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## College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR

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COLLEGE GIRL'S GUIDE TO FAYETTEVILLE

**College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR**

Sydney Johnson

University of Arkansas

# COLLEGE GIRL’S GUIDE TO FAYETTEVILLE

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### **Abstract**

The mission behind creating the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* was to ease the adjustment from high school to college for females attending the University of Arkansas. This is one of life's most monumental transitions, often resulting in anxiety, depression, and loneliness, specifically among the female demographic. With that in mind, the intent of the guidebook was to develop culture, confidence, and community on campus. In the aftermath of Covid-19, loneliness on college campuses has become an epidemic in need of a university-wide solution to increase student satisfaction and retention. A research aspect that heavily impacted the project was the adverse mental affects derived from technology dependence. This issue is rampant amidst college students which furthers loneliness and isolation. In contrast, print content such as guidebooks, novels, and magazines create a peaceful browsing experience, which demonstrates the purpose behind the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* being tangible as opposed to a website. Using this print guidebook as a resource to build community and explore the city, females will not only be exposed to the opportunities in Fayetteville, but also advice on how to immerse themselves into a new environment.

## **Introduction**

### **Background and Need**

Travel guidebooks are defined as an edited book with an impersonal, systematic, and detailed approach, that has been written and published with the purpose of providing information about a place for tourists (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020). As opposed to an online travel source, the tangibility of a guidebook separates it as an artifact of tourism with which the traveler can identify. They are commonly viewed as informational resources prior to traveling, gifts for someone's venture, or even a post-trip souvenir (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020). Within the market for travel guidebooks there is an extensive range catering to different travelers, allowing the individual to choose one that best aligns with their passions and objectives.

According to Holbrook's (1999) Consumer Value Theory, value is defined as a preferential experience and shows that although technological channels of information are available to the traveler, the value of a guidebook must extend past satisfying informational needs, as they are still chosen in addition to or in place of online resources (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020). Several reasons for the preference of a physical guidebook in opposition to technological sources include the organization and easily navigable curation of a guidebook, as well as lack of available cell service, and online confusion of smartphones (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020). A study focused on smartphone addiction within university students showed a significant association between smartphone dependency and depression specifically among freshman females, showing the adverse result of online confusion (Zhang, Guo, et al., 2023). The act of reading from a travel guidebook can be thought of as a serendipitous experience, where readers cannot get lost in a maze of tabs. In contrast to this relaxed experience of browsing, the smartphone's information overload can cause analysis paralysis when seeking information (Meili & Zillinger, 2020).

The transition from high school to college is universally recognized as one of the largest shifts an individual will endure throughout their existence (Duffy, Keown-Stoneman, et al., 2021). Varying degrees of difficulty with the transition occur depending on whether the individual attends a university close to home, if they have companions on campus, and the difficulty of their major. Even before Covid-19, loneliness had affected University students both domestically and internationally, with 75% of freshman reporting loneliness within the first 2 weeks on campus (Vasileiou, Barnett, et al., 2019). A survey from the National College Health Assessment showed that within the past 12 months, 64% of 2,149 domestic students felt very lonely, with a higher percent of this coming from females, where 71% of them reported loneliness (Vasileiou, Barnett, et al., 2019). Specific challenges reported include depression, substance abuse, and anxiety disorders (Zhang, Guo, et al., 2023). Regardless, universities nationwide have proved this data through the mental health crises occurring on their campuses among first-year students adapting to a new way of life in a foreign environment.

### **Problem Statement**

Within the past three years, as society adapts to the changes from a worldwide pandemic, the added social isolation produced a 16% increase in depression and anxiety among college students (Fruehwirth, Biswas, et al., 2021). Female students specifically report experiencing an increase in severe anxiety and depressive symptoms in response to the social isolation and distanced learning (Fruehwirth, Biswas, et al., 2021). Addressing the increase in mental health issues post-pandemic, specifically among first year female students, the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* will serve to provide communal activities to participate in, which will lead to decreased depression and increased social stimulation. The guidebook will provide a wide range of activities, restaurants, and unique offerings that freshman females can experience within

Fayetteville, Arkansas. Due to the overcrowding of online information specifically in the travel and tourism industry, creating something tangible and disconnected from technology provides a breath of fresh air among a demographic that is constantly stimulated. When Gen Z searches for information, trust has been found to be the main contributing factor influencing the decision on where to look (Pop, Săplăcan, et al., 2022). Trusting the source is crucial to the success of a book or website, and a consumer identifying with the author is the most effective way to create a genuine connection (Pop, Săplăcan, et al., 2022). As an out-of-state college student living in Fayetteville, Arkansas, writing the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville*, there is credibility simply due to my identity and lived experience.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of creating the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* is to provide a resource to help the female community on the University of Arkansas campus navigate and combat the difficulties associated with the transitional shift into freshman year, specifically after the adverse effects caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

### **Research Objectives**

Considering the guidebook's mission, the included information must serve the proposed demographic and lead to a seamless reader experience. These are some of the guiding objectives I have chosen to consider throughout the creation process.

Research Objective 1: Conduct email interviews with a selection of the included businesses that will be featured in in the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* to ask what their business possesses that will engage the female population. In their words, what do they offer that is a must-see/must try for this demographic?

Research Objective 2: Publish the guidebook through the Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing program. Discuss selling the guidebook within local NWA businesses to promote it directly to the community with local business-owners included in the guidebook.

Research Objective 3: Research best marketing strategies and curate visual aesthetics to include in the guidebook. Create a plan to effectively reach the target demographic of freshman female students attending the University of Arkansas Campus.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The travel and tourism industry plays a massive role in boosting economic revenue, generating jobs, and creating a sense of culture that draws people together. In Arkansas specifically, 2021 brought a record-breaking number of 41 million visitors, which doubled the number in 2020 (A.M.P. Staff, 2022). As society recovers from a worldwide pandemic, people are re-emerging from extreme social isolation to take back the years lost from strict regulations. During the pandemic, the way that college students learned, interacted, and spent their time was drastically altered, with most activities and courses taking place remotely, leading to increased loneliness (Vasileiou, Barnett, et al., 2019). An important consideration is where Gen Z travelers seek information about activities and offerings in an unfamiliar environment, and how to effectively add to a market oversaturated with information.

### **The History of Guidebooks: A Tourist's Resource**

Guidebooks have served as a channel for tourism information through the course of history, with the purpose of portraying the destination's identity. Travel documents like Biblical reports on the promised land, the Iliad and the Odyssey, and compilations of magnificent sights called Canons laid the conceptual framework. However, the literary genre we know today as



travel guidebooks emerged in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, to follow the trend of leisure travel (Meili & Zillinger, 2020). Thomas Cook is regarded as the modern-day father of tourism as he founded the first travel agency, legitimizing the organized travel industry (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020).

While the industry has adapted with time, the overarching goal of travel guides is to draw people to a specific location, using the art of engagement. Visually, this has been done through sketches, watercolors, engravings, photographs, film, and now with the rise of digital media (Alú & Hill, 2018). The importance of visuals in travel guidebooks has only risen in importance as digital media has expanded. Research has shown that those seeking travel information value experiences, emotions, novelty, creativity, aesthetics, enjoyment, and learning (Zhang & Honggang, 2020). Past research has focused on travel guidebooks as cultural texts, artifacts of tourism, or informational tools (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020). Guidebooks have been studied as information channels as opposed to objects of consumption, creating a research gap. Therefore, more research must be conducted with guidebooks defined as a consumer choice to explore this identity. While staying true to the original purpose is crucial, it is important to adapt to changes in the industry as it relates to tangible travel resources.

### **Relevancy in a Digital Age**

Although social media, blogging and vlogging, and other forms of digital platforms have gained traction within the travel industry, the popularity of guidebooks has continued to prevail (Meili & Zillinger, 2020). This shows that though online information is readily available, there are certain aspects of the traditional guidebook that digital methods cannot obtain. Zhang & Honggang (2020) conducted a study on the use of guidebooks and found that this tourism information channel goes beyond satisfying informational needs through excellence, aesthetics, and efficiency. The tangibility of a book provides the opportunity to bookmark pages, make

notes, and easily flip back and forth between chapters (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020). Online sources allow for postponed planning so that travel decisions can be made while already on the trip.

Although the instant gratification of smartphones is efficient, the peaceful act of seeking information through a print source offers an entirely unique experience.

On a broader scale than the travel and tourism industry, smartphone usage has significantly changed the way Gen Z interacts, seeks entertainment, and spends most of its time. In a 2023 smartphone study conducted on a college campus, the results showed a strong correlation between smartphone addition and depression among college freshman, but only the female population (Zhang, Guo, et al., 2023). A probable reason for this could be the online activities females are engaging in as opposed to males, which lead to elevated levels of comparison and inadequacy. In a separate study by Rodriguez et al. (2020), focusing on withdrawal symptoms related to smartphone usage, researchers found that participants of the study reported serious cases of separation anxiety from their devices. This included mental and physical distress, loneliness, confusion, and anxiety. Concerningly, these symptoms are synonymous with those faced by drug abusers when attempting to quit (Rodriguez, Lozano, et al., 2020).

### **College Transition**

As students transition into an unfamiliar environment for their collegiate years, clinically significant mental health issues have run rampant among the first-year population. Mental health issues can heavily impact overall motivation which hinders the ability to academically perform, interact socially, explore city surroundings, and enjoy leisure time (Duffy, 2020). Instead, freshman find comfort in a smartphone screen, which worsens the depressive cycle (Rodríguez, Lozano, et al., 2020). Among the students pursuing mental health resources on campus, the

universal issues are depression and anxiety (Fruehwirth, Biswas, et al., 2021). A study by Gopalan (2019) examining student's level of belonging between 2-year and 4-year schools showed that 4-year universities allowed students more time to adapt to their surroundings. As stated by the study's participants, persistence beyond the initial adjustment was key (Gopalan & Brady, 2019). These studies show a tremendous mental, physical, and emotional upset involved when transitioning from high school to college that can lead to loneliness and hinder students' sense of belonging. With this data in mind, a comprehensive intervention method with the whole university in mind is worth researching (Duffy, Keown-Stoneman, et al., 2020). The goal of this approach should be to stop the issues before they become rampant on the campus, as they have in many cases.

### **Tourism Marketing Tactics**

In the travel and tourism industry as it relates to Gen Z, marketing efforts are crucial. As the industry has expanded and shown extreme revenue building results among cities, the current research has been trending toward a traveler-focused model as opposed to a destination-focused model (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019). Travel research focusing on Gen Z is only recently beginning to show up in tourism academic journals, and there is expansive room to elaborate on this topic (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019). In a study utilizing eye-tracking to examine the types of readers engaging in travel literature, the results reiterated the significance of being aware of the various reader profiles, including holistic content examiners, visual passives, supplemental scanners, and visual dominants (Lever, Shen, et al., 2019). Authors cannot create a guidebook for each individual reader style, so instead they must design the guidebook in a way that simultaneously appeals to all different types to build greater engagement.

In relationships between Gen Z consumers and organizations, trust has been proven to impact consumer choice. This is especially prevalent as it pertains to influencer marketing in the travel industry. Though the concept is complex, trust is a variable that influences individual and group behavior more than any other (Pop, Săplăcan, et al., 2022). In travel marketing, it is fundamental to building long-term relationships with travelers, where they can trust the author's credibility (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020). In addition to the importance of credibility, the "aesthetic experience," defined as the subjective process in which individuals are stimulated by aesthetic qualities that generate cognitive judgements, heavily impacts consumer decisions (Zhang & Honggang, 2020). While the worth of aesthetics in the tourism industry has been recognized, research scholars have failed to investigate the aesthetic experience through scientific studies (Zhang & Honggang, 2020). This is an area that is crucially tied to marketing and should be investigated, with more intentionality, by destination and tourism marketing researchers.

### **Conclusion**

As time passes and industries develop, the channels for spreading mass information change as well. In the travel and tourism industry, there is a need to expand upon Gen Z and its travel behaviors. More studies defining guidebooks as a consumer choice instead of an information channel would also provide valuable data. Research showing the relevancy of print guidebooks in a digital age (Meili & Zillinger, 2020) displays the serenity that comes from disconnecting from technology and reconnecting with the world. The correlation between persistent smartphone usage and depression paired with significant withdrawal symptoms shows the necessity for action to be taken to fix this digital obsession among college campuses (Rodriguez, Lozano, et al., 2020). This is especially prevalent with those planning trips or moving to new cities that opt to utilize print sources, which are void of technological issues and

feelings of comparison that can arise with social media. Lastly, there is a need for further investigation in college students struggling with smartphone dependency, as opposed to those who engage in greater social engagements and activities. Engaging students in the local community could help alleviate the mental health crises occurring on many college campuses, specifically in the female population.

### **Development Plan**

The overarching goal of the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* is to serve as a tangible travel guidebook for University of Arkansas first-year females. This resource aims to bridge the gap between the high school and college transition, cultivate community between the first-year female class, and serve as a marketing tool for the businesses included. The purpose of creating a print guidebook as opposed to a digital platform was to cultivate presence instead of distraction. Scientific literature has shown the problem of technological dependence and the effects it has on the mental health of college females (Vasileiou, Barnett, et al., 2019). The structure of the book will provide an interactive experience for each reader, with areas to write about their experience and check off places they have gone. The following explanation will serve as a roadmap for the book's curation, publishing steps, and marketing plan.

### **Design Process and Creative Works**

#### **Identifying Branding & Businesses to Feature**

The starting point for the guidebook was curating a brand to direct the visuals, copywriting, and overall identity. I focused on selecting specific fonts, creating a cohesive color scheme, and adding visually appealing elements. Once I had an idea of the theme I wanted to pursue, I constructed a branding template to display the details and keep the aesthetic at the

forefront during the editing process. Then, I wrote out a list of Fayetteville businesses to include based on relevant criteria. Restaurants, specifically, were chosen based on the Diamond Restaurant Rating Guidelines, created by the AAA Diamond Program (AAA, n.d). All other businesses were judged according to their level of hospitality and the company's relevancy to college-aged females. The goal of the guidebook was to highlight the best of Fayetteville to the demographic of college females, while building community. The businesses included were those that would effectively meet that goal. This spanned from local restaurants, bars, cafes, boutiques, activities, and unique Fayetteville offerings such as the weekly farmers market on Saturdays.

### **Conducting Interviews and Generating Photo and Video Content**

I began by curating a list of every single category I wanted to include in the guide: Coffee, food, activities, salons & spas, workout studios, photo opportunities, and more. Once I drafted the list, I acquired the contacts for each business. I reached out explaining the vision as well as requesting professional photographs and information that would be relevant to a college female. I wanted to choose the photos I felt reflected each business while staying true to branding of the guidebook. If the business did not have photographs readily available, I set times to capture my own, or requested access to local NWA bloggers' photographs with proper acknowledgement. I also set up semi-structured interviews to define exactly what the business offered the college female demographic. This allowed me to plug into the community and get them involved in the process. The purpose of these visits was to conduct semi-structured interviews with businessowners to gather correct, relevant, and interesting information about the local businesses; they will not be reported on. During the interviews, I asked about the business, unique information about their brand relevant to college females as well as what sets them apart, and other niche features. I also gathered photo and video content to post once the guidebook was

published via social media. Marketing methods for the College Girl's Guide were conducted on social media, where the book is sold, as well as in NWA shops. When I spoke with certain interviewees (CEO, manager, owner, etc.) I discussed selling the guidebook within businesses such as boutiques, cafes, and gift shops.

### **Developing the First Draft of the Guidebook**

I utilized Canva to build the guidebook using the images captured and the information gained through the conducted interviews. I made sure to credit all the photos and quotes I included. I chose Canva because of the unique templates and user-friendly nature of the software. I wanted to create a seamless reader experience by providing an engaging and interactive stream of information. I chose templates for each section in the book from "Coffee Crawl" to "Must-Do's", then filled the template with photos and text. Aside from the Fayetteville fun, food, and activities, I also wanted to provide some big-sisterly advice to girls reading the guide. I reached out to ten women asking them to share an aspect of their time at the University of Arkansas. The different areas of advice were work & study balance, favorite Fayetteville spots, ways to make friends, plugging into a church and more. Once the internal pages were complete, I sent them to a copyeditor and a graphic design editor for a comprehensive review. The next step was shooting the cover for the guidebook. This was done in front of Pink House Alchemy on N. College Avenue using a University of Arkansas student as the photographer. Once the guidebook was drafted, edited, and complete, researching publishing companies began.

### **Seeking a Publisher**

I explored many different publishing options from travel literature publishers, large publishers, small and independent publishers, and the option of self-publishing. This process was filled with sifting through relevant information regarding the publishing process to choose the

method that best aligned with the guidebook's brand, budget, and timeline. Once the guidebook draft was complete, I provided a PDF of the College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville to my mentor and my thesis committee to provide initial feedback. Then, I sent the completed draft of the guidebook to Amazon KDP for review and editing. This process was a constant dialogue of making relevant edits based on KDP suggestions and cleaning up the trim size of the book. Once the draft was suitable, the guidebook was ready to publish. I then finalized where in Fayetteville the book would be retailed in-store, in addition to the availability to purchase it online via Amazon.

### **Marketing the Guidebook Online**

After the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* was published, social media marketing began. I made sure to create content surrounding the book to post on social media via my personal account. Once the book launched, friends and family were quick to repost which garnered attention from many different groups and individuals. Articles written on the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* from the *Traveler*, *Hill Magazine*, and the University of Arkansas Division of Economic Development created enough buzz to land publicity for the guidebook on KNWA and Channel 5 news. The concluding step was to plan the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* launch party at Pink House Alchemy. I chose this location because the book cover was shot here, and the Pink House branding matched the guidebook aesthetic perfectly. I specifically sent invitations to my community and bloggers in the area, but the event was open to the public as well. Pink House created three custom cocktails using their handcrafted syrups, and it was a night of book signings, networking, and celebration. Using my knowledge of social media and PR strategy, I plan to continue hosting events where the guidebook is sold to grow its impact.



### Discussion

The heart behind this project was to cultivate culture, confidence, and community within the female demographic at the University of Arkansas. Upon completion, the mission for the guidebook was effectively achieved. Females undergoing the transition into collegiate life are a group I deeply identify with, which provides reliability and trust to my authorship. As an out of state student from Austin, Texas with no friends when I first moved to Arkansas, I would have loved a guidebook that provided advice from older girls, activities around Fayetteville, and allowed me to plug myself into the community faster. Scientifically, activities are shown to be a major contributor to building strong, lasting relationships. Therefore, I focused on including opportunities that could be done with others to give girls ideas of things to do alongside new friends. In February 2023, I was given the opportunity to speak at the Arkansas Governor's Conference on Travel and Tourism. I was awarded a conference grant to attend and was privileged to share my idea with a group of seasoned travel and tourism experts and hear from industry leaders. This opportunity gave me new ideas for the book as well as innovative marketing techniques to utilize. From start to finish, the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* is unrecognizable with edits and improvements. There truly is not a single aspect of this project's design process I would have changed. A massive lesson I learned was the importance of a team in such a daunting project. My team consisted of a copyeditor, a photographer, a graphic design editor, bloggers who authorized photo utilization, friends who shared their best advice, and businesses who were more than willing to provide information. Every single step of the way was crucial to the final product, even the setbacks.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the hope I have for the *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* is that it would be an impactful resource that increases student satisfaction and raises retention at the University of Arkansas. With personal anecdotes, unique recommendations, and advice from older college females, the guidebook is a comprehensive asset to market Fayetteville amidst female newcomers. In the future, I plan to host book pop-up events at the locations included in the guidebook where college girls can connect. I would love to create another guide towards a different target audience or broaden the brand of the College Girl's Guide to a website, social media account, and *College Girl's Guide to Fayetteville, AR* ambassador program. Girls who participate in the program would receive a free copy of the guidebook in exchange for sending me content doing activities and trying restaurants in the guidebook that I could then share with my audience. Overall, the dream is that this guidebook would positively impact the University of Arkansas, which has become my home for the last 3.5 years as I completed undergrad. I hope to give back to a school that has given me so many opportunities and supported me throughout the journey of Honors at Arkansas.

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