study, my goal was to contribute to the bodies of research on university image, campus visits, and college choice and explore the intersections of those frameworks. At this time, the bodies of research on university image and campus visits are limited; this study adds to existing knowledge in those areas. While college choice literature is

plentiful, this study offers a look at the college choice processes of students in 2019 and includes a focused view of how students at a large public institution in the South develop their images of the university, experience campus visits, and make decisions about which college to attend. Implications of this study are provided for the University of Mississippi and for institutions of higher education in general. Phenomenological research illustrating students' perceptions and experiences while considering the individuality of those perceptions and experiences provides valuable information in the areas of university image, campus visits, and college choice. In conducting this study, I further developed my knowledge of qualitative research as well as university image, campus visits, and college choice, and I learned more about the perceptions and experiences of the current generation of undergraduate students. I look forward to continuing my qualitative research in the areas of university image, campus visits, college choice as well as conducting research in the area of institution marketing.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Subject: Please Share Your Thoughts about Ole Miss

Hello, [FIRST NAME],

My name is Jennifer McClure. I'm a staff member in the Patterson School of Accountancy and a candidate for a doctor of philosophy degree in higher education.

I'm emailing because I'm conducting a research study for my dissertation that looks at university image, campus visits, and students' college decisions. As a student who participated in a campus visit through the Office of Admissions as a prospective student and applied for admission to the university between October and April, you qualify as an interview participant for my study.

If you are willing, I'd like to schedule a time to meet with you to learn about your campus visit and your decision to attend the university. Interviews will be scheduled for early evenings on weekdays and may last up to 45 minutes. In exchange for your time, I will provide you with your choice of a $25 Starbucks or Amazon gift card.

If you'd like to participate in my research study, please respond to this email with your availability from 5:15-8:00pm Monday-Thursday.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Appendix B

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

RELEASE

For valuable consideration, I do hereby authorize The University of Mississippi, its assignees, agents, employees, designees, and those acting pursuant to its authority ("UM") to:

a. Record my participation and appearance on video tape, audio tape, film, photograph or any other medium ("Recordings").
b. Use my name, likeness, voice and biographical material in connection with these recordings.
c. Exhibit, copy, reproduce, perform, display or distribute such Recordings (and to create derivative works from them) in whole or in part without restrictions or limitation in any format or medium for any purpose which The University of Mississippi, and those acting pursuant to its authority, deem appropriate.
d. I release UM from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of such Recordings including any claims for defamation, invasion of privacy, rights of publicity, or copyright.

Name: _____

Address:_____

Phone No.:_____

Signature:_____

Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18):_____

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

**Title: Examining the Influences of University Image and Campus Visits on Students'
College Choices**

Investigator
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*INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING ONLY IF YOU ARE COLLECTING DATA EXCLUSIVELY
FROM ADULTS By checking this box I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.*

☐

Description
In order to contribute to the limited body of research on the intersections of university image,
campus visits, and college choice, I will conduct a basic research study that utilizes naturalistic
inquiry to explore individuals' experiences and perceptions. I will collect data via open-ended
interviews with matriculated undergraduate students ages 18 and older at the University of
Mississippi who participated in campus visits through the Office of Admissions as prospective
students and who applied for admission within the months of October-April prior to the year of
enrollment.

Cost and Payments
The interview may last up to 45 minutes. Each participant will be given the choice of a $25
Starbucks or Amazon gift card.

Risks and Benefits
We do not think that there are any risks. Participants will be able to share feedback with
university administrators via this study.

Confidentiality
The following data will be collected in order to identify participants: first name, middle name,
last name, hometown, home state, high school, high school graduation year, classification, birth
date, major, race, Ole Miss Gmail address, phone number, date(s) of campus visits with the

Office of Admissions, and date of application for admission. In addition, the following data will be collected: fraternity or sorority (where applicable), EDHE 105 section (where applicable), and EDHE 105 instructor (where applicable). Student names will be changed in the reporting of results.

Right to Withdraw
You do not have to take part in this study and you may stop participation at any time. If you start the study and decide that you do not want to finish, please communicate that to the researcher. You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

IRB Approval   *****must be included as written*****
This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Statement of Consent

I have read and understand the above information. By completing the interview I consent to participate in the study.

Appendix D

Student Interview Protocol

Research Topics: the influences of university image and campus visits on students' college choices

Research Question:

How do students describe the value of university image and the campus visit in their decisions to attend the University of Mississippi?

Theoretical Frameworks: *campus visits, university image, college choice*

Student Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

1. Where are you from?

2. Where did you go to high school?

3. What is your current student classification?

4. What made you think about the University of Mississippi as a potential college to visit?

5. When did you participate in an official campus visit with the Office of Admissions?

6. What made you decide to visit then?

7. Had you applied for admission or been admitted to the university when you visited?

Campus Visits

8. What was the purpose of your campus visit?

9. How would you describe your campus visit?

   Probe: Campus appearance

   Probe: Campus community or campus vibe

   Probe: Interactions with people on campus

University Image

Clarification: For the purpose of this study, university image is defined as your attitudes, beliefs, and impressions about the university and its behavior.

10. How would you describe the image that you have held of the University of Mississippi?

11. How did your visit impact your image of the university?

   Probe: Academics

   Probe: Athletics

   Probe: News and social media coverage

12. How does the University of Mississippi's history influence the image that you have held of the university?

13. As you are a student at the university now, do you have any thoughts about how your image of the university has changed because of your experience, if at all?

College Choice

14. When did you first begin looking at colleges to attend?

15. How did you go about identifying colleges to consider attending?

16. When did you decide to attend the University of Mississippi?

17. When did you apply for admission?

18. Did you apply via the University of Mississippi application for admission or the Common

Application?

19. How did the university's image factor into your decision?

20. How did your campus visit affect your decision-making process?

21. What else influenced your decision to attend the University of Mississippi?

Probe: Did anyone influence your decision?

22. As you have experience as a student now, what are your initial reflections about your

decision to attend the University of Mississippi?

Closing Question

23. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

VITA

Jennifer Lea McClure

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Education

2003   Master of Business Administration, The University of Mississippi

2001   Bachelor of Business Administration, Marketing, The University of Mississippi

Related Professional Experience

2019-present   Director of Master's Programs, Patterson School of Accountancy, The University

             of Mississippi

2011-2019   Assistant Director of Student Housing for Marketing, Department of Student

             Housing, The University of Mississippi

Conference Presentations

2018 "Building an Innovative and Dynamic Student Marketing Team," Association of College and University Housing Officers - International Business Operations Conference, Pittsburgh, PA

2013 "Empowering First-Year Students through Assignments-Based Initiatives," with Ashley Guinn Taylor, StarRez Housing Software User Conference, Fort Worth, TX

Honors

2016 Mississippi Association of Housing Officers Service Award

2013 Southeastern Association of Housing Officers Department Member of the Year