My overall research question is “how do college enrollment officers view and respond to summer melt?” Summer melt occurs when students who have applied to, been accepted to, and pay the deposit to attend college do not matriculate in the fall. The topic of summer melt has significance because of the substantial resources invested by policymakers, legislators, school districts, and practitioners into college applications and admissions. To illustrate, in the School District of Philadelphia, a 38.2% gap exists between students who reported intentions to go to college and the actual college enrollment rate, meaning that nearly 40% of students who in May intended to go to college don’t show up in September.

To research this question, I am in the process of administering a survey to 7,000 members of NACAC (the National Association for College Admissions Counseling) regarding their knowledge and perceptions of summer melt. After I finish collecting questionnaire responses, I plan on following up with individuals who took the survey who consented to be contacted for a 20-minute follow-up interview, focusing on maintaining a diversity of institution types (e.g. selective vs. nonselective, 4-year vs. 2-year). The content of this interview protocol will be generated after review of the questionnaire data, as is often appropriate in mixed-methods research.

After I collect data from the survey and interviews, I will review the transcripts that I create after conducting interviews and code the data with major themes that emerge. To code the data, I will annotate phrases or sentences of my interview transcripts with the topics or themes that the text represents. An example of a code I may use in my research would be “finances,” under which subcodes could exist, such as “tuition deposit” or “FAFSA.” Thus, whenever I encounter a portion of a transcript that references financial difficulties, I would annotate the relevant sentences with the code “finances” or the more specific subcode. I will use a qualitative text analysis for this data analysis, such as Atlas.TI.

In addition, I will conduct quantitative review of my questionnaire data using SPSS. I will perform regressions on several variables evaluated by the survey, including awareness of the definition of summer melt, selectivity of the institution, type of institution, enrollment size of the institution, institutional yield, and perceived frequency of summer melt. I hope to evaluate the strength of connections between institutional characteristics (e.g. yield or enrollment) and the enrollment officer’s awareness of summer melt.

I look forward to making progress on this new refocused research, which has changed substantially over the summer. Over months of May and June, I refocused my research onto how colleges view and address summer melt, shifting away from my original desire to focus on the differences in summer melt rates in rural and urban environments. Noting that ample research has been conducted examining summer melt from the perspective of students and high schools, I have now chosen to focus instead on the college’s end of the handoff from K-12 to higher education.