



# Phase IV: Final Research Plan

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## Executive Summary

To begin finding insights for the NAICU, we came up with our hypotheses and research questions. We then conducted secondary research on the 7 C's: consumer, competition, category, culture, channel, and media convergence that affect the NAICU.

One of our biggest findings from this research was that the NAICU lacked a powerful online presence. The information on their website was sparse—which is the primary outlet to get to know about the organization. We also found that the NAICU should be targeting both parents and students to communicate the benefits of private higher education. As far as their competition goes, the NAICU has two main competitors: the AASCU and the APLU. The NAICU needs to work on their brand presence and finding ways to differentiate them from these two organizations.

Once we conducted our secondary research we moved on to primary research. We conducted a focus group, an expert interview, and sent out a survey to a number of students. The focus group helped us see the importance of connecting with students (high-school and college) in order to promote private education. College applicants are looking for a home away from home, and the NAICU has the power and resources to help them find what they're looking for in a school. The survey helped us gain information on what students believe is true and not true about private colleges. Finally, our expert interview helped us gain insights on the thoughts of a professional in the educational field.

We've provided pertinent information to help the NAICU understand what our findings mean, research limitations, and recommendations. The NAICU is a great organization that can benefit private college students. With having more people aware of what they do, they can expand their business to target the most consumers possible.

## Background

The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU) has represented higher education in policy issues since 1976. As part of their mission they focus on three main areas of legislation: student aid, tax policy, and government regulation. Members include many private universities and colleges. It tracks trends on campuses, meets with policymakers, helps

coordinate activities, and seeks out higher education issues that need attention. The NAICU hopes to share their message and what they do with a larger audience.

## SWOT Analysis

<b>Strengths:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large membership</li> <li>• Mission statement visible on website</li> <li>• Use of social media platforms</li> <li>• The schools it represents</li> </ul>	<b>Weaknesses:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not much public awareness</li> <li>• Lack of social media use among target audience</li> <li>• Very similar to the competition</li> <li>• Website does not have a lot of information</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media growing</li> <li>• More students attending college</li> <li>• A chance to stand out from their competition</li> </ul>	<b>Threats:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizations that are similar to the NAICU</li> <li>• Large, public universities drawing students in</li> <li>• High tuition</li> </ul>

## Hypotheses and Research Questions

### Research questions:

- How does NAICU interact with their target audience?
- How does the mission of the NAICU differ from those of similar organizations, if such associations exist?
- What are the educational goals of someone wanting to pursue college?
- What do students expect from a university?
- What do students find appealing about private universities?
- How much influence do parents have on their child's choice of college?
- Do students have any preconceived notions of private higher education?

### Hypotheses:

- We believe the target audience for the NAICU is college age students, typically 18-22 years old. High school students also fall into the audience since many of them look into attending college.
- We believe that families of high school and college students have a role in deciding what college the student would attend.

## Methodology

### Secondary Research:

We focused on gathering secondary research on the 7 C's (category, consumer, competition, company, convergence, channel, culture) for the NAICU. Our information came from scholarly journals, databases, and other Internet sources. Within our 7 C's, our main focus was on consumer, culture, and convergence. Once we gathered secondary research, we were able to come up with our primary research questions.

### Primary Research:

For our primary research, we conducted a focus group, and expert interview, and sent out an electronic survey. All three of these methods of research helped us better understand the motives of the target audience's behavior, and why they act the way they do.

- Focus group: We conducted our focus group on Monday, November 18th, 2019 at 7pm. We choose a vacant classroom and nine participants were present. All of our participants were students who currently attend Elon University. We used our focus group discussion guide (see in appendix) to guide our questions and gain information from the participants.
- Expert interview: A member of the team interviewed a college consultant, Diana Jones, of College & Prep, an educational consultancy firm in Katonah, New York. Ms. Jones describes herself as a student advocate with over 25 years of experience in both counseling psychology and education. She has been assisting and supporting high school students through the college admissions process for several years, and also focuses on the needs of students with learning disabilities as they transition to the collegiate academic environment (See appendix for interview notes).
- Athlete interview: A member of the team interviewed Owen Johnson, a member of Elon University's Football Team, to understand a bit more what the Student Athlete Perspective of private vs. public colleges and universities is.
- Survey: We created our survey through SurveyMonkey and it had 9 questions. We used different types of questions in the survey to give it some variety. An electronic survey was easier to send out and all of our responses could be analyzed in one place online. We sent out the survey to Elon students, family members, and high school students. Our survey got 16 responses (see appendix for survey questions).

## Findings

### Secondary Research Findings:

#### Company

The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities was founded in 1976. They currently support over 1000 higher education institutions across the United States.

#### Goals

1. **Student Aid:** Ensuring that students receive enough financial aid to give them the opportunity to attend the college of their choice, regardless of price.
2. **Tax Policy:** Promoting tax policies that help families save and pay for college, and also helps private colleges fulfill their missions.
3. **Regulation:** Seeking appropriate regulation of private, nonprofit colleges and universities that is sensitive to their diversity and independence, while addressing society's needs.

## Values

- Commitment to the public good
- Accountability to the public
- Commitment beyond the law
- Respect for the worth and dignity of individuals
- Inclusiveness and social justice
- Respect for pluralism, diversity, transparency, integrity, and honesty
- Responsible stewardship of resources
- Commitment to excellence and to maintaining the public trust

## Membership

Outside of advocacy, NAICU provides members with unique opportunities that support independent colleges and universities. Since NAICU is the only organization of its kind, it has become a platform for independent institutions to speak as a unified whole, sharing ideas and working together to serve all private, nonprofit institutions.

## Services Outside of Advocacy:

1. Networking: NAICU provides a platform for private colleges to communicate/connect and share ideas.
2. National Leadership: The NAICU board is comprised of independent university executives who serve for three years. This gives each university the chance to have their official elected and have a bigger voice at the national level.
3. News and Updates: NAICU provides resources such as targeted information pertaining to each member institution regarding policy briefings and updates from the Capitol. They also provide educational sessions on governmental relations and public relations to assist smaller private universities.

## Statistics From NAICU membership survey:

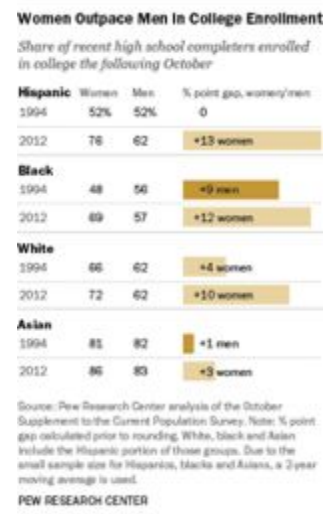
- "92% of NAICU members say being aware of public policy changes and updates at the federal level is very important."
- "84% of NAICU members say providing them with useful tools to make the case for private, nonprofit higher education is an important service NAICU provides."
- "90% of NAICU members consider the association's ability to help them understand and comply with new rules important."

## Consumer Demographics

- The target audience for the NAICU is college-age students, who are typically 18-22 years old. Another group that falls into the target audience is high school students, 16-18 years old, who are looking into which colleges they would like to attend.
- Families of high schoolers and college students are included as well because they likely play a role in which college students end up attending.
- Female students are attending college more than male students in recent years as well.
- Since the NAICU represents private colleges and universities, the target audience most likely comes from a family with a high-income background.

### Psychographics

- The students who are currently enrolled in private colleges and universities are more likely to graduate on time compared to those who are at public universities.
- These schools also tend to be smaller in size.
- Students currently attending are more likely to be active in both academics and clubs/organizations too.



## Culture

### Why People Choose Private School?

A 1996 study conducted in Millard Public School District (Omaha, Nebraska) examined why parents choose to send their children to private school. While this is an old study and the study didn't focus on higher education, it is likely that some of the same reasons stand true today. A survey sent to 1,107 parents of private school students elicited 384 returns. Some of the most prominent reasons were that they sent their children to private schools in order to avoid the lack of strict discipline, lack of parent-approved values, sex education, and certain aspects of curriculum and instruction in the public schools.

### Second Study

A study conducted by ACER research group looked at why parents choose private schools over public in Australia. This study also looks at high school education. One factor stood out in this study: "the extent to which the school embraced traditional values to do with discipline, religious or moral values, the traditions of the school itself, and the requirement that a uniform be worn."

### So What?

The culture of private institutions seems to be very wealthy and has traditional values. There is also heavy political leanings in both directions as well as religious preferences that students and parents care about. In some respects, private schooling is an extension of parental control over what their child learns and holds in high esteem. There is an aura of power and elitism in private institutions. If NAICU wants to reach a bigger audience it is in their best interest to find ways of dispelling this generalization. We must find a way to make private institutions seem more attainable for the greatest number of people.

## Competition

The major competitor in the field of higher Ed advocacy is the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU).



The AASCU describes itself as “a Washington-based higher education association of nearly 400 public colleges, universities and systems whose members share a learning and teaching-centered culture, a historic commitment to underserved student populations and a dedication to research and creativity that advances their regions' economic progress and cultural development.”

As part of their five-year strategic plan the AASCU hopes to also increase their visibility on a national scale, by proving themselves as “innovative” thought leaders and forces for “positive change” among their constituents and competitors. What the AASCU has that the NAICU may struggle with more is a commitment to diversity and serving underprivileged people. We all know that private colleges and universities give off the impression that they are financially inaccessible for many students. Each year, the AASCU is able to host a Millennium Leadership Initiative, a development program and workshop intended to prepare diverse academic leaders for career development and potential employment in the highest ranks of their respective college or university. This year twenty-nine leaders were invited, and according to *Diverse Issues in Higher Education's* website, over the course of the program's existence it has produced 104 first-time presidents. This commitment to diversity and future leaders is a huge area for improvement, not only for the NAICU but also for the private schools we are representing.

### I. The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU)



The APLU's mission is to “expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.”

The APLU also has a commitment to diversity, featured on their website linked at the very bottom of their homepage. The APLU describes itself as a “voluntary organization” which is true, and therefore means the recruitment of diverse members deliberately for their diverse perspectives is not entirely possible. They do however note that the organization's priorities in this area include “equal access and equal opportunity in education and employment.”

The APLU was founded in 1887, making it the oldest higher education association in North America, and almost 100 years older than the NAICU (as well as 74 years older than the

AASCU). While this may seem like a nonessential fact, it may be an advantage over the NAICU, that advocacy for public higher ed has existed for much, much longer than private. More years in the field potentially means more connections with government representatives or otherwise influential people, and more experience with the existing legal structure concerning both private and public institutions. On the other hand, it could be a benefit for the NAICU to be seen as a fresh, modern, and motivated organization, ready to take on “the old guys.” Either way, these differences are something to consider.

## Category

The category of the NAICU would definitely be educational advocacy organizations. There are several groups that do very similar work to what the NAICU does, but two of those most like the NAICU are The Council of Independent Colleges (also known as the CIC) and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). All three of these institutions basically say the same exact thing in their mission statements. They are all dedicated to creating opportunities for students to receive whatever college experience they would like, regardless of what their family financial situation is. The AASCU is unlike the other two because it only works with public universities while the other two deal with private universities. The CIC looked almost identical to the NAICU. They both are very passionate about promoting higher level education and the impact that private schools make on our culture and communities. One thing that stood out from the CIC is that they help universities set up conferences and seminars where people from outside of the university come in. They believe that this improves the quality of student’s education.

## Convergence

How does the NAICU use social media?

- The NAICU has a Twitter, Facebook, and a LinkedIn account.
  - Their Twitter account is used to share highlights of meetings or conferences their staff members attended, and they also share articles relevant to college students.
  - Their Facebook page is very similar to their Twitter, with them sharing highlights and sharing articles.
  - Their LinkedIn account is used to connect employees and share their goals/mission statement in the about section.

Social Media Use Among Teenagers and College Students:

- According to Pew Research, the most popular social media platforms among teenagers and college age students are YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook.
- 95% of teens also own or have access to a smartphone.

How does social media connect students to higher education?

- Social media can act as a portal for students to share thoughts. They can:
  - Ask questions to their higher education institutes
  - Share experiences they have had at college
  - Utilize hashtags to share feelings

## Channel

The NAICU’s primary channel for connecting with their target audiences is through their website. They have a very active Twitter page that Tweets and Retweets information having to



do with private colleges and legislation tied to the NAICU. Their Twitter page also directs viewers to the NAICU website.

To connect with the numerous members of their organization, the NAICU has a mailing list for the colleges that it represents. They update their followers with pertinent information and news regarding private universities and legislative actions taken in the U.S. Capitol.

## Primary Research Findings

### Focus Group Analysis

We conducted a focus group with nine Elon University students, looking for their insights on the college application and decision process and how much of an influence their parents and/or friends had on that decision. The group consisted of three boys and six girls—which was fitting due to the fact that Elon has a 60/40 male to female ratio.

When asked about the elements that each person looked for in a college when deciding on schools, a large factor was the size of the university. An interesting fact about this group was that all of them got into their top-choice university (Elon). This means that they none of them really had to compromise any wants or needs when deciding which school to attend. Some parts about Elon that were appealing to this group were:

- Small population
- Class sizes
- Professor relationships
- Weather
- Study abroad



Few of the students in this group said that they were influenced by their parents to attend a certain university. Some of them stated price as a factor, saying that if they haven't received enough scholarship money then Elon wouldn't have been an option. Others said that while their parents had suggested schools to them, they left the final decision for their children to make.

Since Elon is a private University, and a member of the NAICU, these student perspectives showed us what parts of the college experience stand out most.

We used a picture projection question: "(a high school student sitting in their room, looking at colleges online) What do you think this student is



thinking?” One of the standout responses to this question was, “overwhelmed.” As a high school student, a large part of deciding on a school is finding a place where you believe you’ll fit in. Helping make the college decision process easier and helping applicants find schools where they feel at home could be a key strategy for the NAICU to implement. This could be done using online surveys that match students with private universities across the country, telling them small details about each school that fit with different personality types. If the survey was on the NAICU website this would lead to a higher click-through rate and more traffic for the page. Helping stressed students match with a perfect school would both promote the NAICU and all of the colleges and universities that they work with.



### **Student athlete perspective**

After talking to Owen Johnson, a member of the Elon University football team, as well as other members of athletic teams at Elon University, it was easy to spot similar psychological trends that come along with playing a sport at a private university. One common theme that was brought up by the athletes was an increased focus on academics. Many students talked about how they feel smaller class sizes gives them the opportunity to develop relationships with their professors. This allows students to stay on top of their school work in the midst of their hectic schedules.

One interesting thing that came up when talking about the recruiting process, was that the coaches at private universities spent a lot more time selling the academic benefits that come along with their athletic scholarship. With being a smaller school, a place like Elon is not going to have the same facilities or athletic atmosphere as bigger public schools, but there are a lot of off the field advantages that they have over public schools. For example, a lot of students talked about programs offered by the athletic department that have helped them get connections for internships.

As far as the athletic side, most seem happy with the level of competition and say that they have made many strong relationships while playing their sport in college. The biggest negative that was reported was a disappointment in school spirit/attendance at competitive events. A lot of athletes seemed to be very future oriented when talking about their experience. They understand that sports aren’t going to last forever, and that a private school education is going to prepare them for whenever the time comes to hang up the cleats.

## Survey Analysis

- We had a total of 16 responses.
- The majority of the respondents were under the age of 18 (high school students).
- The majority also said they attend a private school and are interested in attending a private college.
- When asked what was the first thing that comes to mind when hearing private education, we got mixed results ranging from expensive to small class sizes. However, expensive was the most popular answer for that question.
- When asked if they agree that private education is expensive, most agreed.
- We got mixed results when we asked if they agreed that students at private colleges come from wealthy backgrounds.
- Students agreed somewhat strongly to private colleges offering more benefits than public colleges.
- Many believed private colleges offer a more personal learning environment.
- Students did not align greek life and diversity with private higher education.

## Pertinent Information

### Company:

The NAICU does great things that benefit students who attend private colleges, but Information about their work is sparse and most of the pertinent information is found only on their webpage. Relevant news articles only speak about presidents of NAICU being elected or stepping down.

Since the mission of NAICU is to effectively advocate for private nonprofit institutions and to have the greatest impact possible, it would be beneficial for the organization to work on their media presence. The target audience uses social media many times throughout the day and it is one of the most effective ways of reaching them. It could be a sure fire way to spread the word about the advocacy work that NAICU does. Having an increased media presence could help public perception of both the NAICU and private institutions. Increased exposure could also lead to more donations.

### Consumer:

The NAICU's target audience is students in college (18-22) and students in high school because they are most likely starting to look at pursuing a college education. This also includes parents and families because they can influence a student's decision on where to attend college. Knowing who the target audience is helps the NAICU get an understanding of who they need to reach.

Trends in the target audience are important to note because it can help the NAICU always effectively represent their consumers. One of these trends is the fact that more women are attending college than men. Another trend that is important to note is that private education is becoming more expensive as the years go by. Because of this, most students who attend

private colleges come from a high-income household. The NAICU can aim to represent these households, as well as other students from different backgrounds.

Since private colleges and universities have smaller class sizes and a smaller overall population, these are things that students who attend them value when selecting a school. The NAICU must be aware of the desires students have so they can represent them in the best way possible, whether that be with tax policies or government regulation.

**Culture:**

The culture of private institutions seems to be very wealthy and has traditional values. This was also seen with some of our survey responses. However, the NAICU does not represent many students who are diverse.

There is also heavy political leanings in both directions as well as religious preferences that students and parents care about. There is an aura of power and elitism in private institutions. This may not seem appealing to some potential students and their families.

In some respects, private schooling is an extension of parental control over what their child learns and holds in high esteem. Parents also may have an influence on where the child chooses to go. The NAICU can reach a larger audience and share their mission by reaching out to other cultures that they do not yet represent.

**Competition:**

Other organizations that represent higher education are the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities. These two organizations focus on diversity, which is something the NAICU doesn't necessarily do. A focus on diversity could lead them in a direction to expand their audience and seem more inclusive.

**Category:**

Within its category, the NAICU needs to do a better job of separating themselves and making them unique. Putting more information on their website stating what exactly they do and who they represent would prove to be more beneficial to them.

Others in this category, specifically the organizations that represent public colleges, have some goals that align with the NAICU, but they are not all the same. The NAICU should take this opportunity to show their target audience how they are different than the other organizations and how they can represent private higher education efficiently.

**Convergence:**

Social media is a great way to connect with people. The NAICU has a few social media accounts, but they are not reaching the consumers efficiently. The target audience is on the Internet many times throughout the day, and use social media more than any generation before. They have Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook accounts. However, including an Instagram account would be beneficial since most college and high school age students use that social media

platform the most. It would also be beneficial if they were present more often on these platforms, therefore reminding their consumers that they represent private higher education.

**Channel:**

Twitter is the NAICU's most used social media platform. They can expand their presence to reach more of their target audience and ultimately spread the word of what they do to more people. Using social media to update their followers on legislative actions like they do with their mailing list can be helpful for the consumers because these actions can affect their education.

**Focus group:**

Of our 9 participants, most chose a private college because of the many opportunities they offer like small class sizes and study abroad programs. All of the participants were Elon students, and Elon offers both of these components, which is likely why most agreed. Not many of them said their parents had much influence on where they wanted to go to college though. The factor that had the most influence among our participants were scholarship awards.

**Survey:**

From our survey, many of the respondents had preconceived notions of private education, such as stating that it is very expensive, privileged, and elite. This means that private higher education has a reputation that may not be favorable among students, since the majority of the respondents were 18 years old or younger. Respondents also said that they did not know if private colleges had more advantages to students than public colleges. This means that students are not aware of some of the differences that private and public colleges have. Many agreed that private colleges have a smaller population and more personal learning environment though. There was also an overwhelming majority who agreed there was not much diversity among students at private colleges.

**Research Limitations and Considerations:**

There were several limitations to our research, but luckily none discredit the findings and recommendations we have come up with. First and foremost, our focus group participants were all students at Elon University, a private school, and all of these participants had picked Elon as their first choice for higher education. We've taken these factors into consideration because it is more difficult to generalize the opinions of students when choosing their colleges if they all elected to attend the same one.

In addition, of the nine students at the focus group, only one identified as a student of color. While this is somewhat representative of Elon and of many private universities in the U.S. there are concerns about diversity on these campuses and with more diverse students in the focus group we may have been able to glean more information on their experiences opting for a historically less diverse, and what the NAICU can do to dispel that concern.

Lastly, we learned through the expert interview conducted with Diana Jones, a College Consultant for College & Prep in Katonah, NY that Ms. Jones attended private schools herself,



for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Further, the area in New York in which she works is not among the most economically or racially diverse. If we were to continue or adapt this study, we would endeavor to speak to a greater number of counselors and consultants from all over the country.

## Recommendations:

### Survey:

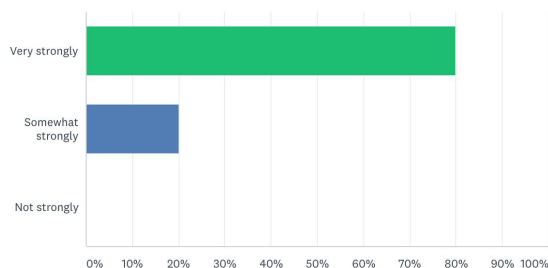
Based off of our answers we received from the survey, participants think there is not a lot of diversity found in private education. The NAICU can seek out to represent more diverse schools. Participants also believe private education is expensive. Since one of the focuses for the NAICU is student aid, they can have a voice for students who need financial aid and want to attend a private college. They can also advocate for more policy changes that benefit students who need financial aid. The survey results also indicated that only a few respondents knew benefits that private education can have on students such as a more personal learning environment and smaller class sizes. The NAICU can showcase these aspects of private higher education to their target audience.

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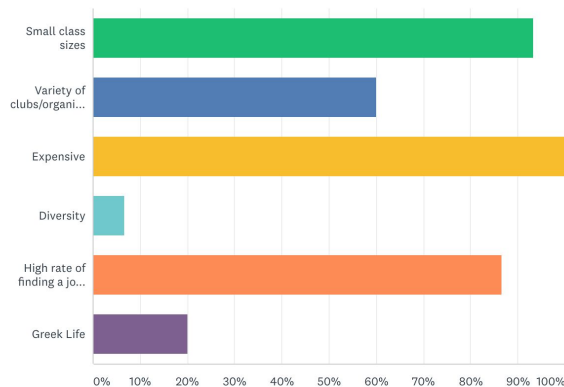
How strongly do you agree with the following statement that private education is expensive?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 1



Which of the following do you align with private colleges and universities? Check all that apply.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 1



### Focus group:

When deciding which college to attend, many of our participants in our focus group looked at many different factors such as class sizes, professor relationships, programs (study abroad), and even the weather. The NAICU can showcase the elements that private colleges have to make it easier for students to see what makes them different than public colleges. Having this information on their website that is easily displayed can be a way to do this.

Students' parents did have a little bit of influence on where they would attend college. Some wanted their child to attend the school that they did, and others wanted them to attend a school that was less expensive. The NAICU can take measures to target parents of students who are looking at colleges or already attend private colleges because they are the ones who may be influencing students. Parents can then know what organization oversees private education. A way to do this would be having a larger Facebook presence because that is the social media platform that most parents are on.

When the participants told us about some of their experiences here at Elon, we came to the conclusion that most of them wanted to attend a college that felt like a home to them. We thought this would be a great strategy for the NAICU to implement when representing private higher education. The application process can be very stressful for some students, and the NAICU can make students feel at ease by creating a system that matches a student with their "ideal" college as stated above in the findings section.

### Expert Interview

Based on Ms. Jones' responses, it became clear that students working with her look for the same thing that students everywhere are looking for: the majors and programs they're interested in, the campus size and the population of students (undergrad vs. grad, background, in-state vs. out-of-state, etc.), campus climate and spirit, location (in the country and rural, suburban, or urban), and the clubs and organizations they could become a part of. Ms. Jones



felt that parental influence on the college a child chooses to attend varied too much per family that she could not generalize whether it was regularly for private or public schools. Students who are looking for research opportunities and school spirit, in her experience, tend to be drawn to public institutions. If the NAICU can more effectively market the research opportunities available at their member institutions (perhaps through college consultants and high school counselors) they may be on the forefront of students' minds. Additionally, the NAICU could encourage investment in the athletic programs of their member institutions to boost school spirit and change this perception!

### **Student-Athlete Recommendations**

In order for the NAICU to get more student-athletes to attend private universities, they need to do a good job of promoting the bigger picture. Sports are not going to last forever and a very small percentage of college athletes go on to play professionally. If a student is fortunate enough to receive an athletic scholarship or the opportunity to continue playing their sport in college, they should not base their college decision simply off the next four years of their life. Instead, students should think about the resources they can gain while playing their sport so they can not only excel on the field, but off the field as well and put themselves in a position to be set up nicely when their time at the university is over.

## **Appendices**

- Survey questions
  1. How old are you?
    - a. Under 18
    - b. 18-24
    - c. 25-34
    - d. 35-44
    - e. 45-54
    - f. Over 55
  2. Do you attend (or attended) a private school?
    - a. Yes
    - b. No
  3. Are you interested in attending a private college or university?
    - a. Yes
    - b. No
  4. Please list the first thing that comes to mind when you think of private education:
  5. How strongly do you agree with the following statement that private education is expensive?
    - a. Very strongly



- b. Somewhat strongly
  - c. Not strongly
- 6. How strongly do you agree with the statement that private colleges and universities have students who are from wealthy backgrounds?
  - a. Very strongly
  - b. Somewhat strongly
  - c. Not strongly
- 7. How strongly do you agree with the statement that private colleges/universities offer more benefits than public colleges/universities?
  - a. Very strongly
  - b. Somewhat strongly
  - c. Not strongly
- 8. Please rank your perception of private colleges and universities on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being what you agree with most, and 5 being what you agree with the least:
  - a. Students at private colleges are stuck up.
  - b. Private colleges offer a more personal learning environment.
  - c. Private colleges lack a fun, social atmosphere.
  - d. Private colleges have a harder curriculum.
  - e. Private colleges do not have a diverse population.
- 9. Which of the following do you align with private colleges and universities? Check all that apply.
  - a. Small class sizes
  - b. Variety of clubs/organizations
  - c. Expensive
  - d. Diversity
  - e. High rate of finding a job after graduation
  - f. Greek Life

- Focus group discussion guide

**Welcome and Introduction:** *1-2 minutes*

- Thank you for taking the time to be here today. Your feedback is valuable to us!
- This focus group seeks to determine if your parents had any influence in your decision on choosing what college you want to attend or are attending.
- It will also determine any other kinds of influences you experienced when deciding where to attend college.
- Please be honest when answering questions – there's no right or wrong answers.

**Warming Up/Icebreaker:** *2-3 minutes*

- Let's go around in a circle and introduce ourselves. Please say your name, where you are from, and some colleges that you considered attending.

**Questions About Considering Colleges: 5 minutes**

- When you were looking at colleges to attend, what was important to you?
- Did you get to attend your “top” college?
- What kind of research did you do on the colleges you were considering?
- What made you “fall in love” with your top college choice?

**Questions Regarding Parent Influence: 10 minutes**

- Were your parents supportive during the college application process?
- Others say their parents wanted them to attend a certain college. Do you agree?
- If your parents influenced your college decision, were you ok with that?
- Tell me about your parents’ colleges. Were those colleges on the list that your parents would have wanted you to attend?
- Did you ever have any arguments with your parents over what college you wanted to attend?
- *Hypothetical Scenario:* Let’s say you already had an idea of what you wanted to major in before entering college. Did your parents support or influence your major choice in any way?

**Questions Regarding Other Influences: 10 minutes**

- What comes to mind when I say “college tuition?”
- Was cost a factor in making your college decision?
- Do you have any friends from high school that attend Elon? Was that a factor when making your decision to come here?
- Imagine you could only attend public colleges and universities. What school would you choose?
- *Picture projection:* (a high school student sitting in their room, looking at colleges online) What do you think this student is thinking?

**Concluding Questions: 2 minutes**

- Overall, what was the most influential factor when you were deciding where to go to college?
- Does anyone have any other statements they would like to make?

**Conclusion: 1 minute**

- Thank you for participating in this focus group.
- Just a reminder – everything you have said today is confidential. Have a good rest of your day.

**12/11/19 Interview with Diana Jones, College Consultant in Katonah, NY**

**Diana's Bio:**

A student advocate with over 25 years of experience in both counseling psychology and education, Diana holds a Bachelor's Degree from Hamilton College and two Master's degrees: one, from New York University, in adolescent and adult counseling psychology, and one in education from Pace University. Diana believes in a highly personalized college consulting approach. Getting to know the applicant well, assessing the student and family's needs, and identifying strengths and concerns help her to provide both an individually supportive and effective admissions process.

"While the objective is getting into a school of your choice, the process should be exciting not fear and anxiety inducing. While this often can't be entirely avoided, every effort is made to channel this energy into more productive outlets and to focus on what makes this one of the most memorable and amazing times in a young adult's life."

Diana's background and continuing education has provided her with the expertise to work with students who require many different types of scaffolding: from essay assistance and interviewing techniques to providing specific support for ADHD/ADD, processing issues, anxiety, ASD, executive functioning, visual impairments, Dyslexia and Dysgraphia.

The college admissions process demands strong organization and diligence to admissions protocols. Diana provides each student with his or her own specific road map and a journey overseen, every step of the way, by an experienced, knowledgeable consultant. As she has visited many campuses and continues to do so, she is very familiar with the majors and special programs offered, learning centers and support services, and the ins and outs of school specific admissions policies and procedures.

"In the end, I wish this for every student: a successful and rewarding experience culminating in admission to a school community where the student can grow and excel. Where one goes to college matters and not just for the more overt reasons. Being happy, being challenged, fitting into a community, having fun while learning, knowing you're in the right place, reaching toward the future you envision, this is why kids go to college."

**Interview notes:****1) How would you describe what you do?**

I assist and support high school students through their college admissions process. I help with:

- Colleges lists - that represent strong fit with student's holistic desires

- Essays and supplements
- communications with prospective schools
- Major and career aspirations / fit with college
- Ensure the right support services are in place for students who may require the use of these

**2) What do you feel is the most fulfilling part of your job?**

- Working with young adults
- Watching them blossom and succeed
- Supporting them as they grow and develop through this arduous process

**3) What are the top five or so important factors students are looking at when they are deciding on a school?**

- Majors and programs they desire
- Campus size - population of students
- Campus climate and spirit
- Location - in the country and rural, suburban, urban
- Clubs and organizations

**4) How often do you feel parents get involved in these decisions?**

- That is a family by family situation

**5) What is your opinion or understanding of the differences between a private and public school education? Do you believe either is ultimately superior?**

- I fully understand the manifestation of both - how they differ and how they are the same - in choosing private versus public institutions for my students, I am driven by the needs, desires and make-up of each individual student sitting in front of me.
- Depending on the outcome, a student seeks, one might be superior to the other - for example, a public institution may offer more research opportunities but bigger class size and classes taught by grad students

**6) What would you say to an ethnically or economically diverse student who is interested in a public school but worried about if their identities are represented?**

- I would say MANY public institutions may embrace your diversity more successfully than a small LAC with a homogeneous population - it really depends on the population and NOT the type of institution.

## Sources:

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