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Virtual student engagement through the admissions process

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Virtual student engagement through the admissions process

Submitted to the Faculty
of the Department of Leadership Education
College of Education
of Winona State University

by

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for the Degree of
Master of Science

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Abstract

Students pursuing higher education are inundated with information meant to recruit them to the college or university. Institutions compete for a prospective student's attention through multiple mediums and platforms (Hagedorn, 2006). It is to the institutions benefit to continue to update recruitment practices to maintain a competitive advantage. The university admissions office central role is to recruit students and implement recruitment strategies. The COVID-19 global pandemic forced admissions offices to pivot efforts into increasing or relying solely on virtual student engagement to meet safety requirements. The transition highlighted the need to fill gaps in virtual student engagement initiatives and knowledge. The focus of this research examines what virtual student engagement are universities leveraging and what virtual student engagement best practices are used to assist prospective students through the admissions process.

Keywords: Virtual student engagement, in-person student engagement, undergraduate student, university admissions office, admissions professional, admissions process, higher education, and Connectivism Theory.

Chapter 1: Virtual student engagement

Students pursuing higher education are inundated with information meant to recruit them to the university. Institutions compete for a prospective student's attention through multiple mediums and platforms (Hagedorn, 2006). It is to the institutions benefit to continue to update recruitment practices to reach prospective students. The university admissions office central role is to recruit students and implement recruitment strategies on behalf of the university. The Coronavirus Disease 2019 global pandemic forced admissions offices to pivot efforts into increasing or relying solely on virtual student engagement (VSE) to follow safety requirements implemented during the pandemic. The transition highlighted the need to fill gaps in virtual student engagement initiatives and knowledge. The focus of this research examines how universities are leveraging virtual student engagement to recruit prospective students through the admissions process.

Problem Statement

University admissions offices typically conduct recruitment efforts through in-person meetings, in-person campus events, in-person campus tours, virtual campus tours, the university website, phone/text conversations, and social media (Hagedorn, 2006). Recruitment options changed during the global outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), a highly contagious virus with sever health risks including death (COVID-19, 2020). Due to the risks, stopping the spread of the virus became a top priority for the world, changing how people interact. Preventative actions requiring physical distancing, wearing face coverings and limited group gathering size challenged the world to reimagine daily life (COVID-19, 2020). Adapting during times of limited in-person interactions caused institutions like universities to rely on

finding solutions through virtual student engagement (VSE) to replace or convert in-person student engagement (ISE). The general problem is university admissions offices are further leveraging virtual student engagement when best practices are limited. The scenario creates an environment with an increased level of experimentation in VSE to create best practices, although at the speed institutions are implementing these strategies the learning has not entered the general knowledge base. Capturing the learning university admissions offices have gathered during a global pandemic further improves the prospective student experience during VSE throughout the admissions process.

Purpose of Study

Universities heavily utilize in-person student engagement (ISE) to recruit students. Although during a global pandemic where ISE posed a risk, virtual student engagement (VSE) offered a competitive option for admissions offices to continue recruitment efforts. The purpose of this research is to investigate what virtual student engagement experiences universities are leveraging and what are virtual student engagement best practices used to assist undergraduate prospective students through the admissions process. The universities who offered expanded VSE options prior to the pandemic have presented a variety of ideas. Hanover Research compiled some of these ideas and offered recommendations for virtual student engagement. The universities point toward examples of VSE and tips on how to successfully implement the strategies (Hanover, 2020). The examples highlight how universities are learning, and how each institution is employing the strategies in ways unique to the institution. This research will build upon current findings regarding virtual student engagement throughout the admissions process by adding to the knowledge base. The goal is to further improve virtual student engagement, even after a global pandemic.

Background of the Problem

In 2020, the world was faced with incredible challenges due to COVID-19. The risks associated with the infectious virus required preventative actions including physical distancing, wearing a facemask and limited group gathering size. These restrictions forced the world to reimagine daily life (COVID-19, 2020). The restrictions challenged all aspects of life, including how universities engage with prospective students through the admissions process. Higher education institutions adapted to meet safety regulations by implementing a variety of virtual student engagement (VSE) options to continue prospective student recruitment.

Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Prior to the pandemic, higher education integrated forms of VSE dating back to the 1980s. In 1989, Phoenix University introduced the first fully online degree options. Not long after in 1996, Jones International University became the first accredited web-based university. In less than 30 years later in 2018, approximately one-third of U.S. university students reported taking all course work exclusively through an online format (Atkins et al., 2021). These advances in VSE paved the way for future institutions to follow suit in offering online degree offerings and integrating VSE options throughout student service like university admissions offices.

Universities admissions offices utilized a variety of recruitment efforts through in-person and virtual student engagement strategies. Examples include in-person/virtual campus events, in-person/virtual meetings, in-person/virtual campus tours, university website, phone/text conversations, and social media (Hagedorn, 2006). Common practice emphasized the in-person student engagement, although VSE was an option utilized by university admissions offices. Swanson et al. (2020) emphasizes when prospective students interact with current students, faculty and staff during in-person university visits, it improved how prospective students “felt”

regarding personal ability to succeed at a university and increased level of confidence in ability to follow through with university attendance goals (Swanson et al., 2021, p. 9). Swanson's study determined prospective students were not recruited by facts alone, prospective students were recruited after multiple meaningful interactions with key groups of people at the university. The feeling of the experience had a lasting impact on the decision to pursue the admissions process at a university (Swanson et al, 2020).

In addition to evidence supporting the continued use of ISE, preceding VSE, higher education has strong incentives to continue old successful recruitment practices resulting in prospective students pursuing the admissions process. Higher education is experiencing a time of national decline in new student enrollment. According to the National Student Clearinghouse, data collected from a sample representing 97 percent of postsecondary institutions in the United States, noted overall enrollment for fall 2020 is down by 3.3 percent from last year (Sedmak, 2020). The declining number in new student populations has resulted in an increased competitiveness to recruit prospective students. Universities are increasingly focusing on recruitment practices throughout the admissions process to capture the attention of prospective students. Universities nationally are experiencing pressure to recruit in the midst of new student decline and have developed successful ISE options. Virtual student engagement options developed at the rate the university admissions offices were capable of sustaining.

After implementation of COVID-19 Pandemic Restrictions

During the pandemic, many in-person interactions was suspended causing shifts in recruitment practices toward virtual student engagement (VSE). Limited in-person interactions required universities to address gaps in VSE experiences. The Hanover Research company published case studies of how universities are leveraging technology to emulate in-person

engagement and innovative VSE strategies. Examples of VSE include virtual campus tours, video conferencing, and live chat options (Hanover, 2020). Virtual student engagement (VSE) experiences are by no means a duplicate of in-person recruitment. Instead, VSE is another way for universities to engage students and offer solutions to the limitations of in-person interactions like time and expenses related to traveling to the university (Swanson, 2021). The University of Minnesota offers an example of a university converting a ISE event into a VSE event for the first time.

The University of Minnesota converted an ISE graduate chemistry “recruitment weekend” event into a “virtual recruitment weekend” due to COVID-19 in March of 2020 (Gavin et al., 2020). This was the department’s first time attempting the event virtually requiring the team to create a VSE event with the same goal of recruiting prospective students (Gavin et al., 2020). The university found the VSE event was as effective as the in-person event when it came to meeting recruitment goals. The university hopes to use these VSE strategies to expand recruitment efforts of international students and students of diverse backgrounds as the virtual event addresses barriers typically associated with in-person events like limited time, visa issues, and monetary constraints (Gavin et al., 2020). Examining what VSE experiences universities are adopting and best practices learned influences how other universities conduct prospective student recruitment. Learning which virtual strategies work best for students inform university recruitment professionals what to continue.

Research Questions

Determining the qualitative data of this study will help understand best practices for implementing virtual student engagement. The research questions are:

RQ1: What virtual student engagement are universities leveraging to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

RQ2: What virtual student engagement best practices are used to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

Both questions seek to further understand how university admissions professionals are meeting the demand of virtual student engagement.

Limitations/Delimitations

Virtual student engagement (VSE) plays a role in how prospective students acquire information when considering the admissions process at a university (Hagedorn, 2006). The number of students who choose a particular university may not be the results of VSE alone, instead a combination of interactions with the institution (Hagedorn, 2006; Swanson, 2021). It is difficult to claim virtual student engagement is the sole reason a student chooses to pursue a particular university even if it was conducted as intended. The parameters of the study focus on the experience of the admissions professional's perspective on best practices and specifically what VSE experiences were used. Examining the experience of university admissions professionals was a practical decision based on time. The experience admissions professionals had implemented the VSE is not a direct equivalent to the experience of the student. Further research may also look at the student perspective during VSE. These experiences offer practical insight for other admissions professionals to use as inspiration for ideas to use at their own institution.

A global pandemic has created an increased interest toward VSE in university admissions offices to meet safety regulations (Hanover, 2020). It has created a testing environment, to try VSE options. It is not clear how the lessons learned during a global pandemic, will impact how universities incorporate virtual student engagement in the future. As communities lift safety regulations the interest toward VSE may also change. Further examination on what VSE continues after restrictions are lifted offers a richer picture on what options make a lasting impact on admissions best practices.

Definition of Terms

Virtual Student Engagement (VSE) refers to interactions between people through computers connected by the world wide web (Hanover, 2020; Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In context, university admission professionals utilize this form of interaction for student's convenience and most recently to meet safety restrictions due to COVID-19. In contrast, in-person student engagement (ISE) refers to interactions with people physically in the same space, time, and location (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Admissions Process refers to the steps a prospective student takes toward completing the application to a college or university (Serna, 2014). The steps of each university's admissions process may have different details, although ultimately leading to the same goal of application completion. The scope of the study will only focus on the steps leading up to the application completion to maintain focus on the efforts lead by admissions professionals.

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID – 19) is a highly contagious virus causing severe illness and even death (COVID-19, 2020). Measures meant to stop the spread of the virus have been implemented all over the world limiting in-person interactions, like group size, required

facemasks, and physical distancing. The safety restrictions has altered how university admissions offices conduction student engagement and many have turned to VSE.

Summary

The movement toward virtual student engagement has increased over time and typically universities added these options as student demand grew. The implementation of virtual student engagement experiences was expedited during COVID-19 pandemic to meet safety restrictions. The transition highlighted the need to fill gaps in virtual student engagement initiatives and knowledge. The general problem is university admissions offices are further leveraging virtual student engagement when best practices for basing changes is limited. The next section covers a literature review of the university journey toward virtual student engagement.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Virtual student engagement (VSE) was utilized by university admissions professionals prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. Due to the contagious nature and high risk related to the virus, one major difference is during the COVID-19 outbreak many admissions offices suspended in-person student engagement (ISE). VSE became many offices' only means of maintaining interactions with prospective students through the admissions process (Hanover, 2020). This is a shift from best practices encouraging multiple meaningful in-person interactions with prospective students through the admissions process (Swanson et al, 2020).

The focus of this research uses qualitative data collection of best practices for leveraging virtual student engagement through the admissions process. The research questions are:

RQ1: What virtual student engagement are universities leveraging to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

RQ2: What virtual student engagement best practices are used to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

Both questions seek to collect what admissions professionals learned while leveraging virtual student engagement.

The literature review covers a historical overview of the problem, virtual student engagement method and technology, best practices, and the Connectivism Theory.

Historical Overview of the Problem

Virtual student engagement strategies have been used in multiple settings in higher education. An early example of how higher education used virtual student engagement to interact with students is through online learning. “Online learning is a form of distance education using computers and the internet as the delivery mechanism, with at least 80% of the course content delivered online” (Kentnor, 2015, p. 28). Online-learning became an integral part of the higher education experience creating connections between people and information no matter the physical location (Kentnor, 2015). University of Phoenix was the first online learning university established in the late 1980’s. The purpose of this type of learning is to facilitate education without in-person student engagement between faculty and student. The advancement of virtual technology allowed the interactions to emulate an ISE. In 2011, 65% of institutions reported online learning was critical to their long-term goals. Online learning bridged the distance of physical location (Atkins, 2020). VSE added a personal aspect to the interaction allowing the individuals to see the other person. Higher education professionals who work in the admissions office have applied VSE throughout the admissions process to facilitate a personal interaction when sharing key information to prospective students. The admissions offices’ VSE options became vital for continued interaction with prospective students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hanover, 2020).

Virtual Student Engagement (VSE) refers to interactions between people through computers connected by the world wide web (Hanover, 2020; Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In context, university admission professionals utilize this form of interaction for students’ convenience and most recently to meet safety restrictions due to COVID-19. In contrast, in-person student engagement (ISE) refers to interactions with people physically in the same space,

time, and location (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Swanson et al. (2020) argues multiple meaningful ISE for students in middle school and high school is the best way to recruit students. VSE adds another option for connecting with prospective students and addresses challenges some students face with ISE. After the University of Minnesota successfully converted an ISE event into a VSE event, the university determined VSE can improve engagement efforts of student who face challenges associated with ISE. Prospective international students can engage with the university without long distance travel, which can be costly and complicated when considering obtaining a visa. VSE also address barriers associated with underrepresented minorities, first generation and low-income students unable to travel to the university for ISE events (Gavin et al., 2020). When admissions professionals utilize a variety of engagement strategies it creates opportunities for students who may have been left out otherwise.

Virtual Student Engagement Method and Technology

Virtual student engagement comes in two methods: asynchronous, and synchronous. Asynchronous refers to VSE conducted remotely with no live interactions (Hanover, 2020; Atkins, 2020). Forms of technology used to conduct asynchronous methods of VSE are on-demand video libraries, blogs, on-demand virtual campus tours, mobile applications, email, text messaging, and social media. Synchronous refers to VSE conducted remotely within time constraints maintained through live interactions (Hanover, 2020; Atkins, 2020). Technology used to conduct synchronous methods of VSE are video conferencing, live virtual campus tours, virtual events, phone calls, live chat, webinars, and live social media events. Each method allows admissions professionals the ability to offer a diversity of VSE to meet the prospective student's availability. As the risk of COVID-19 lessons and restrictions are lifted, admissions offices may choose to continue to implement VSE alongside traditional ISE.

Steps toward best practices

Each university admissions professional uses a unique set of VSE technology solutions and applying VSE best practices creates valuable experiences for prospective students. There are processes and tools admissions professionals used to establish best practices. Hanover (2020) emphasizes the importance of establishing and communicating VSE quality standards. Staff who are intimately familiar with planning VSE are also encouraged to take part in establishing these standards to offer insight into how to implement the expectations. Rubrics can be used to organize quality indicators for VSE options offered. The Online Learning Consortium offers a free quality score card for admissions online student support (Hanover,2020). The quality indicators focus on the student experience, the ability to easily navigate VSE and access multiple avenues of support while participating in VSE. Standards established by the admissions professionals play a role in the success of VSE events.

Understanding the needs of the university target prospective students can make it clear what barriers to remove. Virtual student engagement events offer active ways to prioritize and address student needs, by crossing barriers typical of visiting campus like transportation, funds, and time (Hanover, 2020; Gavin et al., 2020). Students who have access to technology can gain the support needed through the admissions process anywhere there is technology available connected through the internet and/or cell service. There are student demographic groups where connectedness remains a barrier. Atkins (2020) acknowledges the disparities of adequate access for many students, especially underserved and underrepresented students. Access to technology refers to owning tools connected to the internet like a computer or cell phone. Limited access to technical tools also means limited knowledge for leveraging the tools to navigate VSE experience. Where a university currently lacks in ability to reach students without access, it is

paramount for the university to offer students alternative means to gain adequate support through the admissions process. Hanover (2020) offers the idea of connecting with the “right partners” when offering VSE. Reaching out to other university departments like technology services or external community technology centers to generate solutions for accessing the appropriate resources to participate in VSE experiences (Jung, 2001).

The global pandemic forced admissions professionals to pivot to virtual in a short amount of time without the ability to create a comprehensive plan. Acting on the knowledge available played a key role for creating VSE experience for prospective students (Krishnamoorthy, 2021). An emphasis on the human element and flexibility are VSE qualities evident amidst an abundance of change (Hanover, 2020). These qualities maintain a level of empathy toward prospective students and admissions professionals as both groups learned how to navigate VSE, in some cases for the first time. Focusing on the human element challenged professionals to evaluate the core purpose of certain ISE events to create refined VSE experiences. The goal was not to replicate ISE. Instead, it was to emulate the most valuable components of ISE through VSE. Paired with student feedback, VSE experiences continue developing in quality. Krishnamoorthy (2021) and Hodges (2020) estimate a six to nine month time period required to develop high-quality VSE experiences. Expanding further upon the human element idea, is also acknowledging the personal interaction between prospective students and admissions professionals. This interaction is different during VSE experiences when compared to ISE. Maintaining a level of warmth and an authentic representation of the university is important for valuable prospective student experiences. The recommendation is to include current students, student service representatives and faculty.

Best practices for virtual student engagement

Prospective students may have varying comfort levels or interest interacting with representatives through the universities unique set of VSE options. Hanover (2020) urges universities to listen to student feedback and work with representatives to determine what channels will facilitate the best VSE interaction.

Channels are platforms for hosting VSE experiences (Gavin et al., 2020). Each channel has features differentiating it from other platforms, even if there is some overlap. There are six types of interaction categories to differentiate between virtual platform features. The six categories are: as individualized, group, live, on-demand, formal, and informal (Gavin et al., 2020; Hanover, 2020; Niehaus, 2020). Individualized is typically a one-on-one meeting covering topics specific to the prospective student in the meeting. Group is more than one person in the same virtual space covering topics applicable to the group instead of the individual. Live is an interaction in real-time. On-demand is a recorded interaction conveniently available at any time to the prospective student. Formal is an interaction created to meet specific goals. Informal is a flexible interaction with an organic exchange. Many platforms have features in all or some of these categories.

It is recommended admissions offer a diversity of channels with the ability to integrate to reach prospective students (Hanover, 2020; Gavin et al., 2020). Prospective students have a wide range of channel preferences and presented in an integrated fashion creates a hub of information. Notable channels for VSE include Zoom, Slack, Instagram, YouTube, and YouVisit (Hanover, 2020). The Zoom channel accommodates most of the categories with the help of integration from other channels. For example, a video conferencing meeting through Zoom can be individual, group, live, formal, and informal. A Zoom meeting can also be recoded. Integrating with

YouTube to publish the video converts it to an on-demand resource. In comparison, YouVisit is a platform for virtual campus tours. Virtual tours can be viewed by individuals, groups, in an on-demand fashion and offer a formal viewing experience of the university. Integrating the virtual tour on the university website and sharing the resource on multiple social media platforms widens the reach of the channel.

Practical Application of best practices

During COVID-19 restrictions, universities were limited to using only asynchronous and synchronous virtual methods. The University of Minnesota case study utilized a mix of asynchronous and synchronous methods to conduct a successful VSE event (Gavin, 2020). The platform used to host the virtual event was Slack. The platform served as the hub for all event activities and housed all event resources for students. Slack offered the ability to create channels or “persistent chat rooms” with designated themes (Gavin, 2020, p. 2546). Each channel contained pinned information and discussion threads. Pinned information is permanent content highlighted in each channel. Each thread housed text comments about a specific topic related back to the channel theme. The general channels contained pinned information highlighting how to navigate the event, an on-demand department welcome video, event schedule, announcements, and zoom links for synchronous events. Detailed research channels contained pinned information for scheduling synchronous video conferencing meetings with department faculty and current students. In addition, asynchronous resources were also available like student research posters, on-demand lab tour videos, and even presentation slides. External applications like Twitter, Google Drive and Zoom were integrated during the VSE event to further emphasize Slack as the main hub of information.

Connectivism Theory

The data collection results are interpreted through the lens of the Connectivism Theory. It is a learning theory emphasizing the relationship between human learning and access to information through the current technological environment to make decisions (Corbett et al., 2020). A fundamental function of learning is the ability to make decisions. Reaching a decision requires the capacity to find applicable knowledge when and where it is needed. This also means the individual knows how to navigate the digital resources and has access to these digital tools. The ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill leading an individual to a place where a decision can be determined (Corbett et al., 2020).

The concepts of connectivism were first introduced by George Siemens in 2004 (Corbett et al., 2020). The theory is influenced by cognitivism, constructivism, and behaviorism (Corbett et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2015, p. 880). Corbett et al. (2020) observe how these theories developed prior to connectivism categorize learning in either an externally driven process or as an internally driven process. Connectivism challenges the notion by asserting learning is an internal and external dimension of life inseparable from the technological innovations facilitating the learning (Corbett et al., 2020, p. 2). Reinforcing the idea learners exist as intersections in a technological network of information. The information flows externally through a digital tool until an individual absorbs the information and releases a decision back into the network. These components only function if all are present.

Connectivism presents four foundations highlighting how learning is making connections between information. The foundations are autonomy, connectedness, diversity, and openness. Autonomy emphasizes the learner's independence to make unique connections to knowledge and the importance of creating a deep network of knowledge with peers rooted in

emotions, reflection, logic, and reasoning (Corbett et al., 2020; Downes, 2012). Leaving room for the reality of humans as unique and dynamic.

Connectedness emphasizes the network of people and computers. Learning occurs when peers are connected and share opinions, viewpoints, and ideas through a collaborative process. The authority figure becomes part of the peer network instead of acting upon the traditional role of controlling the interactions (Corbett et al., 2020; Dunaway, 2011). The abundance of information creates an environment where it is unattainable to be the sole source of accurate information and instead contributes as a knowledgeable mentor offering direction. Leaving room for anyone on a team to be a leader and a follower.

Diversity in the context of connectivism represents the unique perspectives and creativity of members in the network who are contributing to the whole (Corbett et al., 2020; Downes, 2012). Diverse teams of varying viewpoints are critical structure for completely exploring ideas. Maximizing and facilitating diversity is a way to build upon the network of information for sophisticated decisions.

Openness is strongly related to the learner's paradigm. Instead of learning because of a lack of information, learning is about "...curiosity, exploration, and creativity" (Corbett et al., 2020, p. 3). Individuals are free to choose a level of participation in exchanges of concepts, tools, and things (Corbett et al., 2020). Decision making itself is a learning process. Choosing what to learn and the meaning of incoming information is seen through the lens of a fluctuating reality. A right answer now, may be wrong tomorrow due to alternations in the information environment affecting the decision. Sustaining a level of openness allows for flexibility to change.

Connectivism articulates the overall learning environment in the digital era where individuals must filter through an abundance of information to make decisions. Virtual student

engagement is the act of interacting with prospective students through a digital tool and sharing information. This digital network of tools connecting prospective students and admissions professionals facilitates information sharing. Varying levels of information is absorbed by all participating in the network and decisions are made based on what is understood from the information. Admissions professionals are learning how to best leverage and navigate VSE in a meaningful way to recruit students. Prospective students choose to navigate certain types of VSE to determine if a particular university is a worthwhile investment of personal time, money, and energy. As of 2020, the total student loan debt stood at \$1.5 trillion for over 45 million students. Out of the students who completed a bachelor's degree, 43% are underemployed in the first year following graduation (Krishnamoorthy et al., 2021). These are realities many students face, placing a great deal of pressure to determine the best capable university to attend. The admissions professional's goal is to learn about the prospective students needs and connect them with information necessary to make such an important decision. Connection was limited to VSE to observe safety requirements. A great deal was learned by admission professionals and decisions about VSE were acted upon.

Summary

Universities have experienced decreased student enrollment over the last decade due the increased financial burden placed on students (Mitchell, 2017) and a decline in new student population. A global pandemic limiting the options for recruitment meets higher education as it struggles to increase enrollment (Sedmak, 2020) and challenges each institution to adapt to virtual student recruitment (Hanover, 2020). The connectivism learning theory articulates how individuals learn and make decisions in a shifting digital environment. Recruiting students in a mostly virtual or completely virtual environment has caused universities and students to

experience high volumes of innovation. The next section articulates the methods used to collect case studies identifying examples innovation while pursuing virtual student recruitment. Chapter two discussed a historical overview of the problem, virtual student engagement method and technology, best practices, and the Connectivism Theory. Chapter three covered the research methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to investigate what virtual student engagement universities are leveraging and what are virtual student engagement best practices used to assist undergraduate prospective students through the admissions process. The research methodology chapter covers the research design, sample and setting, instruments, data collection procedures and data analysis. The research questions are:

RQ1: What virtual student engagement are universities leveraging to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

RQ2: What virtual student engagement best practices are used to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

Research Design

Systematic methods were used to explore the qualitative research regarding what VSE universities are leveraging and what virtual student engagement best practices admissions professionals have determined. Ruane (2005) and Wilson (2015) recommend examining qualitative research by combining observational experiences of the participants to articulate meaningful themes. Individual semi-structured interviews with open ended questions allowed participants to share professional experiences with virtual student engagement (Ruane, 2005). Exploratory research methods best facilitated in-depth narrative to understand the admission professional's "genuine experiences and understanding" of VSE (Ruane, 2005, p. 12).

Sample and Setting

A purposeful sampling technique was used to select admissions professionals with at least one consecutive year of work experience leading up to the interview. A total of six participants, four women and two men, contributed to the study.

The sample size is representative of a qualitative research study; emphasis on a small sample size dedicates time for an in-depth understanding through narrative (Ruane, 2005). Each participant worked for a university in the midwest. Five total university admission offices were represented. The researcher's network and university staff directories were leveraged to determine an invitation list. The participant selection was invited to a one-time 45-minute video conferencing interview through Zoom. The interviews were conducted summer of 2021.

Instruments

The investigator conducting the empirical data collection was the instrument. The researcher as an instrument places emphasis on skillful interview strategies to gain empirical evidence. Brinkmann (2013) encourages a degree of interviewer effect in qualitative interviewing to obtain relevant information. The interviewer pays close attention to the conversation and occasionally clarifies information. These interactions increase the level of understanding between interviewee and interviewer (Brinkmann, 2013).

The interview questions related directly to the research questions. The questions were determined through an in-depth literature review and the researchers' professional experiences. The first set of questions explored what types of VSE participant were currently using in the office. The second set of questions explored VSE best practices.

Data Collection

The researcher identified current admission professionals through networks and university directories. A personalized email invitation outlining details about the research study and interview structure was sent individually. After confirming participation, interviews were scheduled as private 45-minute meetings with corresponding video conferencing links. Zoom was the choice virtual platform with the ability to automatically transcribe and record the interview.

The participant's privacy was protected in several ways. All meetings were scheduled as private. The participant names were replaced with a coding system starting with "Participant 1" continuing for all participants in a sequential order. In Zoom, when scheduling individual meetings, the participant coding system was continued. Participant data was then saved on a password protected computer.

The semi-structured interview was designed to document a cross-section of admission professionals understanding of VSE (Ruane, 2005, p. 93). In other words, a single moment in time was captured in the form of individual interviews. The researcher used an interview protocol to ensure a consistent interview environment was maintained for all six interviews. The protocol documents included pre-interview set-up reminders, interview outline, list of all interview questions, and interview schedule. The interview was recorded and transcribed through Zoom to ensure accurate representation of the data (Creswell et al., 2007).

The systematic process of triangulating data, theory and methodology produced qualitative data (Brinkmann, 2013). In other words, data, theory, and methodology played a key role in establishing credible empirical data. Triangulation offered an ethical compass toward an ethical version of the truth, instead of a personal interpretation of the data.

Prior to the interviews, a request for approval was submitted to the Institutional Review Board. This was a required step as the study involved human subject or current admissions professionals. The board determined the study was exempt. It posed no harm to the participants as defined by the Federal Regulations for Protection of Human Research Subjects under 45 CFR 46.

Interview questions are in Appendix A, interview transcripts are available in Appendix B and the IRB exempt letter is in Appendix C.

Data Analysis

Directed content analysis was used to create thematic codes. This means codes were defined before and during data analysis (Hsieh et al., 2005, p.1286). Thematic codes organize the data into domains based in theory for a systemic approach for analyzing qualitative research. The interview responses were coded into themes. Each theme is derived from the literature, theoretical framework, and participants interviews. RQ1 themes include: (1) diversity virtual student engagement experiences and (2) verify overall goals and virtual student engagement align. RQ2 themes include: (1) make virtual student engagement as user friendly as possible, (2) collaborate in multiple ways, and (3) maintain an openness to learning. The data analysis was conducted by the researcher and used the directed content analysis for all collected data.

The researcher transcribed interviews using Zoom. Transcripts can be found in Appendix B.

Summary

Chapter 3 covered research methodology in the following sections: research design, sample and setting, instruments, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 covered description of sample and data analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Chapter four identified data analysis to answer the two research questions regarding what virtual student engagement is being used and best practices for using virtual student engagement. The chapter was broken down into two sections, the sample demographics, and data analysis. The data analysis section first looked at research question 1 followed by interview questions 1 through 5. Then research question 2 followed by interview questions 6 through 11.

Demographics

University admissions professionals who work with prospective students were selected to participate in the study; a total of six participants, four women and two men participated. The sample size is representative of a qualitative research study; emphasis on a small sample size to dedicate time for an in-depth understanding through narrative (Ruane, 2005). Each participant worked for a four-year public non-profit university in the Midwest. Five total university admission offices were represented. There was one participant who has worked in higher education for one to five years, one participant who worked five to ten years, one participant who worked ten to fifteen years and two participants who worked over fifteen years.

The participants work environment during the pandemic was separated into four categories: fully virtual, partially on campus, but closed to the public, open to the public and working in the office or other. All participants experience fully virtual work environment at one time or another. All participants experienced partially on campus but closed to the public. Two participants at the time of the interview worked for offices open to the public. Two experienced other as they were not fully open to the public but conducting in-person tours with limited numbers.

Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were recorded and then transcribed for coding analysis. The transcripts were color coded using to representing the major themes identified by the researcher to answer research questions one and two. The following research questions with the related interview questions were used:

Research questions 1 (RQ1): What virtual student engagement are universities leveraging to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

Interview Question 1 (IQ1): Please list examples of virtual student engagement utilized prior to COVID-19 restrictions and virtual student engagement utilized after COVID-19 restrictions were implemented?

Interview Question 2 (IQ2): What types of virtual student engagement does your office plan to continue after restrictions are lifted and why?

Interview Questions 3 (IQ3): Were there networks of people or resources you leveraged to determine the virtual student engagement you and your team leveraged?

Interview Question 4 (IQ4): Describe a time you received new information where it influenced or changed the virtual student engagement you were leveraging.

Interview Questions 6 (IQ5): Reflecting on what you have learned while leveraging virtual student engagement, have you made connections between other fields, ideas and/or concepts? What were the connections?

Research questions 2 (RQ2): What virtual student engagement best practices are used to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

Interview Question 7 (IQ6): Please describe an example of virtual student engagement you or your department is most proud of? What key best practices make it the virtual student engagement it is known for today?

Interview Question 5 (IQ7): Given your experience, rate your capacity to leverage a version of virtual student engagement you have never heard of from 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest).

Interview Question 8 (IQ8): How do you or your office determine if a student engagement is virtual or in-person?

Interview Questions 9 (IQ9): What tools, resources, people and/or skills were invaluable while conducting virtual student engagement?

Interview Question 10 (IQ10): Describe a time you received new information where it influenced or changed a best practice.

Interview Question 11 (IQ11) If you could travel back in time to March of 2020, what advice would you give yourself regarding virtual student engagement?

Research Question 1 – Interview Questions 1 through 5

Participant responses to IQ1, “Please list examples of virtual student engagement utilized prior to COVID-19 restrictions and virtual student engagement utilized after COVID-19 restrictions were implemented?” All participants (100%) referred to having minimal VSE prior to COVID-19 restrictions. Participant 1 stated, their university offered “YouVisit” virtual tours available on the university website. Participants 1 and 6 both noted using social media for posting important announcements (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). The admissions Facebook account was used to create groups for each undergraduate class. Participant 2 shared how the office had access to a virtual tool called Webex, although it was not typically utilized for

prospective virtual student engagement in their admissions office. Webex was later replaced by the virtual tool called Zoom. Lastly, Participant 5 noted using Skype for business to meet with prospective students virtually prior to COVID-19 restrictions.

After COVID-19 guidelines were put into place, all participants (100%) utilized Zoom to offer the following virtual student engagement: one-on-one meetings, information sessions with academic programs, and group events. There was some variation on the admission office use of meetings and webinars, two features in Zoom changing how presenters and guest interact. All participants identified meetings was how they conducted one-on-one meetings. Participant 1 clarified by sharing in their office, meetings are used for information sessions as well.

Participant 6 noted several ways for how they leveraged Zoom. One option was virtual space in a drop-in format for prospective students every weekday from 8am till 5pm for about six months. The second was a one-day a week evening meeting. The third was a zoom webinar once a month on Saturdays. They described the Saturday event further detailing how it was a hybrid between webinar and meetings depending on the group presenting. Admissions counselors used the webinar and segments involving current students were typically meets to facilitate more interactions. The fourth event style referred to their large-scale virtual events. These large-scale events were typically part of a series. Each one formatted the same way, although with a different live academic theme depending on the date. These events used live Zoom virtual student engagement, recoded videos, and a central website (similar to a blog post) with all event information. The fifth event style was facilitating a lunch time live event using Facebook every Wednesday at noon for about 20 minutes a session. The admissions counselors talked about a variety of admissions related topics like on campus housing options. There was some participation while the event was live, although interaction increased when the session was

posted as a video on the admissions Facebook page for an on-demand experience. Participant 6 explained, “I’m just getting more content out there in different ways to capture more students.”

Along the same line of adding variety, Participant 1 described how their admissions office created an additional virtual tour. They described it as a video recording of a current student ambassador leading a tour around campus. This was different from the tour they had prior to the pandemic made through “YouVisit.” They also used short informal videos to interact with prospective students using an application called “Covideo.” Admissions counselors and prospective students were able to record a short video message and send it to each other. The student receives the short video in the same fashion as a text message or phone call.

Some participants even found ways to pair Zoom with other applications. Participant 1 and 5 supplemented Zoom with their own scheduling tool, Bookings and Calendly respectively. The prospective students scheduled virtual conversations using the tool.

Participant responses to IQ2: “What types of virtual student engagement does your office plan to continue after restrictions are lifted and why?” All participants (100%) plan to have VSE as an option, although to varying degrees. Participant 6 noted how the office will most likely continue offering their February large-scale event virtually, due to winter weather concerns and offering all evening events virtually. Admissions related social media accounts will continue like Facebook. Regarding VSE with the high schools during travel season it may depend on external factors. Participant 6 will coordinate with high school counselors if they are able to offer virtual visits, be it through Zoom, Google Meet, or another platform.

Participants 1, 4 and 6 plans to continue offering virtual one-on-one meetings. Participant 6 acknowledged if a student specifically requested a virtual one-on-one meeting, they are now equipped to honor the request. Participant 1 also noted the office will continue hosting a weekly

group virtual information session for students who are unable to visit campus in-person.

Admissions counselors will rotate covering the weekly virtual information session.

Regarding large virtual events, Participants 1 and 3 noted how the office will continue offering them with less frequency; possibly offering large virtual events once a semester.

Participant 3 thought of continuing the large-scale events in a virtual format to capture as many prospective students as possible. These are typically a shorter time commitment and students who are starting to get to know the university can attend to gain a sense of what is offered. As a student progresses through the admissions funnel the office may offer more on-campus engagement options like campus tours. Participant 3 noted their universities unique student population and how this approach may work well for them, but not for all universities. The time savings alone avoiding traffic and parking, may be reason enough for many of the students to participate in VSE. Participant 5 noted how their office will most likely continue having virtual tours. Faculty have participated by taking their phone or laptop around lab spaces to showcase the facilities.

As time passes, Participant 2 is curious to learn more about student engagement trends. They planned on continuing VSE even with unanswered questions. They summarized unanswered questions they have when determining if events are in-person or virtual:

I think the convenience factor [of virtual] is one thing we can use to expand our reach. And so, one thing I wrestle with...is if a student comes to campus or prospect comes to campus, the research shows that they're more likely to apply and enroll. However, if you have a virtual event, you can cast a wider net of prospects and access our folks...Is it best to access students virtually versus in-person? Do you do both? Do we have a virtual open house with an on-campus component and if so, what does that look like? ...So I'm super curious as to, like, what data will come out that reflects any trends, or are indicators for us as to how we should go ahead and implement to continue to implement these services, because virtual services won't go away it's just a matter of how do we leverage them and how do we use them.

Participant 4 noted much of their engagement is in-person with minimal VSE. They are noticing declining attendance numbers for VSE options, noting an event where they have 125 people attend in-person, but the virtual version of the event with about 20 people in attendance. Although, even with declining attendance in VSE, they plan to maintain some virtual options for example their sophomore and junior events will have two in-person sessions and one virtual session.

Participant responses to IQ3: “Were there networks of people or resources you leveraged to determine the virtual student engagement you and your team leveraged?” All participants (100%) were able to recall examples where they did not always do it alone. Participants 1, 2 and 5 utilized a couple professional organizations. One called, Collegiate Information and Visitor Services Association (CIVSA). They offered small drop-in group discussions and hosted informational webinars for staff. National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) and Minnesota Association of Counselors of Color (MnACC) were also credited for offering support. In addition to organizations, Participants 2 and 4 cited the usefulness of the workshops offered through their admission’s higher education consulting firm, Ruffalo Noel Levitz and CRM Liaison AMP. Participants 3, 4, and 5 noted how important other universities were in learning about VSE. Participant 3 even attended other large scale virtual student engagement events to generate ideas.

Participant 1 leveraged their own network of fellow admissions counselors who they met while attending professional development opportunities, college fair and other events. Within the university and college system, the admissions directors also would have month meetings to discuss and share. Participant 4 recalled seeking out the knowledge of another university department who quickly converted to VSE, the office of advising. The office ended up showing

them the resources on the NACADA Clearing House and Advising Resources. Participant 6 noted how the admissions team looked to them for a plan, as one of their primary responsibilities was to plan events. Through trial and error, they were able to determine what VSE worked well for example, they hosting a three hour long VSE event and it did not work; influencing how VSE was leveraged. Moving forward, participant 6 was able to generate ideas from observations of people in their personal life. For example, their parent is self-employed and hosted a Facebook live video series, talking about a variety of topics. Participant 6 ended up incorporating the same strategy and found prospective students were engaging, especially after the video recording was posted for an on-demand experience.

Participant 4 cited how in their area the interest in VSE has decreased considerably. Local high school groups were requesting in-person student engagement and if it was VSE they would not attend. The prospective student population greatly influenced the switch back to ISE.

Participant responses to IQ4: “Describe a time you received new information where it influenced or changed the virtual student engagement you were leveraging.” Participant 1 noted how long it took for the office to get comfortable recording events and the features of the virtual platform. The major concern regarded student data privacy when recording VSE using Zoom and offering an accessible VSE experience. If they recorded a meeting the prospective student username and face appear in the recording. They wanted to ability to share these videos and needed to know how to meet privacy requirements. Participant 1 also needed to meet accessibility requirements. It took time for the live transcript tool to become a feature and for the team to learn how to use it. As the group gained more information the departments comfortable level grew when sharing recorded videos.

Participant 1 noted how the pandemic also changed how universities interacted with prospective high school students. Due to the increased demand to focus on COVID-19 related changes, many high school counselors were not available to facilitate virtual visits and shared:

Individual appointments with high schools wasn't super productive, partly because those high school counselors were just drowning trying to keep students, successful and on track to graduate... There are a lot of the smaller schools where a counselor does all the things. They're not just the college counselor. So they just didn't have time to set-up these virtual appointments with colleges. So once we figured that out, we really had to pivot our strategy for communicating with students. Because we realized we couldn't rely on those high school visits like we would have if we were on the road.

Participant 1 noted pivoting to hosting their own virtual events for prospective students to sign-up to attend. The pivot also increased how much admissions worked with the university marketing and communications department to promote events using social media. In addition to digital outreach, for the first time in Participant 1's tenure working in the department, utilized local news stations and local newspapers to promote. Participant 2 noted their surprise at how quickly prospective students appreciated the opportunity to connect virtually. Students signed up for meetings during lunch breaks.

Participant 3 shared how their admissions office invited a guest speaker to host a training webinar regarding virtual student engagement. The speaker noted avoiding "unpleasant pleasantries," instead of opening a virtual event with small talk, open the event up one minute before the intended start time and start engaging the audience through a chat feature instead of talking aloud. There may even be a prompt questions for attendees to answer like, "what are you interested in studying?" or any question related to the presentation topic. Then start the event. Participant 3 applied the strategy to the open house event and started the event with a welcome

video from the university president. The major takeaway, participant 3 noted, was to have a clear opening and use chat as a way of engaging with the audience instead of talking at them.

Participant 4 notes how their admissions office paid close attention to the COVID-19 requirements and as soon as they were able to offer in-person student engagement, the office made the switch. They attributed declining engagement for wanting to make the switch.

Participant 6 also relied on student feedback to know what to change regarding VSE.

Participant 5 noted participating in a virtual transfer panel hosted by a community college with multiple universities. No students ended up attending and the group decided to record the transfer panel allowing each university to share their information. The video was then shared with prospective transfer students at the two-year college. Learning by trial and error is how participant 5 described what influenced the VSE they were leveraging.

Participant responses to IQ5: “Reflecting on what you have learned while leveraging virtual student engagement, have you made connections between other fields, ideas and/or concepts? What were the connections?” Participant 1 stated how their admissions office wanted to do more video production, and after COVID-19 the office started to create videos. The desire to have a videographer has become even more apparent after the office created their own videos. The thinking behind having a videographer is to continue increasing the quality of the videos produced to meet the prospective student demand for information in the form of videos. The push for more video content stems from increasing trends where prospective students are responding positively to video. Participant 1 notes how their office does not have the capacity to do video production well.

Participants even make connection in their own personal lives. Participant 1 recalled their experience teaches yoga outside of their role as an admissions counselor and during COVID-19

converted the classes to virtual, noting it was stressful and not the same as in-person. Participant 2 noticed how they used virtual engagement meeting up with friends. They went on to say, “before the pandemic we would never have done that, but the pandemic just made that okay and I think it will continue to be okay.” The COVID-19 restrictions mandated it, but the convenience of leveraging virtual technology was another perk. Virtual student engagement offers another option. ISE is not always an option. The example Participant 2 offers was how VSE allows people to connect, even if the weather is 50 below.

Participant 3 has also made connections from their personal life while using virtual tools and has applied it to virtual student engagement. They along with their partner, participated in a virtual cooking class with a chef to learn how to make a crab boil. They were engaged in the hour-long activity and described how much fun they had participating. Another virtual event Participant 3 recalled participating in was with a nationally known author where audience members were able to engage by asking questions. The connection they made was the ability to have these fun experiences without the typical barrier of in-person engagement like the costs and time of travel. Participant 3 observed similar benefits for prospective students who attend virtual student engagement events, not readily available in the past through in-person student engagement. When talking about the impacts of VSE, Participant 3 stated, “I think it's here to stay. It's a tool that we can use to stretch our resources, stretch our connections, and stretch our access.” While simultaneously staying in-tune with VSE interest and the need to continue reinventing VSE experiences to maintain interest. As Participant 6's experiences increased implementing VSE and learning how to maintain strong student engagement, they noted an increased level of confidence in their own ideas. They attributed their confidence to success conducting VSE and feedback received.

Participants 2, 4 and 5 drew connections from their own experiences attending medical appointments virtually. Participant 5 went on to share how they are a current staff member and a current student navigating higher education. This experience caused Participant 5 to emphasize the importance of the student experience. The knowledge from being a current staff member and a current student helps Participant 5 pick-up on areas of VSE improvement. An example they shared was thinking from the student's point of view, prompting them to offer feedback when something did not make sense. They would think to themselves, "If I was a student, who didn't already know how to do this, I would not know how to do this based on our current structure." This perspective helped them consider why students might not be participating in certain VSE options. They noted how working with these virtual platforms eight hours a day decreases their own interest using another virtual platform. They noted "virtual fatigue" and can understand if a student does not want to attend a long virtual open house. Their personal experiences have influenced how they apply VSE into practice.

RQ1 themes include: (1) leveraging a diversity of virtual student engagement experiences and (2) verifying overall goals and virtual student engagement align. The themes are discussed in Chapter 5.

Research Questions 2 – Interview Questions 6 through 11

Addressing research question two with IQ6 through IQ11.

Participants responses to IQ6: “Please describe an example of virtual student engagement you or your department is most proud of? What key best practices make it the virtual student engagement it is known for today?” Participant 1 referred to a student led event as the VSE they are most proud to offer prospective students. Sharing the following details:

So ...we allowed our students ambassadors run, kind of like a news show. So we hosted a student panel and then we also had like correspondence in the field that were our tour guides, showing off different spots of campus, so we could control who was on our zoom panel and who our guests saw. On the webinars, they would only see the person who was talking, so it looked like a news show where it would go back and forth between the anchor and the correspondence in the field, or the panel of students that we have answering live questions. That's the webinar format that we'll be continuing.

Participant 1 attributes the events success to the student leadership and noted the student involvement as a best practice. Participant 1 noted how it created a fun and successful event. In addition to current student involvement there was also a great deal of event preparation and rehearsal used to create a successful news themed information session. All event staff in front of the camera and behind the camera participated in the event rehearsal. It took months preparing and everyone involved in the process participated in the rehearsal, all to present a “polished virtual student engagement.” The importance of the preparation leading up to a large-scale event was important for presenting a polished virtual student engagement. In addition to involving current students, Participant 1 also noted communication between other university departments as key. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, many doors on campus were locked. Admissions needed to let facilities know they were going to be around campus filming during the event. In addition to directly communicating with other department, Participant 2 credited momentum from a

successful virtual open house for inspiring other forms of VSE like a comprehensive schedule of virtual program information session for prospective students.

Participant 3 noted their large-scale VSE event was a success for several reasons. Instead of replicating the in-person student engagement event, it was broken down to the core purpose of the event focusing on faculty, curriculum, and the admissions process. Then converted to a VSE experience. The two major best practices were observed. One, how importance it is to have event hosts to support event flow. Two, how events hosts support the event representatives and student confidence navigating the event. During large scale events it also helps to have strong student engagement. Participant 4 recalled using break out rooms to better facilitate prospective student conversations.

Participant 5 was proud of how they are leveraging tools like LinkedIn to promote online programs to adult students. They have also changed their approach to recruiting online students, by focusing on staying true to the 100% online mindset. Instead of replicating ISE into VSE, which sometimes makes for a confusing information, they are starting out creating outreach efforts specifically for the online students. For example, when examining previous resource adapted for online students, there were references to physical locations, which is unnecessary information to 100% online students. This mind set carried over to the orientation, where they no longer make physical campus references in their online orientation.

Participant 6 is most proud of a Saturday event for rising seniors and juniors. It was a hybrid event with both VSE and ISE. There were prospective students physically attending and students attending by live stream on Zoom. The event included information covering a variety of topics like, a high school senior college timeline, how to make the most of their college visit, financial aid, scholarships, and information about their institution. Faculty from the academic

programs supported the event by offering general information about the field taking on an informative approach instead of a recruitment approach. Student services staff were also present sharing information about the support they offer. The students who attended virtually then were separated from the in-person students to hang out with an admissions counselor to watch a campus tour and housing video. All the in-person students went on a guided tour of campus buildings and residence halls. Participant 6 noted almost everyone who sign-up to attend in-person were present and about 50% of virtual sign-ups attended. A best practice they learned from this experience was to keep communicating with prospective students who plan to attend and with fellow team members supporting the event. Updates or corrections to the information were necessary to keep everyone on the same page.

Participant responses to IQ7: “Given your experience, rate your capacity to leverage a version of virtual student engagement you have never heard of from one (lowest) to four (highest).” Participant 1 rated their personal comfort level at a three. Although, when considering the logistics of implementing VSE and promoting VSE, they lowered the score to a two.

Participant 1 offered why stating:

When it comes to the logistics of planning and implementing and marketing, and all of those things probably a two. I have other roles within my position besides just visit events. And that takes up a lot of time. So when it comes time to learning and planning new technologies. It's tough to do that on my own.

Participant 1 and 3 noted similar reasons for increasing their number to a four if they thought the many responsibilities of VSE logistics were shared as a team. Participant 3 went further to acknowledge the marketing and communication department, because they did much of the behind the scenes for creating event webinars for the purposed of tracking and driving

prospect traffic to the event. Participant 2 listed their number at a three, because VSE tools have improved making them more intuitive.

Participant 4 noted other reasons for the numbers they choose. They explained how at the beginning of the pandemic their office was using Virtual Alt Space, where prospective students were able to create their own avatar and navigate all the resources like a video game. At the beginning of the pandemic, Participant 4 notes a level four capacity to leverage VSE. After COVID-19 restrictions allowed for ISE, they would lower their capacity to a one, because the directive from leadership is to serve students through ISE and feedback from their audience identify preferring ISE over VSE.

Participant 5 and 6 rated themselves at a four based on their experiences to date. They did lower the number when considering the admissions office they work with, due to the resistance received when implementing previous VSE.

Participant responses to IQ8: “How do you or your office determine if a student engagement is virtual or in-person?” Participants 1, 2 and 5 noted how there is not an exact process for how this decision will be made. Student feedback will play the largest role for making the decisions. When virtual student engagement decreases, the office will decrease how often it is offered. Participant 5 went on to emphasize they think moving forward they will start offering both VSE and ISE. Participant 2 noted keeping their open house as a virtual event to cast a wide net of prospective students who possibly have not applied to the university or are at the top of the prospect funnel. The last virtual open house generated about 500 sign-ups and almost 300 people participated over the span of three evening open house webinars.

Participant 2 noted how difficult this decision is because COVID-19 creates a fluid situation. They went on to share how even during the research interview, they received updated

COVID-19 related directives changing plans they intended to initiate next week. Participant 4 planned an even more specific approach. They will be conducting ISE unless directed otherwise. Although, they will continue offering VSE in the form of one-on-one meetings when requested by the student. Participant 3 plans to approach this decision by taking inventory of what virtual student engagement cannot accomplish, student interest and opportunity for deeper engagement. They acknowledged how uncommon it is for individuals to buy something without seeing it first, so being able to offer ISE will be important for the student who want to see the campus before committing to attend. Participant 6 ultimately cited how COVID-19 restrictions have dictated how engagement was implemented.

Participant responses to IQ9: “What tools, resources, people and/or skills were invaluable while conducting virtual student engagement?” Participants 1, 2, and 6 noted the Information Technology (IT) department an invaluable partner while conducting VSE. They made sure tools were accessible to the admissions professionals like laptops, cell phones and VSE software like Zoom. They also ensured training was provided for people to know how to navigate when working in a virtual environment. Participant 1 also noted the importance of the office of communication and marketing for promoting virtual student engagement. Participant 6 also emphasized the importance of internal communication. Participant 5 also commented on communication. They attributed student feedback and taking inventory of what other institutions are doing as invaluable while conducting VSE.

Participants 1, 2 and 3 reference the flexibility to try new things was important for learning how to leverage virtual tools. Participant 2 shared similar sentiment praising the admissions departments’ ability to adopt in the face of so many changes due to COVID-19.

Participant 1 noted how important current student involvement was in created virtual student engagement and the support of leadership. They acknowledged the support of president and the president's cabinet. During the pandemic leadership hosted weekly campus wide webinars and allowed fellow university member to share updates regarding their department as if they were guest speakers and updates on the most current COVID-19 related news. Participant 1 noted how for the most part, the general contentment regarding these meetings is a feeling of connection between departments, they normally would not interact with and it was an opportunity to spotlight things happening on campus. Participant 2 emphasized how the universities leaderships make it clear they were prioritizing the health and safety of the university community and ability to work from home for a longer period when compared to other institution even outside of higher education.

Participants 4 and 6 noted Zoom as an invaluable tool for conducting VSE. Participant 4 observed how the students and staff who were interested in eSports or video games were well prepared to navigate VSE. When compared to these individuals, Participant 4 felt two steps behind them at first. They also mentioned how tools have evolved so much and wonders if this level of VSE would have been even possible five years ago. Participant 3 called out having a blend of skills is helpful for creating an even better VSE experience.

Participant responses to IQ10: "Describe a time you received new information where it influenced or changed a best practice". Participant 1 and 5 noted the importance of not assuming prospective students know how to navigate a particular virtual student engagement. Providing adequate and proactive information about what the student can expect like needing adequate internet connection, a quiet space, and to even be camera ready. This communication leading up to virtual events helped prospective students navigate successfully through VSE. Participant 5

and 6 noted using student feedback through surveys to know what information the students needed proactively. In addition to supporting student, Participant 2 noted keeping in touch with the admissions team to understand ways they need support. Consistent staff meetings have become a way for the team to stay connected while working virtually. Participant 2 noted the waves of different emotions experienced while working virtually like isolation and frustration. The staff meetings offered admissions a way to mediate some of these feelings and offer time to brainstorm together about ideas for virtual student engagement.

Participant 2 noted having a diversity of VSE options to increase accessibility to as many students as possible. For example, sharing recording of live events the student may not have been able to attend, so they can watch the video on-demand. Even through in-person student engagement was not always an option during COVID-19 restrictions, participant 2 emphasized how important it is for admissions offices to remain accessible.

Although Participants 3 and 4, want to make sure they are protecting student information. They noted the choice between webinars and meetings was an example of influencing best practices. Participant 3 recalls when the admission office first started VSE, they were open to host meetings, but grew concerned about data privacy of the student who attended the event and decided to not record the meetings for this reason. Webinars became the standard event platform for large scale events to make sure they were recorded for the prospective student who were unable to attend. There are instances where the meeting format made sense and it typically was the smaller scale events like 10 people. Webinars remained the best practice for large scale events. Participant 4 also choose webinars over meeting. Participant 4 based the decision off the type of VSE event and choose webinars to better facilitate the audience to prevent inappropriate outbursts.

Participant responses to IQ11: “If you could travel back in time to March of 2020, what advice would you give yourself regarding virtual student engagement?”

The first piece of advice, was to know not all assumption will be correct about VSE. Participant 1 stated VSE is nothing like ISE. The assumption was that in-person student engagement would be converted into VSE. This was not the case when considering their attempt to convert in-person high school visits to VSE. The high school counselors were not available to facilitate these interactions. An in-person event can take up a whole day. VSE requires identifying information to fit into an hour or less to maintain an audience. Participant 1 also assumed students knew how to use VSE and was surprised when they needed to prepare prospective student ahead of time. They communicated what to expect and how to have a successful experience during VSE. Participant 3 adds making sure everyone has a good internet connection in preparation for all VSE.

The second piece of advice was to develop the ability to adjust expectations and quickly learning something new. Participant 1 also noted needing to plan for how much production time goes into conducting VSE. Participant 1 stated:

But you can't do the same thing on zoom that you would do in-person, because it's not fun to sit at your computer on a video call all day and you're not going to keep anybody's attention... They don't owe you anything. If they get bored they're going to leave...[Students] don't have the in-person presence where it's awkward if they were just to stand up and leave like it's so easy just to leave the zoom call...Everything about it is different.

Participant 2 stated, “it works,” but it will be important to establish a level of comfort implementing virtual student engagement to create a seamless experience for prospective students. Admissions counselor may need to do more work preparing, communicating, training, and practicing. Participant 2 also would advise using a VSE event check list of important steps

during the event. Participant 3 suggests having fun with it and to be open to learning from others even outside of the immediate admissions team. They continued by suggesting try something even if it is not perfect and if does not work, keep adapting.

The third piece of advice was to not over complicate VSE. Participant 6 noted VSE is not deep. They explained how it is not a big deal to offer VSE. The students who want to be there, will be there. Overthinking VSE adds too much pressure on the experience. They also noted from their experience, the responsibility of coordinating a successful VSE fell on a team of people, not just one person. Participant 4 advised on paying close attention to the universities prospective student population to determine how to move forward regarding VSE. Participant 5 emphasizes how there is no answer. These were exceptional uncharted ways of conducting education for traditional institutions. Many places were not built to conduct VSE. Continue to learn from your colleagues. Believe you can conduct VSE. Participant 5 noted being allowed to get creative for the first time and trying new things even if they did not know if they will work. A positive observation they saw, was how higher education evolved during the pandemic and if the evolution is maintained, “we’re going to be just fine.”

RQ2 themes include: (1) make virtual student engagement as user friendly as possible, (2) collaborate in multiple ways, and (3) maintain an openness to learning. The themes are discussed in Chapter 5.

Summary

The qualitative interview results offered an overview of six admissions professional experiences leveraging a variety of VSE and insight on best practices developed while leveraging VSE. Chapter four covered, demographics, and data analysis. The data analysis was outline starting with research one followed by interview questions one through five. Next was research question two followed by interview questions six through eleven. Chapter five provided a discussion of the finding, leadership implication, recommendations for future research and a summary.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this research is to investigate what virtual student engagement universities are leveraging and what are virtual student engagement best practices used to assist undergraduate prospective students through the admissions process. Chapter five covered discussion, theoretical framework, conclusions and leadership implications, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion and Connections to Current Study

Determining the qualitative data of this study will help understand best practices for implementing virtual student engagement. The research questions are:

RQ1: What virtual student engagement are universities leveraging to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

RQ2: What virtual student engagement best practices are used to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

Both questions seek to further understand how university admissions professionals are meeting the demand of virtual student engagement.

Data collection was performed through semi-structured individual Zoom interviews. The research used thematic coding to analyze the data. Five themes emerged from RQ1 and RQ2. Each theme is derived from the literature, theoretical framework, and participant's interviews. RQ1 themes include: (1) diversify virtual student engagement experiences and (2) verify overall goals and virtual student engagement align. RQ2 themes include: (1) make virtual student engagement as user friendly as possible, (2) collaborate in multiple ways, and (3) maintain an openness to learning.

Theoretical Findings and Connections to Current Study

Connectivism Theory is a learning theory emphasizing the relationship between human learning and access to information through the current technological environment to make decisions (Corbett et al., 2020). Reaching a decision requires the capacity to find applicable knowledge when and where it is needed. The ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill leading an individual to a place where a decision can be determined (Corbett et al., 2020). Theories established prior to Connectivism emphasize learning as externally driven or internally driven. Connectivism challenges the notion by asserting learning is both an internal and external process inseparable from technology (Corbett et al., 2020, p. 2). The notion reinforces the idea learners exist as intersections in a network of information. Connectivism presents four foundations of learning: autonomy, connectedness, diversity, and openness. Autonomy emphasizes learner independence. Connectedness refers to a network of people, technology, and the abundance of information. The theory defines diversity in terms of ideas, people, and concepts. Openness refers to the learner paradigm instead. Instead of learning because of a lack of information, learning is about "...curiosity, exploration, and creativity" (Corbett et al., 2020, p. 3). All parts are necessary for learning.

All participants shared learning experiences while leveraging virtual student engagement. Participant 1 shared a unique example of students creating and leading the implementation of a large-scale VSE event. The positive response to this news themed event, established it as a new department staple. The Participant 1 supported the student ambassador's autonomy for creating and leading the event. This degree of student autonomy was unique to Participant 1. Although other professionals also pointed to their own autonomy while leveraging VSE. Participant 6 noted their role as the events coordinator and how the department looked to them for direction

regarding next steps. They were free to create and implement ideas with high levels of support from the team.

Connectedness was witnessed through the network of people, technology and information used to inform VSE related decisions (Corbett et al., 2020). All participants shared examples where they leveraged a network of information to increase their own capacity to leverage VSE. Examples include, connecting with other admissions professionals, attending VSE workshops, and attending other university VSE events. Participant 6 noted an example of how they drew inspiration from a different field, watching their self-employed family member use Facebook Live to present a series of information. They applied this idea into their own field to create a series of admissions related live sessions, involving fellow admissions professionals and student ambassadors. They made this observation and had the internal creativity to apply it to their own profession. Prospective students engaged and continued engaging after the videos were posted for an on-demand experience.

In the context of the Connectivism theory, diversity refers to an array of ideas, people, and concepts (Corbett et al., 2020). Regarding VSE, it is recommended admissions offer a diversity of channels and features with integration capabilities (Hanover, 2020; Gavin et al., 2020). Channels are platforms for hosting VSE experiences (Gavin et al., 2020) and features refer to the type of interactions experienced. The six feature categories are individualized, group, live, on-demand, formal, and informal (Gavin et al., 2020; Hanover, 2020; Niehaus, 2020). All participants shared a variety of experiences conducting VSE using diverse channels and features. Examples of channels noted by participants were Zoom video conferencing, social media (Facebook), and the Covieo application for sharing short videos. Participants also mentioned using multiple features like live tours, individualized one-on-one meetings, and on-demand

videos. Participant 6 noted how they achieved the concept of integration by creating a central hub of VSE event information like a blog post. This became the intersection of channels and features for prospective students to learn how to navigate the VSE event.

Openness refers to the learner paradigm. Instead of learning because of a lack of information, learning is about "...curiosity, exploration, and creativity" (Corbett et al., 2020, p. 3). All participants acknowledged, no matter the level of resistance to VSE, shared plans to continue some level of VSE into the future. Participant 4 experienced a great deal of resistance to VSE from prospective students. Despite the resistance, they planned to offer one-on-one virtual meetings and a virtual winter event. All participants planned to continue VSE after COVID-19 restrictions are fully lifted. Each participant possessed a level of openness to VSE, especially compared to before COVID-19 restrictions were implemented. All participants acknowledged having minimal VSE, prior to COVID-19 restrictions.

Research Question 1 Discussion

Based on similarity of responses and participant's meaning, themes were identified and grouped together for research question one. Two themes emerged for RQ1, What virtual student engagement are universities leveraging to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

Theme 1: Diversify virtual student engagement experiences

Offering a diversity of channels and features with integration capabilities is recommended for VSE experiences (Hanover, 2020; Gavin et al., 2020). The concept of diversity can also be found in the context of the Connectivism theory. The theory defines diversity as an array ideas, people, and concepts (Corbett et al., 2020). Prior to COVID-19 restrictions all participants noted a lack of diverse VSE options for prospective students. After COVID-19

restrictions, several participants identified an increased variety of VSE. The variety came in form of VSE feature offerings and technology used creatively.

Select discussions relevant to this question:

Participant 6: When the campus quarantines were in place in September for two weeks and November for two weeks, we moved all of our daily visits to Zoom and did them online.

...then through November through the end of the year, we did virtual Saturday visits on Zoom. And then now going forward, we still do our 2pm, or Tuesday 7pm virtual visit.

And then once the school year starts again, we'll add virtual visits to Saturday's. So every other Saturday, there's a Saturday visit. But once a month, it's in-person or online. So it's like in-person, a bi-week online, bi-week in person, bi-week online, bi-week is what we'll do.

And then for [event name] we have five occurrences, the February one will be online but the other four will be in person.

So, trying to like mix, a couple different options for students.

Participant 1: ...We allowed our student ambassadors to run, kind of like a news show. So we hosted a student panel and then we also had like correspondence in the field that were our tour guides, showing off different spots of campus, so we could control who was on our zoom panel and who our guests saw.

On the webinars, they would only see the person who was talking, so it looked like a news show where it would go back and forth between the anchor and the correspondence in the field, or the panel of students that we have answering live questions. That's the webinar format that we'll be continuing.

Theme 2: Verify overall goals and virtual student engagement align

The global pandemic forced admissions professionals to pivot to virtual in a short amount of time without the ability to create a comprehensive plan. Acting on the knowledge available played a key role for creating VSE experience for prospective students (Krishnamoorthy, 2021). An emphasis on the human element and flexibility are VSE qualities evident amidst an abundance of change (Hanover, 2020). These qualities maintain a level of empathy toward prospective students and admissions professionals as both groups learned how to navigate VSE.

Participant 1 acknowledged the realities and limitations of VSE. Admissions professionals can use a variety of quality VSE tools to engage with prospective students and can still experience VSE limitations. It's important to maintain a human element to stay in tune with the audience needs. Based on the prospective student needs, admissions professionals then need to evaluate the best way to meet the needs with the available VSE tools.

Select discussions relevant to this question:

Participant 1: Individual appointments with high schools wasn't super productive, partly because those high school counselors were just drowning trying to keep students, successful and on track to graduate... There are a lot of the smaller schools where a counselor does all the things. They're not just the college counselor. So they just didn't have time to set-up these virtual appointments with colleges. So once we figured that out, we really had to pivot our strategy for communicating with students. Because we realized we couldn't rely on those high school visits like we would have if we were on the road.

Research Question 2 Discussion

Based on similarity of responses and participants means, themes were identified and grouped together for research questions two. Three themes emerged for RQ2: What virtual

student engagement best practices are used to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?

Theme 1: Make virtual student engagement as user friendly as possible

Understanding the needs of the prospective students can make it clear what barriers to remove. Virtual student engagement events offer active ways to prioritize and address student needs, by crossing barriers typical of visiting campus like transportation, funds, and time (Hanover, 2020; Gavin et al., 2020). Hanover (2020) urges universities to listen to student feedback and work with representatives to determine what channels will facilitate the best VSE interaction.

Select discussions relevant to this question:

- Participant 3 ...Thinking again about that engagement piece, how do we not just talk at our audience but connect with and...make sure that the person on the other side is engaging either through chat or through small group or ...poles or video so that we're just we're mixing it up some.
- Participant 6: I mean, anytime we got information that students were confused or didn't understand the event or, you know, didn't know what to expect we send out more communication, whether it was just an individual level or we sent it to the masses. If we got a couple of things like, I don't understand where to find the scheduled for tomorrow we would just resend it again...
- ...We did surveys post event, and then we would use that feedback for the next occurrence. But we were also getting like phone calls at the front desk or emails, being like I don't understand what I signed up for. And then we would work to straighten that out.

Theme 2: Collaborate in multiple ways

The concept of collaboration is seen in the theoretical framework of the Connectivism Theory. One of the foundations of this learning theory is connectedness; a network of people,

technology and information used to inform VSE related decisions (Corbett et al., 2020). All participants shared examples where they leveraged a network to increase capacity to leverage VSE. Hanover (2020) offers the idea of connecting with the “right partners” when offering VSE. The participants offered examples where they collaborated with a network to successfully offer VSE.

Select discussions relevant to this question:

Participant 1: [Referring to a news themed VSE event]...we made sure everybody on campus knew what we were doing. We had help from the different buildings that we were going to be in... the from maintenance crews to open things up that were closed because of [COVID-19] and make it look like it was alive ... turn lights on and open the gates of the dining centers that were closed because of [COVID-19].

Then we got people on-board from across campus. So we had really high level support on this. Our Provost was on-board. Our president of the university was on board, our Office of Communications and Marketing was on board. They helped us create materials to promote [the event].

Participant 2: I will say our IT did a really great job of deploying laptops. They did a really great job of getting instructions for forwarding calls to work cell phones, and to implementing Jabber for some spaces. So I think it was pretty critical. I never want to leave them out of the conversation. Because absolutely they've been great. Just in terms of supporting us as we transferred out.

And then I would say, R and L (Ruffalo Noel Levitz) offers some pretty good webinars that talks at length about how to leverage a virtual space on how to... amp up your presence and perfect your presence there.

Theme 3: Openness to learning

Openness refers to the learner paradigm. Instead of learning because of a lack of information, learning is about “...curiosity, exploration, and creativity” (Corbett et al., 2020, p.

3). Prior to COVID-19 all participants acknowledged having minimal VSE options. Participants were able to identify the challenges and success of exploring VSE for the first time. Each participant shared examples of learning while using VSE. Compared to where they started, each participant noted being in a different place of knowledge since COVID-19 restrictions were implemented. At the time of the interview, all participants planned to continue VSE after COVID-19 restrictions are fully lifted.

Select discussions relevant to this question:

Participant 6: So I mean there was a lot of trial and error because like the first large-scale event we did on Zoom was [event name], it was like three hours long and...it just didn't work, like it worked, but it didn't work.

Participant 1: ...We allowed our student ambassadors to run, kind of like a news show. So we hosted a student panel and then we also had like correspondence in the field that were our tour guides were showing off different spots of campus, so we could control who was on our zoom panel and who our guests saw.

On the webinars, they would only see the person who was talking, so it looked like a news show where it would go back and forth between the anchor and the correspondence in the field, or the panel of students that we have answering live questions. That's the webinar format that we'll be continuing.

Participant 3: So I think in general. It's been fun to kind of see ways to get access to things that I haven't had access to...in the past. I do think...there's still Zoom fatigue. So, as cool as it is...I wouldn't mind a face-to-face thing.

But, ...I wouldn't be able to access 90% of what I was just talking about so I still want to be able to do some of that in the future, and...it's a balance right, so that I do some face-to-face stuff and then I get to still...have a cooking class or hear from a...renowned author or do a book study with people across the country.

Conclusions and Leadership Implications

In this section each conclusion was followed by a corresponding leadership implication.

Conclusion 1 and Implication

Conclusion 1: Focus on generating authentic human connecting using VSE

Implication: Leaders are responsible for supporting admissions professionals in offering a variety of VSE options. Students who decided to attend a university completed the admission process and needed to access key information to complete it. Students have a variety of needs and benefit from a variety of user-friendly VSE options for obtaining admissions related information. The admissions process was the start of a large investment of time and financial resources for all students who attended a university. Offering VSE options proven to decrease barriers for prospective students is ethical and supports admissions engagement goals. Examples of how leaders have supported VSE were by investing budgetary resources into purchases tools, using their network to tap into valuable information to inform VSE decisions, and by taking the time to learn from the admissions professionals who have worked intimately with VSE.

Conclusion 2 and Implication

Conclusion 2: There is a new standard of engagement and ways to access admissions.

Implication: When COVID-19 restrictions were first implemented, it created an environment filled with unknowns and a tremendous amount of change. As time passed prospective students and admissions professionals advanced in their ability to navigate VSE; there were times VSE was the only option for interaction with admissions professionals. These skills created a new standard of general VSE knowledge. Individuals witnessed VSE in the admissions process and other aspects of normal life. Examples included virtual doctors visits, virtually visiting with friends and family, and even enjoying personal interests in the form of a virtual cooking class.

These experiences have changed what is considered normal. Admissions professionals were accessed using VSE and developed as a realistic expectation to continue the option. The choice to sustain VSE is an opportunity for leaders to continue meeting prospective student expectations.

Conclusion 3 and Implication

Conclusion 3: Fostering environments of VSE innovation leads to success

Implication: Leaders exemplified great capacity to support environments where experimentation was accepted. Failure was part of the process for figuring out how to implement VSE for prospective students. Participants shared numerous examples of where VSE did not work as planned and multiple attempts were needed to find success. Failed efforts were not failures. Leaders emerged on all levels regardless of their title. Examples of reversed roles like presidents as supporters and event coordinators as VSE innovation leaders, offer light on an environment where it was accepted for leaders to not always have the answers. This environment created innovation on a new level for improving the admissions process for prospective students. The focus on the human element of learning maintains empathy and flexibility while trying new things. Leaders are challenged to maintain an environment where learning is rewarded to continue VSE innovation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research is encouraged to organize the overwhelming means of conducting VSE. There are examples of asynchronous and synchronous experiences. There are many features within each virtual channel with their own unique qualities. One suggestion is to do an in depth look at VSE options to determine the best places to leverage them in the admissions process.

This information would offer admissions professionals a strategic way to implement VSE, with less trial and error.

Another area for further research is to do a qualitative study on VSE to identify which options facilitate the highest levels of engagement and in what combinations of experiences. Learning more about the degree of engagement and the long-term impacts of VSE offer admissions professionals data for supporting further exploration of these tools.

An area of concern regarding VSE are university access barriers for students of color. Jung (2001) studied if internet connectedness increased people's upward mobility. The findings draw connections from internet connection to increased income and educational attainment. Completing the admissions process at universities is one of the first phases in obtaining a degree. Learning more about the barriers can inform ethical policies for implementing VSE.

Lastly, research on how to better facilitate a wider network of resources, people, and information among admissions professional. Participants who found greater levels of success at a quicker rate, also utilized a diversity of resources. Understanding how to expand admissions professional's network has the potential to greatly improve the prospective student's access to higher education.

Summary

The study identified five key findings regarding what VSE universities are leveraging and what VSE best practices are used to assist prospective students through the admissions process. The theoretical framework based on the Connectivism Theory, literature review and participant interviews guided the research for determining three overarching conclusions regarding VSE. Participants shared insightful observations in the spirit of continued learning for all admissions

professionals. As more information is learned regarding VSE, prospective student experiences in the admissions process will continue to improve.

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Appendix A – Interview Questions

Open-ended Interview Questions	
Research Questions	Open ended interview questions
<p>RQ1: What virtual student engagement are universities leveraging to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please list examples of virtual student engagement utilized prior to COVID-19 restrictions and virtual student engagement utilized after COVID-19 restrictions were implemented? 2. What types of virtual student engagement does your office plan to continue after restrictions are lifted and why? 3. Were there networks of people or resources you leveraged to determine the virtual student engagement you and your team leveraged? 4. Describe a time you received new information where it influenced or changed the virtual student engagement you were leveraging. 5. Given your experience, rate your capacity to leverage a version of virtual student engagement you have never heard of from 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest). 6. Reflecting on what you have learned while leveraging virtual student engagement, have you made connections between other fields, ideas and/or concepts? What were the connections?
<p>RQ2: What virtual student engagement best practices are used to assist prospective undergraduate students through the admissions process?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Please describe an example of virtual student engagement you or your department is most proud of? What key best practices make it the virtual student engagement it is known for today? How did you and your team come to determine these best practices? 8. How do you or your office determine if a student engagement is virtual or in-person? 9. What tools, resources, people and/or skills were invaluable while conducting virtual student engagement? 10. Describe a time you received new information where it influenced or changed a best practice. 11. If you could travel back in time to March of 2020, what advice would you give yourself regarding virtual student engagement?