

**Role Reversal in the College Admissions Process:  
How For-Profits Sell Themselves**

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This study explores what we call the “admissions encounter” that potential undergraduates experience at many for-profit colleges and universities. We consider how this encounter is shaped by intentional sales techniques and the implications of that approach for college enrollment choices for low SES and low-achieving students in particular.

### **Background, Literature Review and Conceptual Frameworks**

The rapidly growing for-profit sector now enrolls 15% of all first-year undergraduates (NCES, 2010). A disproportionate number of these students are working adults and nearly half are racial/ethnic minorities (Chung, 2008). Why are so many students choosing this option? Few mainstream higher education researchers have studied this topic qualitatively (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, and Person, 2006). “We still know very little about these schools and the students who attend them” (Chung & Deil-Amen, 2008). This leads to some important questions. How are admissions encounters structured by for-profit institutions, and what elements are present? How do potential enrollees experience these admissions encounters and how might these experiences differ from public/not-for-profit colleges/universities?

Traditional college choice frameworks conceptualize individual students choosing among various college options (Perna, 2006). In this framework, a student considers what assets s/he can showcase to be worthy enough to gain admission, or “get in” to the colleges of her/his choice. However, a majority of students who attend for-profits are low-income, have less recognized social and cultural capital, and/or haven’t succeeded in past schooling attempts (Chung & Deil-Amen, 2008). Many may have tried to pursue college in the past and not been successful. Therefore they have a relatively weak ‘package’ to present to colleges or universities due to their weak GPA, low or nonexistent test scores, lack of a recognized extracurricular

resume, etc. In other words, they have little with which to ‘sell themselves’ to selective universities or colleges, making them prime contenders for for-profit college enrollment.

Furthermore, they are particularly vulnerable due to several other conditions. They are: less likely to have parents who went to college; lower parental involvement in their college-going decision than their peers in 2-year public or 4-year colleges; lower educational aspirations and parental educational aspirations; and less likely to have friends with plans to attend a 4-year college. For these reasons potential for-profit students often make enrollment decisions with little input from parents or counselors and/or simply based on whether they had a positive experience with a recruiter or know someone who is going or went to that particular college (Chung & Deil-Amen, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). This is consistent with other studies of the college choice process that find the number and variety of college options students consider dwindle as family SES, social and cultural capital, and access to college knowledge decreases (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; McDonough, 1997; Vargas, 2004; Perna & Titus, 2006). While much literature has explored first-generation college students and their path from access through their first year of college, the experience of students who choose for-profit colleges has not been considered (Pascarella et al, 2004).

The emphasis placed on standardized test scores in the college admissions process has also been found to be a source of stress for disadvantaged students with college-going aspirations, discouraging minority students in particular from applying to selective colleges immediately after high school (Walpole et al, 2005). Furthermore, application and financial aid processes can be daunting for students who attend high schools without strong college-going cultures and the related social capital, guidance, and support needed to effectively negotiate the application, admissions, and enrollment processes at traditional institutions (McDonough, 1997).

Many of these students find it especially difficult to translate their aspirations into admission and enrollment at a four-year institution, and they remove themselves from the process at various points during the stages between college goal-setting and actual enrollment (Roderick et al, 2008).

In addition to the procedural obstacles of standardized testing and financial aid, students who are not high achievers may experience substantial fear about their ability to meet the required academic expectations of college. In her study of community college remedial students, Cox (2009) finds students hold perceptions that college will be incredibly difficult, and these students feel they are on their own to meet the college's expectations and figure out how to be successful. In other words, they do not have a sense of entitlement that staff and instructors should go out of their way to help them if they are struggling. In fact, they often feel that succeeding on their own without assistance is evidence of their worthiness while struggling and needing help to succeed is a sign that they may not be 'college material.' If students cannot be successful, then they expect they do not belong and the college will not want them to be there.

Our study utilizes this prior research to engage in an exploration of what we call the *admissions encounter* between for-profit colleges and the potential students who consider enrollment. We focus on how a student's the habitus and related social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) informs their experience of the approach and behaviors of for-profit college and their staff. This intersection of how for-profits frame the recruitment/admissions/enrollment process and how potential students receive and respond to it may be relevant for understanding why more and more students are choosing to attend for-profit colleges.

### **Data/Methods**

Three sets of qualitative data are combined in this study. First, one researcher engaged in participant observation as an admissions representative at a for-profit college for 8 months. Second, the training manual for admissions and recruitment staff of this nationally owned for-profit franchised corporation was content analyzed. Third, interviews from two related studies with students who had gone through the admissions/enrollment process at for-profit colleges were utilized to add their interpretations of that process.

The first of these related studies involved case studies of several community colleges, a few not-for-profit two year colleges, and four for-profit institutions in and outside Chicago. Staff, administrators, faculty, and students were interviewed who were involved with or enrolled in 2-year accredited associate degrees programs in business, accounting, computer information systems, computer-aided drafting, court reporting and paralegal, office technology, electronics, engineering, and health programs. The present study utilizes the interviews that were conducted with the 33 *students* who had chosen to attend the for-profit colleges. In the other study, slightly more than 1100 seniors were surveyed while attending five high-poverty high schools in Chicago. The surveys included questions about students' SES background, college and career plans and goals, high school experiences, support and encouragement, and college knowledge. A carefully selected stratified subset of 110 of those students was chosen from the survey sample to optimize variation along several dimensions, including highest degree goals, their self-reported grades, race, knowledge about college, and the type of college they planned to attend. These students were interviewed during their senior year, again one to two years later, and then again two to three years later. An overall interview response rate of 76 percent was maintained over the three-year period with 110 students interviewed the first year, 102 the second year, and

84 students interviewed in the third year. Initial interviews asked students more detailed questions about their high school experiences, college and career aspirations, perceptions of and experiences with college entrance exams such as the ACT, the level of certainty and confidence about their immediate plans, self-assessment of their academic ability and potential, knowledge about college and the source of that information, and the influence of their family and social support networks. Follow-up interviews focused on the details of students' trajectories, decision-making, and acquired knowledge of and experience with college since the initial interview. Interviews were semi-structured and lasted about one hour. The present study analyzed the *14 students* interviewed who transitioned from high-poverty Chicago high schools to for-profit colleges.

The interview data for this total of *47 students* were entered into NVivo, a qualitative analysis package, and coding and analysis techniques reflect those suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008). The analyses were conducting beginning with an open coding technique (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify general themes. Following a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), axial coding was used to create a structured 'ranking' of concepts and sub-concepts. Selective coding helped identify the main themes used to organize the final stages of the analysis and interpretation of the data.

### **Results/Findings/Discussion**

A primary driver of the enrollment numbers at for-profit colleges are the aggressive tactics used by admissions departments. This is an area of research that demands attention if rising enrollment rates at for-profit institutions are to be understood. We find the admissions and enrollment process at for-profit colleges may be quite different from what we know about the

process students experience at other types of postsecondary institutions. First, the actual moment of the *admissions encounter* dominates the for-profit process and that process is not only about securing admissions. It also tends to be a moment in which students both make a final choice about whether or not to enroll as well as actually begin the enrollment process. This stands in contrast to other more traditional institutions, where the choice, application, enrollment, and acceptance process is much more protracted. Second, during the for-profit admissions encounter, sales techniques are central. The roles are reversed, with the college selling itself to the student rather than the student trying to sell him/herself to the college. Even though for-profit colleges ask students important questions in which they might appear to be merely inquiring about what the student values and desires, this process is not necessarily meant to facilitate student insights about their most appropriate college choice. Instead, the for-profit staff use this gleaned information to employ particular sales techniques to powerfully encourage the student's enrollment. These techniques exploit the circumstances of students who tend to lack the advocacy and social capital to make well-informed comparisons and decisions. The for-profit admissions/recruitment staff representatives coercively set the stage for the admissions process by capitalizing on student habitus and remain in control until enrollment is completed.

Students who do not enroll in college or enroll in a for-profit school are significantly less likely to have parents who went to college (Chung, 2008) Considering also the lower aspirations, lower parental involvement in the college-going decision, and fewer friends with 4-year college plans, such circumstances make it reasonable to assume that students considering enrollment in for-profit colleges don't demonstrate the same level of informed advocacy as those choosing to attend other institutions. Based on our analyses of the interview data and the training manual, we find the *admissions encounter* at for-profit colleges is structured to capitalize on this

lack of advocacy and this is used to benefit the admissions representative to achieve their goal of enrolling as many students as possible to “create tomorrow’s graduates and success stories” at the for-profit. The aggressive enrollment tactics used by for-profit admissions representatives are not accounted for in traditional college choice models. Admissions representatives emphasize the benefit of the for-profit by capitalizing on student’s fears about more traditional institutions. These tactics work best when students lack involvement from parents or others who can advocate for them or help them do a thorough comparison of the variety of post-secondary options.

### *Initial Contact*

The process may begin with a prospective student requesting more information from a website. Immediately the college aggressively pursues the student, rather than the student pursuing the college. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report filed in 2010 found that undercover students who filled out website forms claiming to assist with finding a college match were bombarded with phone calls from for-profit college representatives. The highest volume of phone calls totaled 182 in 30 days for one of the undercover students (Kutz, 2010). The aggressive and persistent nature of the phone calls is a glance into the process that follows with the admissions representative steering the progression of the *admissions encounter*.

According to the training manual of a particular for-profit institution, once an admissions representative has a potential student on the phone the use of sales techniques begins, and hence the *admissions encounter* can be thought of as beginning at this moment. While the purpose of the phone call is to convince the potential student to come in for an admissions interview or even to merely look at the school, the identification of the student’s needs begins immediately. Once several of the student’s needs have been identified the admissions representative offers their own expertise and suggests that they will be able to provide solutions for the student’s

needs/problems if they are willing to come in and meet at the school. Needs identification, defined in the manual as creating “the awareness of what your prospect has and what he or she wants, needs or desires,” is the bases for much of the process that follows and is a vital part of the admissions representative’s sales technique.

### *Sales Techniques*

The student’s interview during the next phase of the *admissions encounter* is a crucial interaction, with admissions representatives taking a proactive role in the student’s college choice. The admissions representative’s job is to further decipher the values and needs/fears of the student and use those to build the institution’s value from the student’s perspective. The predominate focus of the training manual is the sales process which consists of identifying student needs by listening and creating value based on those needs. Analysis of the training manual found the greatest percentage of language used was “sales” language. For example, the training manual encourages admissions representatives to use a sales technique known as “peeling the onion,” which encourages representatives to “peel” back the layers of protection surrounding prospective students’ emotional core to discover fears and areas in their life they view as problematic. The representative uses this to create a narrative that allows them to connect fears and problems to solutions offered by the for-profit college (also called need identification). The tactic exposes the prospective student’s fear, allowing the for-profit to become the solution. Aria is a Latina who, during her senior year in high school, was very uncertain about where to apply to college, how to finance it, and what major/career to pursue. She received very limited guidance from teachers, counselors, and family and knew only one person in her family and social network who went to college and actually graduated – a cousin with whom she was not in close contact. She feared leaving her network, and the for-profit

college took the initiative to make contact with her at her home. Below Aria expresses a fear she has about living on her own. This is an opportunity for an admissions representative to expose a fear and create a need that the for-profit could potentially meet.

*Interviewer:* What are you thinking about in terms of the advantages to that and the drawbacks of living on campus [at a four-year college]? You sound like you are concerned about it.

*Aria:* I don't know. Living on my own. I won't know anyone...I will be more lonely. I will have to start from zero.

*Interviewer:* Did you fill out any applications yet for any colleges?

*Aria:* I have not sent them. I don't know why. I have them all filled out, but I have not sent them. I am having doubts about it.

The need to remain close to home becomes an ample opportunity for the admissions representative to sell the location of the for-profit. The admissions representative was able to convince Aria to enroll at the for-profit.

During the *admissions encounter*, if the student is unaware of what type of information they should be garnering from the admissions representative or if the student lacks the social and cultural capital that would enable them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the for-profit college relative to other options, the institution is able to take advantage of the by using sales techniques to steer the student in the direction of the admissions representative's choosing. The ability of the representative to use the student's values and connect them with particular attributes of the college is a sales technique known as "partnership selling." This type of selling illuminates a specific feature of the institution and highlights how this feature benefits the student based on their individual needs. Bobby, an African-American student, was living in public housing and had first enrolled at a non-profit college, and then he switched to a for-profit.

Bobby explained that the freedom provided at a previous non-profit college had been too much for him. The for-profit offered Bobby a different kind of experience.

*Bobby:* It was just too much freedom for me. ... I kind of messed up and had ta, you know, sit out for a little while. That's why I'm going to this school too. ... I mean it wasn't like I was a bad student. It was just I kind of fell behind a little bit, then I kind of got to this lazy mode and just wanted to work. That's why, that's what happened. I think it was just too much freedom for me...

A simple Google search of “sales techniques” or “sales psychology” demonstrates the commonality of using need and emotion to sell, especially fear or pain. Different practitioners and authors have a variety of names for sales techniques from “persuasive selling” to selling according to human nature. These techniques use the same method as partnership selling, identify a need (the more connected to an intense emotion the easier the sale) and use the product in question to fulfill that need.

Partnership selling can highlight how the for-profit institution is better suited to meet the student's needs than other institutions, including other for-profit institutions. The features available to use in partnership selling vary depending on the for-profit, but at many schools the length of the programs are a draw for some students who fear the need to invest in schooling for a long period of years in order to obtain their degree, particularly if they need to enroll part-time. The shorter, condensed program length was clearly the draw for Adrianna, who had originally planned to work for a few years after high school, but was convinced by a recruiter to start college right away:

*Interviewer:* So where did you, why did you decide to choose this college?

*Adriana:* Well, I really didn't research on it a lot, but I did, umm, there was someone who's at the school, and talked about it, and they told me, in three years, you'll get, you know, associates. So they said it was something fast, you know, I could start off, and then

keep on going. So I start off, like, you know, just to start off, and then later on, in the future, I'll go on to my bachelor's or something.

The admissions representative uses the feature of a short program length to sell students who are afraid of investing large amount of time into school.

### *Student Perceptions*

Student's lack of knowledge and perceptions of other institutions can be used by the admissions representative during the *admissions encounter* to steer the potential student toward enrollment at the for-profit. In the above case the perception that an associate's degree obtained by most institutions is a lengthy ordeal is used. It is likely the perspective student will either not have enough knowledge of other institutions to refute the representative (Roderick et al, 2008) or have perceptions of other institutions that support the representative's portrait of these other options regardless of merit. A community college didn't make the same positive impression that a for-profit did on Richard, a low-income, white, child of immigrants.

*Interviewer:* When you first came here to [name of for-profit] what was your experience when you walked in the door and tried to enroll?

*Richard:* I liked it here. I had a good feeling...when I came here.

*Interviewer:* Did it feel different than [the community college] felt for you?

*Richard:* ...the admissions people were very nice and...they also showed the entire plan of the school. They gave me these packets right away. They were very forward in a nice way.

*Interviewer:* Is that something you didn't experience at [the community college]?

*Richard:* Yea exactly. They didn't do that there.

Students perceptions of other types of institutions provide an easy selling point for for-profits.

In approximately one-third of the interviews analyzed, students described feeling a personal connection to the institution that developed as a direct result of the pro-active approach

taken by for-profit representatives in their recruitment efforts and in the face-to-face admissions encounter. Unlike community colleges, which students said took a more passive and bureaucratic approach, the for-profit recruiters made extra efforts to be welcoming and enthusiastic, and admissions/enrollment staff took time with students to present information and convey the merits of attending their institution, often linking such conversations with students' interests, hopes, fears, and concerns as confirmed by Richard above.

As Roderick et al (2008) demonstrates, students coming from under-resourced schools or schools without college-going cultures, or students without the social capital to navigate the college application and enrollment process frequently don't have someone to advocate for them as they move through this process. Without adequate knowledge or someone who can navigate the process, these students considering for-profit colleges will likely not apply or enroll at other types of institutions. Though these students may have relationships that offer support and encouragement of their aspirations, there is a lack of informed advocacy. In other words, there is no one that can verify whether the for-profit will actually be beneficial and be able to meet the needs of the students. These students are more vulnerable to the influence of for-profit sales techniques such as partnership selling.

### *Career as a Feature*

The training manual emphasizes the for-profit institution as means to a specific career. A large amount of the language used in the training manual centers around the future careers of potential students encouraging the admissions representative to focus on this feature. Career placement as the end goal is an important aspect of the sales process which includes enticing literature such as lists of businesses where former students have been employed upon graduation. The details of employment, such as length and job description, are left out but students are sold

on familiar names of employers and what they consider the fast track to positions at those companies. Half of the students interviewed chose for-profit schools because of the appeal of a direct focus on a specific career (eliminating much of the ‘irrelevant’ general education students didn’t want to take) and shorter term, condensed program lengths (i.e. 18 months to complete an AA degree). Johanna, a first-generation college Latina, expresses that she didn’t want to deal with general education requirements.

*Interviewer:* Did you look at any other colleges?

*Johanna:* [shakes her head] I didn’t want to go through all that Gen Ed stuff, at the big universities, like one year, two years of math. . .

Richard highlights the carrot on a stick that the for-profit colleges emphasize with students – post-college employment opportunities:

*Richard:* I received all these packets here. They showed me a paper - all the companies you could work for in two years with the help of a program within [the for-profit college] which was in cahoots with those companies on the list.

Any given feature of a career-oriented program can be highlighted as offering a benefit to the student depending on the student’s expressed need. Aria’s description reveals how her lack of exposure to the multiple purposes of college combined fueled her fears. She was under the impression that a focus on a specific career was the ideal framework for any college pursuit. During her senior year in high school, she was hesitant about going away to college because she had not decided on that focus:

*Interviewer:* What are you having doubts about?

*Aria:* You have to know what your major is going to be, and I don’t know. I am still trying to find out what I really like most. . . . I don’t want to be one of those people that go and then they are there for one year and then they change their major. I want to decide and then focus on what I want, and when I start college I want to finish.

The for-profit representatives convinced her that their institution not only provided a major that matched her interests best, but also provided a context for a bounded exploration of her interests while remaining close to home. This seemed to Aria to allow for less of a complete investment, just in case she changed her mind about her major or career. In this example the career feature of the for-profit was employed in a different way than it was for Richard in order to meet Aria's specific needs.

### *Students Who Can't "Sell" Themselves*

Another important aspect of need identification and partnership selling revolves around the student's lack of confidence in their prior academic performance. During the admissions encounter at for-profit colleges, the students' values become the central measure of merit, rather than their grades, exam scores or extracurricular activities. When students attempt the transition to college from an under-resourced school, they may have difficulty trying to sell themselves to colleges based on traditional measures of merit and worthiness. When for-profit institutions do the selling, students don't have to be concerned about their lack of impressive credentials or college knowledge. They only have to express what they value in a post-secondary education to start a chain reaction of pro-active responses. Students are asked to consider what they believe will make college a successful experience, what is important to them in a potential school, and why they value an education. The *admissions encounter* is structured to build upon the answers the student provides. Particularly powerful is the fact that for-profit institutions offer students the opportunity to attend an institution without the additional stress of college entrance exams, which can be a considerable barrier (Walpole et al, 2005). This is one more procedure that a student can forego. The *admissions encounter* at many for-profit institutions is focused on how the

college is able to provide value to the student and not on how academically valuable the student is to the institution.

This situation is quite different from traditional colleges that send students the message that they are unwanted if they cannot meet the expected criteria, a message that reinforces student fears (Cox, 2009). The for-profit sales tactics validate these negative perceptions of traditional institutions and demonstrate to potential students that their educational experience at a for-profit will eliminate many of these negative, unwelcoming aspects that the student fears.

Enrollment at for-profit colleges does not require the same type of access to social capital as described by Roderick et al (2008) because the institution pursues the student, and in the *admissions encounter*, an admissions representative walks each prospective student through the process from the moment the student expresses interest until they are enrolled in class. First-generation college students do not have to rely on their support systems or parents, who may lack experience, to navigate the process. The for-profit college becomes the student's support system but with the agreement that the student enrolls at that particular for-profit institution.

### ***Financial Aid Assistance***

Unlike students' reported experiences at community colleges, at the for-profit institutions, students described how one-on-one help with financial aid planning and application were also available on-the-spot, which enhanced the ease of the enrollment process for students who felt uninformed and fearful. Unsure about enrolling in college, the one-on-one assistance through the enrollment process averted Adriana's fears:

*Adriana:* Well, I made an appointment...to go see the counselors over at the admissions office. I talked to them. They explained all the classes, you know, how it's gonna be, financial aid and everything, and then I decided to do it. They helped me fill out everything, and she basically did all my scheduling... the hours and everything, the

financial aid, and... she helped me through it... She tutored me for the test. So, she helped me with everything. ...

*Interviewer:* Would you have applied for financial aid if they hadn't helped you?

*Adriana:* No. I'm afraid, I was scared, 'cause I don't know how it works...and it's like really hard for me to pay out of my pocket, too, 'cause, you know, we're not that rich. So...I don't think I would have. But they helped and they explained the process and everything, so...

When a student believes they are incapable of negotiating the financial aid process on their own, a for-profit institution becomes an attractive path. Many for-profits walk students through the admissions and financial aid process step by step, even filling out paperwork for them.

Oftentimes students are willing to make a commitment to enroll so that they can receive the procedural guidance about financing college that the for-profit college has to offer.

The training manual specifies that the student is pushed to set an appointment with a financial aid officer within 72 hours of agreeing to enroll. The entire enrollment process happens quickly, leaving students little time to think about important aspects of college success such as college match or the price of the education they just purchased. This may seem of little consequence to a student who is more pre-occupied with a hands-on experience that allows someone other than themselves to navigate the process, especially the financial aid process, for them.

### ***Reputation***

The image of the for-profit in the local community is another important part of the enrollment process. The training manual emphasizes the for-profit's reputation/image as both a business and an educational facility which centers on the college's ability to provide career driven education. Students regard the school's reputation as a benefit as Bobby describes.

*Interviewer:* Have you ever thought about going to a community college for this kind of degree?

*Bobby:* No. ...because...it might hurt my reputation...it's just, you know...most jobs won't look at it if they never heard of that school so they probably think I don't know as much stuff. So at least I go to [name of for-profit] you know, since that's one of the good schools, they all are, you know...let's give him a job.

The image of the for-profit in the local community also allows for-profits to use students' personal networks. For example, Bobby describes how he first heard about the for-profit he was attending.

*Bobby:* Actually just by word of mouth. A lot of people say [name of non-profit college], a lot of people say [name of for-profit he attends], a lot of people saying [name of another college]. But most kept saying [name of his for-profit] cause of the [accelerated degree offered]." ... I was just like talking to my grandmother. She go to church. She's the gospel lady, so...she was going to church, and they were saying yeah, [name of for-profit] was a good school to go to.

For-profit institutions make use of students' existing access to social capital and social networks even during the *admissions encounter*. Once the admissions interview has turned the prospective student into an enrollment, the training manual states they should ask for referrals. This is because these referrals are the largest source of new students, making students who are enrolling the business' marketing source to access their friends and family. Consistent with chain migration models of college enrollment (Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006), nearly all the students interviewed who chose to enroll in a for-profit did so based on word-of-mouth referral from a for-profit representative, a co-worker, a family member, friend, or community member within their family's social network.

In particular, students were more likely to feel intimidated about going to college when they had neither parents nor high school staff offering information about college or guiding their decision-making. Consequently, students felt more comfortable entering higher education when they had a personal connection to the institution. For over half of the students interviewed, that connection came in the form of a friend or extended family member who was enrolled or

enrolling. For-profit colleges use referrals to their advantage by encouraging current and potential students to specifically identify members of their community and support system who do not have a college degree and are part of non-college-educated families. Johanna followed her cousins to her two-year for-profit college immediately after high school:

*Interviewer:* Did you look at any other schools when you were looking?

*Johanna:* [name of a four-year college]

*Interviewer:* Did you look at any other two-year schools?

*Johanna:* No

*Interviewer:* Where did you get the information on [the for-profit college]?

*Johanna:* From my cousin

*Interviewer:* From your cousin. Does he or she go here?

*Johanna:* Yeah. My cousin and my brother

*Interviewer:* They both go here?

*Johanna:* Yes

*Interviewer:* When you looked at [four-year college], where did you get your information about that?

*Johanna:* My other cousin goes there

The access to social capital or students' personal networks is paramount to for-profit admissions. The training manual shows that the institution is aware of this and taps into this network of resources right away. Not only do students provide the largest amount of potential enrollees that actually do enroll with their referrals, but they ensure that they will be able to tell the students they contact that someone in their network has enrolled and recommended them to consider the college as well. This lends additional support to the type of students who tend to depend on their personal networks in this way in choosing a college.

### Conclusions

Our findings suggest overall that the *admissions encounter* at many for-profit colleges is a sales process focused on listening to potential students in order to identify their needs and then matching those needs with solutions provided by the institution. What is missing from this process and what was missing from the training manual are alternative solutions if the admissions representative is not confident that the for-profit will be able to meet the needs of the student. With a sales driven enrollment process students' needs can be conveniently steered into categories that can be links to solutions the for-profit institution can provide. If a student lacks information or advocacy they may not recognize that their needs could be better met elsewhere. During the *admissions encounter* the admissions representative shares information in a way that steers potential students toward enrollment at the for-profit. While it is quite probable that for-profit institutions are filling an un-met need, in many circumstances the for-profit may be a poor match for a student but the admissions representative's job is to sell the school, not offer admissions counseling about the best possible educational route for the student.

It is likely that enrollment at for-profit institutions will continue to rise. In further research it would be beneficial to include students who have both graduated or left prior to graduation from for-profits as well as those who decided not to enroll. It is imperative to students of these institutions that academic scholars continue to explore and research this "sales" aspect of enrollment since it is impacting the college trajectories of a growing percentage of the college-going population in the U.S.

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