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## COLLEGE and UNIVERSITY

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# IMPROVING RETENTION

## ONE COLLEGE'S STRIDE TOWARD IMPROVEMENT

In order to support a new knowledge-based economy, President Obama has determined that more of our population will need a college degree. This paper examines one primarily associate degree granting college's retention efforts to contribute to the national goal and improve student success.

During the latter part of the first decade of the 21st century, the U.S. economy faltered. Many Americans lost their jobs, homes, and the ability to afford a college education. In response, President Barack Obama outlined the need for 8 million additional college graduates—many of whom will need to earn associate degrees—to fuel the economy and restore America's place as the country with the largest proportion of college graduates in the world. In support of this goal, the U.S. Department of Education (2011) releases state-by-state reviews of degree attainment by individuals between the ages of 24 and 35 years.

Nationally, close to 16 million Americans (39%) in this age group have earned either an associate or bachelor's degree. In order to achieve the President's objective, 27 mil-

lion Americans in this age group will need to have earned a college credential by 2020 (U.S. Department of Education 2011). The rate of increase varies by state. Arkansas, New Mexico, and Nevada, whose target population ranks lowest nationally, has a college degree attainment rate of 28 percent. Each of these states will need to increase its degree attainment rate to between 42 and 60 percent to help the nation achieve its goal of having 50 percent of the population earn a college degree. Other states—including Massachusetts and North Dakota—as well as the District of Columbia have a different set of challenges as their percentages of young degree holders already exceed the national goal of 50 percent. Nevertheless, such states must post large increases if they are to help the nation meet the

# ON RATES

national goal. The graduation rate needed in North Dakota is between 60 and 76 percent, and in Massachusetts it is 60 to 81 percent; in Washington DC, the required rate is between 60 and 98 percent (U.S. Department of Education 2011).

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts faces numerous challenges to achieving a college degree attainment rate of between 60 and 81 percent. Among the challenges are a decreasing population of “traditional” college students and low graduation rates at community colleges (Alssid, Goldberg and Schneider 2011). Consequently, Massachusetts will have to increase its retention of college students if it is to meet the degree attainment goal set for it.

According to the U.S. Census, the percentage of the population of the Commonwealth grew only 3.1 percent between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2012) and is below the national population growth rate of 9.7 percent. In addition, a mere 21.7 percent of the population is younger than 18 years of age. This is less than the national rate of 24 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2012) and less than the 23.6 percent recorded in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000).

President Obama noted the importance of two-year colleges in increasing degree attainment rates and supporting a knowledge-based economy. At the 2010 Summit on Community Colleges, he stated that “jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience” (Obama 2010). While the Commonwealth has one of the highest percentages of its 24- to 35-year-old population cohort earning an associate or bachelor’s degree, its three-year average graduation rate of community college students is 17.4 percent—lower than the national average of 21.5 percent (Lassen 2007).

Public funding for higher education in Massachusetts has presented its own challenges. In a study commissioned by The Boston Foundation, Lassen (2007) reports that “Massachusetts had the largest decrease in public higher education funding in the nation from 2001–2004.” She also reports that despite having a 10 percent increase in enrollment, Massachusetts is “the only state in the country that is spending less for public higher education than it did ten years ago” (Lassen 2007). Because of the limited public investment in higher education, the Commonwealth must

rely more heavily on the private higher education sector to contribute to national degree attainment rates.

While much of the research on two-year colleges has focused on public community colleges, there are a number of private, independent two-year colleges whose graduates will also contribute to a knowledge-based economy and to meeting the President's degree attainment goal. This review focuses on one private two-year college in Massachusetts that has set the aggressive goal of increasing its graduation rate to 70 percent by 2016; this goal is within the degree attainment range that the U.S. Department of Education has set for Massachusetts. The college community has taken significant steps to improve the retention and graduation rates of its student population, and it has netted some promising results in a short period of time.

## STUDENT RETENTION

Retention is a buzzword on most U.S. college campuses. While many institutions have measured their enrollment success by the number of students they have admitted, others have shifted their focus to improving their retention and graduation rates (Budden *et al.* 2010). Retention rates correlate with institutional enrollment, financial resources, and graduation rates (Smith *et al.* 2009). In addition to business-related reasons to increase retention and graduation rates, there are political, governmental, and ethical reasons as well (Budden *et al.* 2010).

## RETENTION FACTORS

To those who do not work within higher education, retention may seem a simple issue. In fact, there are many factors—academic and non-academic—that affect a student's ability to persist to graduation.

Many newly admitted college students are academically under-prepared for the amount and level of work required of them. As a result, many colleges and universities have introduced developmental, or remedial, classes to better prepare such students for postsecondary course work. In addition, there has been a large increase in the number of documented learning differences among primary and secondary students; nevertheless, colleges and universities do not yet provide these students—as they attain college-going age—with reasonable accommodations as described in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Many of the non-academic factors that affect student success are financial and socioeconomic. It is no secret that the cost of higher education is increasing—in stark contrast to family earnings and their increasingly limited ability to meet educational expenses. Time is yet another non-academic factor that often affects students' success, particularly when students must maintain full-time employment.

Colleges and universities need to do more to support student success. Many colleges that monitor student retention fail to address systemic issues facing *all* of their students. Instead, they focus their efforts on certain populations of students who have been identified as being at risk of not graduating. Institutions must begin to consider *each and every student* as being at risk of not graduating and must involve their entire communities in discussions and action focused on increasing student retention and graduation rates. Only then will their efforts prove effective in both the short and the long term.

## BENJAMIN FRANKLIN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology (subsequently referred to as the College) is a small, independent, not-for-profit higher education institution that prepares high school graduates for careers in technical fields. Accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the College is located in Boston's South End neighborhood. Only 11 percent of the student population lives on campus.

Historically, the College had higher graduation rates, on average, than community colleges in Massachusetts. While this remained true, the College experienced a decrease in its retention rate beginning with the class that was admitted in fall 2009. Students who had entered the College in fall 2004 had a 43 percent graduation rate; by the latter 2000s, the rate decreased to the high 30 percent range (Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology 2012). Because of the decrease, the College lost a significant amount of anticipated revenue. In response, senior leadership began to enact a systemic initiative to increase retention and graduation rates.

The College's spring 2012 enrollment was 455 students enrolled in three certificate, one bachelor's, and nine associate degree programs (Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology 2012). The student headcount had increased by 16 over the fall 2011 figure, and the full-time equivalent

student body had increased by 31.8. Though perhaps not numerically significant to the casual observer, such increases—in student headcount and full-time equivalent—are not common. In fact, neither had happened to such a degree at the College since it had begun to collect enrollment data, in 2007 (Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology 2012). One contributing factor was a retention rate 3 percentage points higher than in the previous year.

## STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Once administrators agreed that action was necessary to increase the number of students being retained and graduating, the College formed a retention committee and charged it with identifying issues that were preventing students from persisting to degree attainment; researching how to ameliorate the issues; and implementing programs or services that would do so. The committee was co-chaired by the dean of students, the dean of academic affairs, and the dean of enrollment management. These three individuals were key decision makers who sought to implement changes to institutional operations in order to better serve students. Each division of the College was represented, with the result that almost 25 percent of its full-time employees served on the committee.

The committee examined several key aspects of the problem: populations of students at risk of dropping out, attendance trends, advising and mentoring, freshman seminars, developmental education, and an early alert system whereby faculty and staff inform one another of issues related to individual students. As a result of these efforts, retention was integrated into the College's strategic plan as a key objective and was discussed in multiple forums, including with prospective and current students, faculty, staff, administrators, trustees, and friends of the College. The entire community was made increasingly aware of the importance of retention, with the result that it soon adopted a philosophy of student success: Our goal is for every student to graduate.

## IDENTIFYING AT-RISK POPULATIONS

Research shows that factors that can contribute to poor persistence to degree include diversity, socioeconomic background, learning and psychiatric disabilities, and previous academic performance (Garcia 2010; Lloyd and Eckhardt 2010; Vaquera and Maestas 2009). The College's

retention committee thus began to review data as part of its effort to identify subgroups at greater risk of attrition. The College did not have a long history of collecting data such as high school grade point average or SAT scores, and quantitative data proved scarce. Nevertheless, the College did have limited data—including placement test scores—pertaining to certain subgroups, including students in the College's developmental education program, and students who were graduates of Boston public schools.

On the basis of its research, the committee determined that most students demonstrated some characteristic of being at risk of dropping out and that all students should be monitored for behaviors that would limit their academic success.

## SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Lloyd and Eckhardt (2010) assert that students who enroll at two-year colleges are financially disadvantaged compared to those who enroll at four-year institutions. Vaquera and Maestas (2009) cite numerous sources as evidence of "family socioeconomic status having a direct or indirect effect on persistence" toward degree attainment. And Williams and Luo (2010) find that students who live within 50 miles of the college they attend are more likely than students who live at greater distances to persist.

The majority of students enrolled at Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology are at risk on the basis of socioeconomic factors: 70 percent of the College's student population is considered low income on the basis of its receipt of Pell grants (National Center for Education Statistics 2012). A large percentage of its students are from urban areas (primarily Boston), and the vast majority are residents of Massachusetts.

In an effort to minimize the effect of socioeconomic issues on student persistence and graduation, the College committed itself to keeping tuition low and to providing financial assistance to its students. Compared to other private colleges in Massachusetts, Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology has the lowest net-tuition charge (National Center for Education Statistics 2012). As part of its investigation, the retention committee observed that many students who were experiencing poor attendance and minimal academic success had employment that was necessary not only to pay for their education but also to help provide for their families. The committee also noted

that students employed on campus through the federal work-study program had approximately a 10 percentage point higher retention rate than the general student population (Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology 2012).

## STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Some research suggests that non-attendance may be a student's way of "silently withdrawing" (Bowen *et al.* 2005) from college. Administrators charged with monitoring student attendance may be able to identify issues causing students to disengage from their studies (Bowen *et al.* 2005).

Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology enrolls a large population of Boston public school graduates. According to an analysis by the *Boston Globe*, poor attendance at Boston public schools is a chronic and longstanding issue; in 2011, more than a third of the students enrolled at the city's public schools were chronically absent (Vaznis 2012). Similarly, the College's retention committee identified poor attendance as an issue for many of its students. Faculty were urged to use the College's student information system to track their students' attendance beginning in the fall 2011 semester. At the same time, a subcommittee was formed to monitor attendance. Each week, the Students of Concern Committee reaches out to students, faculty members, and academic advisors to determine whether students have attended their classes—and if not, what can be done to re-engage them. This monitoring is in addition to the long-standing electronic early-alert system that enables faculty members and advisors to communicate about individual students and keep one another informed about students' particular situations.

## INTRUSIVE ADVISING AND MENTORING

Many two-year colleges have open enrollment policies, with the result that their student bodies are very heterogeneous. Such students typically are challenged by a wide variety of "academic, personal, and environmental factors that can have a large impact on their success" (Colalillo 2007). Because student characteristics and the complexity of students' individual situations vary, so, too, should colleges' advising mechanisms. Escobedo (2007) defines intrusive advising as "intervening early, following up with a plan of contacts, and getting to the heart of what is causing the difficulty so the appropriate intervention takes place." Intrusive advising typically benefits non-traditional stu-

dents because "the approach inherently takes individual needs into consideration and focuses on matching interventions and services to those needs" (Smith 2007). It typically involves advisors making personal contact with students, students understanding how their actions (or inaction) affects their academic performance, and identifying and addressing (to the extent possible) whatever has caused the academic difficulties (Vander Schee 2007).

Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology utilizes an intrusive counseling model. Most instructional and administrative staff—including the president and senior administrators—serve as student advisors and mentors. The College has a long-standing tradition of intrusive advising, but only in recent history has it allocated financial resources in support of these efforts. As a result of the initiatives of the retention committee, the advising department has been expanded to two full-time positions. Accordingly, the College reduced the advising caseload of one staff member and expanded the assistant director's portfolio to include students with diagnosed learning disabilities. In addition, advisor training has been expanded from a single session that focuses on updates and a question and answer session to include additional training opportunities.

## DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION AND FRESHMAN SEMINARS

Escobedo (2007) cites Robert McCabe in stating that "one in four students who enter higher education is underprepared." Two-year colleges need to create special developmental education programs to support these students. Many have designed such programs to be more than remedial courses. First-year seminars have proven to be associated with increases in retention and graduation rates (Jessup-Anger 2011).

After determining that students in the developmental education program at Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology were not persisting to degree completion at a rate comparable to that of students enrolled from the outset in college-level English and math courses, the retention committee recommended a pilot one-credit first-year seminar program. The Franklin Seminar would provide students with explicit opportunities to develop effective study skills in the context of the courses they were taking. Once implemented, the Franklin Seminar posted dramatic results: the developmental cohort median grade

point averages increased dramatically compared to those of the prior cohort. Students requested that the Franklin Seminar continue into their second semester; in addition, an Academic Achievement Seminar was implemented for students whose poor academic performance had resulted in their being placed on academic suspension or probation. The seminar integrates curriculum centered on effective study skills with tutoring specific to the courses in which the students are enrolled.

## RESULTS

Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology has netted some positive results since beginning to focus on retention as a key aspect of enrollment management. Faculty members have demonstrated their commitment to the College's retention efforts by participating in training initiatives and intrusive advising and by tracking student attendance. New processes, policies, and committees have been formed to promote satisfactory academic progress, in part by monitoring and addressing student non-attendance. A new first-year seminar course, which incorporates study skills instruction and in-class tutoring, has been developed for students enrolled in remedial coursework. This seminar now also enrolls students on academic probation.

As a result of these efforts, student retention from the fall 2011 to the spring 2012 semester increased by 3 percentage points compared to that from the fall 2010 to the spring 2011 semester. In addition, students' average GPA was higher at the end of the fall 2011 semester than at the end of the fall 2010 semester. Finally, the percentage of students placed on academic suspension or probation at the end of the fall 2011 semester was less than that at the end of the fall 2010 semester.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While many of the retention strategies that have been implemented at Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology have resulted in short-term gains, the present study is preliminary; long-term success has yet to be realized. Moreover, the findings of this study are limited by the size of the College and the relatively small number of students (400–450) affected. Further research should focus on colleges and universities of various sizes that utilize similar retention efforts and to determine whether these results can be replicated. Sharing retention strategies and results

will help institutions improve their practice so that more students graduate.

The essential feature that has helped ensure the success of our retention efforts is the shared conviction that individual efforts can positively impact student success. The College's entire senior staff, board of trustees, faculty, and professional staff have wholeheartedly adopted the definition of success as students graduating from the College; each constituency has done its part to contribute to the College's retention efforts. The admissions staff has improved its tracking of data (*e.g.*, in-coming students' high school GPAs and SAT scores) that can be used to inform course placement and advisor assignment. Faculty members have tracked attendance data in the student information system, served as advisors, and taught the new seminars. Enrollment management, student affairs, and academic affairs staff meet frequently to discuss individual students of concern and conduct outreach in order to help students overcome obstacles to their success; sometimes this involves working with students to utilize support services. Further retention research might seek to determine how sustainable similar retention efforts are at institutions either where the community does not fully support them or where the student and staff populations are larger.

## CONCLUSION

Higher education institutions—particularly those that award primarily associate degrees—must pay closer attention to student retention and how it correlates with graduation rates. Colleges and universities “are facing increased accountability across the United States, and student persistence and retention to degree completion are scrutinized by state boards and legislatures alike” (Escobedo 2007). Colleges and universities must understand that every student—not just those from certain locations or with a certain type of academic background—is at risk of not graduating. To ensure success, each and every employee must believe that all students deserve support so they can graduate; none should seek to use mechanisms to “weed out” those who seem not to be academically prepared for college.

Increasing the population of U.S. citizens that have earned a college degree is critical if the nation's knowledge-based economy is to prove successful and sustainable. Without a more knowledgeable society, the United States will continue to experience the skills gap that has undermined

our economy in recent years. Smith *et al.* (2009) note that “improving retention is not a quick fix; it takes time and must be sustained.” Time will tell if Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology’s coordinated retention efforts will lead to a long-term and sustained increase in its retention and graduation rates.

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## About the Author

**MICHAEL A. BOSCO** is Dean of Enrollment Management at Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology in Boston, Massachusetts. He is pursuing a doctor of education degree with a concentration in higher education administration at Northeastern University.

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# ANTICIPATORY ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

## Another Level of Enrollment Management

Building on the principles of Enrollment Management (EM) and Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM), Anticipatory Enrollment Management (AEM) offers another level of managing enrollment: anticipating future enrollment. AEM is grounded in the basic principles of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and includes strategic outreach to parents and students from the time of acceptance to graduation. But AEM focuses more on anticipating future enrollment and suggests that enrollment managers should spend more time on research and less time on attending meetings. AEM lists the weekly and monthly publications to read, beyond the “usual suspects,” to help create a mindset that focuses on the future and not just on next year’s class. AEM offers methods for enrollment managers to connect the dots to increase their school’s enrollment pie and gives suggestions on how to research trends that could become future markets. AEM challenges enrollment managers to re-organize their daily activities by creatively replacing the demands of today with the possibilities of tomorrow.

In the September 1989, issue of *Change*, Richard Chaite, executive director of the National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance at the University of Maryland, describes the following memorandum:

*To: The Dean of Enrollment Management*

*From: President (or Faculty Senate)*

*Welcome aboard. Please recruit more and better students from a smaller and weaker pool of prospects without increased costs, more financial aid, or drastic program changes. Would like to see the results reflected in next year's class. Best wishes.*

Fast forward to 2012. A similar memo might read:

*To: Dean of Enrollment Management*

*From: President (or Faculty Senate)*

*Welcome aboard. You may attend one conference this year: the annual meeting of the World Future Society. You may read only one report: the most recent U.S. Census. And before you send any recruiter abroad, I would like you to review a copy of the Stratfor report. Identify three new national and international markets, and recommend two new academic programs based on recent market analysis. Would like to see the results reflected in the next academic year. Best wishes.*

The concept of enrollment management is nearly 40 years old. The field focuses on the management of student enrollment through the realignment of certain administrative functions to synergistically integrate services to students. In 1976, in an article that appeared in Boston College's *Bridge Magazine*, John Maguire defines enrollment management as a process that brings together disparate functions related to recruiting, funding, tracking, retaining, and replacing students as they enroll, progress, and graduate.

Organized by strategic planning and supported by institutional and enrollment research, enrollment management activities focus on student college choice, transition to college, the influence of financial aid policies on admission and enrollment, student attrition and retention, and student outcomes.

Michael Dolence (1996) enhanced the concept of enrollment management by introducing strategic enrollment management (SEM), which suggests that enrollment management plans should be integrated into a school's overall strategic plan. SEM focuses on data and key performance indicators and alignment with a school's objectives.

In his latest book, *EM=C<sup>2</sup>: A New Formula for Enrollment Management*, Maguire (2011) expands his earlier definition of enrollment management to include community and the need to incorporate principles of customer relationship management (CRM) into enrollment and retention management practices.

There is little doubt that for many colleges and universities, the implementation of enrollment management practices has resulted in increased enrollment and retention and stabilized tuition revenue. Given current national and international economic instability and the dramatic changes taking place in higher education, enrollment managers will continue to be successful not only as they manage enrollment but also as they anticipate it.

Anticipatory enrollment management (AEM) thus comprises a mindset and work schedule that asks enrollment managers to add to their basic enrollment and retention management programs another layer of activity: anticipating new and future enrollment that can introduce additional revenue streams either by creating new academic programs or by new and creative use of technology. AEM asks enrollment managers to spend more time conducting research on trends both inside and outside higher education and connecting those trends to future enrollment opportunities.

AEM is grounded in the basic principles of CRM and includes strategic outreach to parents and students that begins prior to acceptance and admission and that continues through graduation. Like enrollment management, AEM is aligned with both a school's strategic plan and its SEM plan. AEM focuses on diversifying and increasing a school's revenue stream by using data and research to anticipate new markets.

In the present age of shrinking national and state budgets, demographic shifts and retention issues, and downsizing, AEM is about increasing the enrollment pie, not shrinking it. It is about creating transfer centers for students moving from one school to another; three-year degree programs and combined undergraduate and graduate degree programs; winter-term online course offerings and increased online summer programs. It is not only about anticipating enrollment growth; it is about creating enrollment growth.

Many seasoned enrollment managers are already practicing AEM. This article is intended for the younger enrollment professional who may be learning the basics of enrollment and retention management and who wants to expand her knowledge of the profession.

We must anticipate our institutions' future enrollment because the higher education landscape is shifting dramatically—and it will continue to. Consider the following:

- From 2000 until 2009, undergraduate enrollment increased from 13.2 million to 17.6 million students. Undergraduate enrollment at private, for-profit institutions quadrupled—from 0.4 million students to more than 2 million students. Enrollment at two-year institutions increased from 5.9 to 7.5 million students. Female enrollment increased 31 percent. The number of black students tripled, and the number of Hispanic and Asian Pacific Islander students increased fivefold (National Center for Education Statistics 2011).
- Since 1980, college tuition has increased 375 percent while the average family income has increased 127 percent. In 1981, Pell grants paid, on average, 69 percent of college tuition; in 2011, they paid only 34 percent of tuition (Pew Research Center 1980).
- Outstanding student loan debt reached \$1 trillion in 2011 (The Lawlor Group 2011).
- It is impossible to estimate the number of college graduates who cannot pay their student loan bills and are liv-

ing with their parents either because they cannot find work or the work they do have does not allow them to live independently.

- According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), full-time enrollment is projected to increase 20 percent, and part-time enrollment is expected to increase 14 percent during the next few years. Half of the increase will occur in only three states—California, Texas, and Florida.
- The U.S. Census Bureau released a 2010 Census brief that reported that the Hispanic population accounted for more than half of the total U.S. population increase of 27.3 million persons. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population increased 43 percent—four times the nation's 9.7 percent growth rate.
- The National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reported that nearly 60 percent of all undergraduate students have enrolled at more than one higher education institution, an increase from 49 percent two decades ago.

The higher education “customer” has changed: Students today are “digital natives.” They study in “brick and click” environments. They migrate from one school to another and from one program to another. They are savvy and demanding consumers. They refuse to mortgage their futures with large loans, and they want good jobs after graduation. Many are members of the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Technology and social media have affected every aspect of higher education. Marketers no longer have complete control of their message or brand. A disgruntled student blogger could destroy the most carefully constructed marketing plan in an instant.

The Occupy Wall Street demonstrations and the long-term impact of the worldwide recession will affect higher education for years to come. There is evidence that parents and students will select a college based on cost and financial aid and not necessarily because it is the best fit. There also is evidence that some schools are selecting students for admission based on the ability of the students' families to pay.

The decrease in federal and state funding for higher education will require colleges and universities to create new business models; those that have been in place for decades simply are not sustainable. Skyrocketing discount rates and “let's make a deal” financial aid offers will have to change.

It seems safe to predict that future higher education students will be lifelong learners. Today's undergraduate degree could be compared to the high school degree of 50 years ago in that it constitutes a beginning degree, not the final one. Most undergraduate students will continue their studies either in graduate or business school. The concept and practice are as important at the graduate level as at the undergraduate. Combined degrees, three-year degrees, and collaboration with other colleges and universities—all are essential for AEM.

How could AEM change the work life and practices of enrollment managers? Consider the following five recommendations:

### **ANTICIPATE TRENDS**

I advise graduate education students that the most important quality of an enrollment manager is curiosity, a quality that often takes you out of your comfort zone. To anticipate trends that may affect future enrollment, you have to be curious, always looking for new information and data and then using that information to affect institutional enrollment and retention practices. The AEM manager needs to be willing to move from what is to what can be because enrollment success in the future will include increasing the revenue stream by adding new academic programs, creating better ways of engaging and retaining students, and developing national and worldwide collaborative agreements.

### **REALLOCATE PRIORITIES; SPEND MORE TIME ON RESEARCH AND LESS ATTENDING MEETINGS**

This is essential for AEM success. Devote a portion of the work week (or weekend) to reviewing trends not only in higher education but also in the country and in the world. Connect the dots among technology, demographic shifts, international events, and the "millennial mind." Consider the impact on your school of "the new normal" created by the national and global recession. Will changes in loan financing, student debt, and the perception that college is too expensive affect your school's future admission or financial aid strategies? What will happen to your retention program if admission and financial aid policies shift from need blind to need sensitive?

In addition to the "usual suspects," what publications do you read daily, weekly, monthly? Do you include *The*

*Economist*, *World Future Magazine*, *Financial Times*, *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, and *China Daily* in your reading? Information from these publications may help you identify the next new market or academic program for your school.

Before investing in attendance at an international trip or fair, consider subscribing to *Stratfor*, a research publication that provides information about a country's economy, literacy rates, and education enrollments, all of which can provide insight into the potential for future students. Before developing a marketing plan designed to recruit Hispanics, learn about Hispanic student enrollment patterns from multiple sources.

Data and research indicate that one out of every two college students will transfer to another institution. Are members of your enrollment team devoted only to these "educational migrants?" What does your research reveal about transfer students? How do you plan to increase your transfer market share? Have you conducted an institutional audit of all of your school's services for transfer students? Have you considered creating a Transfer Center? Have you considered developing a separate marketing plan for "reverse transfer" students, *i.e.*, adult students with undergraduate or graduate degrees who return to an undergraduate college or university to obtain specific skills or to earn another credential? Have you done the same for your school's international students?

### **ANTICIPATE NEW MARKETS AND ACADEMIC PROGRAMS**

One of the creative byproducts of a research-focused AEM program is the identification of new markets and academic programs. In a time of diminishing budgets and increasing layoffs, AEM suggests that a good manager can "grow the pie" by creating new revenue streams. But recommendations must be based on research, creativity, and transparency and the ability to communicate effectively with all major stakeholders about potential new markets and programs.

Like all robust enrollment management programs, AEM includes retention management as an essential component of enrollment stability. How can enrollment managers anticipate programs that will result in better progression, retention, and graduation rates? How should

enrollment managers use their research time to plan for the next student service or financial aid policy that will help increase student retention and success? Relevant retention research can help create new ways of addressing nagging problems of student retention and success.

### **ADD CRM PRINCIPLES TO YOUR ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

Study CRM business practices and add some to your enrollment and retention management programs. Add to the synergy of enrollment management's administrative functions a holistic approach to all of your school's interactions with students and parents, from pre-admission throughout the college experience and after graduation. Solicit input from student services, career services office, and alumni affairs office as part of your outreach to students and parents. The best enrollment managers know that marketing does not end at the time of acceptance and admission. That is just phase one.

### **EDUCATE AND INVOLVE ALL APPROPRIATE STAKEHOLDERS IN AEM**

There has been, and probably always will be, a natural tension between a school's marketing, admission and enrollment team and its faculty. Some teachers consider the word 'marketing' to be degrading to the academy. However, AEM managers need the cooperation of all of the institution's key players—including faculty—if they are to be successful in identifying new markets and suggesting new academic programs. My advice to AEM managers is to conduct bi-weekly meetings with a small group of stakeholders to discuss trends that may affect future academic offerings. Get buy-in when necessary, and encourage committee members to bring their ideas, suggestions, and objections to the table. If meetings are not possible, create an AEM newsletter and disseminate it to faculty and staff. Let the college or university community know that you and your enrollment team are thinking about and planning and collaborating for the future. Inform your school's officials of anticipated changes in enrollment.

### **ANTICIPATORY ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT IN ACTION**

The best AEM managers spend a fair amount of time reading and creating a database of trends—particularly in national and international education, social media, and

technology. This information, along with annual evaluation of the institution's strategic enrollment and retention management plans, forms the basis upon which the next year's EM, SEM, and AEM plans should be based.

The information that follows describes a typical day in the life of a seasoned AEM manager:

#### **Undergraduate and Graduate Admission Staff 9:00 am Meeting**

The lead article in the March 5, 2012, issue of *Time* lists the reasons Latinos will determine the next president of the United States. That information, coupled with the anticipated future enrollment of Hispanic students in higher education, suggests that a strategic enrollment and retention management plan specifically for Hispanic students will be essential to any future enrollment growth. The AEM manager distributes copies of the article and solicits feedback from undergraduate and graduate admission counselors regarding how to increase Hispanic enrollment and how to retain Hispanic students after enrollment. The directors of graduate and undergraduate admissions are tasked with writing a plan and reporting on the plan's progress, in one month's time.

#### **International Recruitment Counselors Noon Meeting**

The AEM manager has called a meeting of the admission counselors responsible for the international recruitment program. Each counselor had the opportunity to review last year's program and to make recommendations based on the enrollment of new international freshmen, transfer, and graduate students. The AEM manager asks if anyone present has read *The Economist's* "The World in 2012," and, if so, how the articles influenced their recommendations of future international recruitment markets.

The AEM manager asks if anyone present saw the March 11, 2012, "60 Minutes" piece on Salman Khan, founder and executive director of the Khan Academy. Khan's on-line videos provide basic tutorials (mostly in math and science) that students can watch anywhere at no cost. To date, the lessons have been viewed by more than 60 million users in more than 1,000 classrooms and are being translated into ten languages. Students receive information and learn at their own pace anytime and anywhere. Such personalized instruction is perfect for millennial

and international students. Funded in part by Bill Gates, this type of instruction may revolutionize how students learn. The AEM manager asks the group to research the Khan Academy and to report at the next meeting on how its style of instruction could affect college and university students in the future.

At the end of the meeting, the counselor responsible for study abroad programs makes a pitch to increase study abroad programs in Europe. Did the counselor read “The Myth of Europe” (2012) in *Foreign Policy* before making the request? How might the information in that article affect future study abroad opportunities in Europe?

### **Technology Meeting 2:00 pm**

In the February 4, 2012, issue of *The Economist*, one author describes Facebook as an emerging Internet passport. In the same article (Williamson 2012), the Boston Consulting Group estimates that by 2016, 3 billion people will be online, up from 1.6 billion in 2010; more than 425 million people access Facebook via their cell phones.

The AEM manager meets with the school’s IT team to discuss the implications not just of Facebook but of other social media for future enrollment and retention plans. The AEM manager asks members of the IT team for their opinions on an article that discussed several Midwest schools that the author referred to as “innovation” campuses (Smith 2012). How can the IT team support technological changes that, in turn, will support future marketing and enrollment plans?

### **Senior Staff Meeting 4:00 PM**

At a meeting of the college’s senior staff, the AEM manager references “Colleges at Risk” (Delbanco 2012), which describes the unprecedented changes taking place in higher education not only in the United States but also around the world. Delbanco’s book *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* was published in March 2012; the AEM manager will read and report to the senior staff on the implications of the author’s findings for the school.

### **Commute Home 7:00 pm**

During the commute home, the AEM manager reads “10 Ideas That Are Changing Your Life” (Konigsberg 2012) and promises that tomorrow will be a day of no meetings.

The right AEM manager can influence not only enrollment and retention management but also many other facets of college administration. AEM managers in action suggest a new format and context for conducting staff meetings and a different level of preparation and direction of all participants. They invite staff to move beyond the usual way of looking and interpreting data and thereby help improve institutional outcomes. Innovation and creativity are at the core of AEM. And it is an excellent means of training the next generation of enrollment and retention managers. The academy is changing; there can be no going back to doing things a certain way because that is how we have always done them.

In *A Practical Guide to Enrollment and Retention Management in Higher Education* (1998), I define some of the qualities of a good enrollment manager. A good enrollment manager:

- is able to balance the big picture with detail and knows the right questions to ask;
- is goal oriented and can set priorities and remain focused;
- can concentrate on making a few good decisions based on a clear set of priorities;
- builds coalitions;
- is flexible;
- is a good communicator;
- demonstrates political astuteness and tolerance of and respect for the campus culture;
- manages time well;
- is a team player who builds on the strengths of people and deals effectively with their shortcomings;
- is secure enough to take risks;
- has a good sense of humor; and
- is a change agent.

A good AEM manager:

- is future oriented and can articulate a vision for enrollment and retention;
- uses time wisely to plan for the next new market or academic program;
- mentors young members of the enrollment team regarding the need for AEM;
- weaves together research, strategy, and technology to identify new markets and programs;
- applies AEM principles to student retention;

- conducts broad-based research;
- has the wisdom and creativity to know how relevant research will connect to future enrollment success; and
- is curious.

There are never enough hours in the day to accomplish everything we want to do. I have struggled with deadlines, technology challenges, and the constant pressure to enroll and retain the necessary number of students. However, over the years, I gradually moved from being a good enrollment manager to being one who practiced AEM daily. I changed the way in which I allocated my time, and I changed how I thought. I have tried to teach younger staff that AEM is a new and necessary addition to enrollment and retention management and not just another task.

Most of the sessions at education and enrollment management conferences present information on current enrollment and retention problems or the latest use of technology. These constitute the “now” problems. But how many conference attendees would attend a session presented by a member of the World Future Society? The demands of today often trump the needs of tomorrow. But if we believe that one of the functions of enrollment management programs is to grow the educational pie at our schools, then anticipatory enrollment management should be a tool in our toolbox.

Lincoln Steffens said, “I have been over into the future, and it works.” Anticipatory enrollment management has a part in that future.

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## About the Author

**MARGUERITE J. DENNIS** has been a higher education administrator for more than 30 years, first at St. John’s University in New York, then at Georgetown University in D.C. and at Suffolk University in Boston. Dennis is a nationally recognized expert on creating sustainable enrollment and retention management programs, and designing strategic international recruitment plans. She is the author of more than 50 articles on higher education and has appeared on national television, including CBS and PBS. Dennis has lectured throughout the United States and abroad on enrollment and retention management. She helped to found two colleges abroad, and has served as a consultant to colleges and universities in the United States and around the world. She is the author of “Developing a Sustainable Retention and Student Success Program,” published in April 2012, by Magna Publications.

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# FRAUD

*in the Admissions and Registrar's Offices*

The education sector is no stranger to fraud, unfortunately. This article provides best practice guidance in recognizing and dealing with fraud, with emphasis on domestic and international academic credential fraud. It includes practical approaches to academic document review and verification. Success in fighting fraud requires becoming informed, consulting reliable resources, practicing due diligence, establishing effective policies, and acting quickly and consistently.

In the sphere of education, fraud does exist. Although we, as educators and education administrators, prefer to think that our sector is safe from fraud and misrepresentation, the reality is that fraud involving your institution has occurred, is about to occur or is in progress. Fraud in education can take many forms among students, instructors, administrators and other members of the institutional community. It can include cheating, plagiarism, academic and professional misconduct, misuse of the institution's name, misrepresentation of the institution and credential fraud. Recently AACRAO has published several resources on fraud as it relates to the admissions and enrollment management environment, including the *Guide to Bogus Institutions and Documents* (2006), *Accreditation Mills* (2007) and *Counterfeit Diplomas and Transcripts* (2008). Another highly recommended resource is *Degree Mills: the Billion-Dollar Industry That Has Sold over a Million Fake Diplomas* (2005) by Allen Ezell and John Bear. An updated edition of this reference guide is due to be published in early 2013. Several other web-based resources are included in the list at the end of this article.

This article identifies some of the common types of fraud encountered in the admissions and registrar's offices and presents suggestions for best practices in admissions and student record review processes. The goal is to help your institution become proactive about fraud and develop procedures and policies to minimize the incidence of fraud in your environment and protect the integrity of your institution.

### **TYPES OF DOCUMENT FRAUD**

The most common types of document-related fraud seen by the admissions and registrar's offices are incomplete or misleading applications for admissions; altered or fabricated academic documentation; intentionally misleading English translations; counterfeit transcripts and documents from real educational institutions; documentation from fictitious or bogus universities or colleges that sell "degrees" (so-called diploma or degree mills) and documents from bogus accreditation bodies that often operate in tandem with degree mills. Other offices on campus that require students, faculty or administration to present academic credentials, such as the human resources department

or research and development units, might also encounter problems with document fraud, including misleading, incomplete or fraudulent résumés.

### **MISREPRESENTATION OF THE INSTITUTION AS FRAUD**

Every vendor that sells your institution's name on fake documents is misrepresenting your institution and degrading the value of its reputation. But misrepresentation extends beyond the sphere of fraudulent documents. Other examples include the unauthorized use of an institution's or organization's materials, products and services; false advertising that implies the involvement or endorsement of an institution; unscrupulous recruiting agents gaining unwarranted financial benefits from an institution's international student applications, and bogus entities such as degrees mills and accreditation mills including an institution's name in lists of its members, associates, etc. without the institution's knowledge or consent. Registrars and admissions officers are sometimes shocked to discover such cases of misrepresentation.

### **THE CAUSES OF DOCUMENT FRAUD AND ITS GROWTH**

The value of any product reflects the demand for that product. In an environment in which education or a degree is seen as a product, the market value of education increases as demand grows. When access to education is limited or removed, or when authentic academic documentation is not available, an opportunity for fraud is created.

We usually think of such things as natural disasters, war, political crises, economic disasters and social upheaval as conditions that can limit access to education or authentic educational documentation. We must keep abreast of current events so that we can give informed and careful consideration to applications from individuals who have been affected by such conditions. The list of countries and regions experiencing disruptive conditions changes with world events. As international professionals, we need to be familiar with resources that can confirm information about these types of conditions and give suggestions as to how to handle these cases.

However, we must also pay careful attention to other factors that create an opportunity for fraud. One common example is countries or regions with high rates of corruption or very complex bureaucratic systems that make it difficult for the average person to navigate. Other factors may

relate to an individual student's academic history: for example, a student with outstanding education-related debt who cannot get official transcripts; an applicant who has completed coursework requirements but not other types of additional graduation requirements; an applicant to a graduate program who may have insufficient undergraduate coursework in a particular discipline or an insufficient grade average to be eligible for the program; an executive who has advanced professionally without commensurate formal education. All of these situations might lead an individual to resort to presenting fraudulent credentials.

The thread that connects all of these scenarios is the desire to gain access to education. Academic credentials have become a commodity in the world market. The proliferation of fraudulent documents has, of course, been fueled by the development of the Internet and e-commerce. Be it counterfeit transcripts from real institutions, "replacement" transcripts and diplomas from replica services or "novelty" degrees from degree mills "accredited" by bogus accreditors, it is the "commerce" in *e-commerce* that drives the growth of this industry. Degrees = dollars (or any other currency in the world). What "sells" in this milieu is the name recognition and reputation of your institution and every other school whose name or logo appears on fraudulent documentation, or that becomes a victim of this type of fraud.

### **HIGH SCHOOL DOCUMENTS AND FRAUD**

Fraud in education is not limited to the higher education sector. The answer to the frequently-asked question of whether fraud in higher education also applies to the high school level is, unfortunately, a resounding "yes." Although it appears that less fraud is connected with high school level documentation, when it comes to the benefits that one can gain from presenting fraudulent high school transcripts, "diplomas = dollars" remains the standard. Consider the case of any individual who has not actually completed secondary or high school in the United States or abroad, thus being shut out from many types of jobs or education/training programs. Or the person who has completed secondary school in a different country, but is constantly asked for a "high school diploma or GED" by people in the United States and is not aware of the existence of foreign credential evaluators. Or the high school athlete who possesses talent in his/her sport, but does not have the

academic ability for college admission. Imagine the possible results of one of these scenarios when the individual discovers the possibility of buying a “high school diploma” or “GED” online. It may seem far-fetched or desperate to those of us who work at the level of higher education, but high school documentation has a “market value,” too.

### **WHY DUE DILIGENCE IS ESSENTIAL**

There are many flags that might alert an international admissions officer to the possibility of fraudulent, altered or misleadingly-translated documents, including academic records, test results, letters of recommendation and financial documents. So why is due diligence essential? Why should an institution bother to request verification of suspicious documents? Why is it not enough to think that “the document is probably OK,” or that *surely* the international applicant will not get a visa if the visa officer is suspicious about the document too? What is the harm in admitting a student with altered documents? The answers fall into three categories: ethical, legal and practical.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical imperative is simple enough. If a school admits students on the basis of suspicious or incomplete documentation, while denying admission to students who submit authentic documents, the institution is supporting and rewarding fraud. Good practice and simple fairness require that a school take care to ensure that its admission and transfer credit practices reward only real achievement for all applicants, international and domestic.

#### **Legal Considerations**

The legal issue is also straightforward. Institutions that receive state and/or federal funding, as well as those certified to accept international students, have entered into legal agreements with legal obligations. Not practicing due diligence is a clear violation of the public trust granted by state government support, as well as the partnership with the U.S. government that the institution has undertaken by applying for and receiving the right to admit international students.

#### **Practical Reasons**

The ramifications of ignoring due diligence are also rather clear-cut, although the interpretations may be more subtle and have long-lasting consequences for the reputation of

an individual institution. On a macro level, if an institution admits international students based on suspicious or incomplete documents, the reputation of U.S. higher education suffers worldwide. The same warning applies more obviously to an individual institution. It is common practice in many countries to sell and buy bogus documents, from marksheets and transcripts to complete degree dossiers, including U.S. immigration forms. One single ill-gotten I-20 form from a U.S. institution that is not alert to document fraud can be reproduced and sold indefinitely. That institution’s reputation is then tarnished. The reputation of an institution as an “easy mark” for questionable application documents is a hard one to repair. Once this reputation is public, excellent students will stay away. Weak ones will apply, fraudulently or not. Additionally, once word gets out about lax admissions standards, the number of fraudulent applications will skyrocket. The campus then has fraudsters in its midst and must deal with the consequences. Given the resource limitations these days, it is wiser to do a careful review during the admissions process than to have to manage problems created by fraudsters once they are on campus.

### **GOOD PRACTICE IS THE KEY**

To safeguard the authenticity of our institutions, as well as to continue to attract quality international students who contribute to the vitality, diversity and quality of U.S. higher education, it is imperative that we follow principles of best practice in the admission of international students. This means that international admissions professionals should have the training and resources they need to make sound professional judgments about the documents that applicants submit, that they receive the encouragement and support of enrollment managers to research and seek verification of questionable documents and that they share the results of the verification process with their colleagues. There is too much at stake to disregard or fall short on our responsibilities in this area.

### **DOCUMENT REVIEW AND VERIFICATION**

Our best protection against fraud is a solid knowledge-base among our foreign credential analysts and a strong network of information-sharing about document fraud and verification successes. Best practice in international admissions and foreign academic record review calls for:

- training and continuing professional development for foreign transcript evaluators, so that they are knowledgeable and up-to-date about country educational systems, documentation practices and events that impact on international education;
- clear communication to applicants about the documentation required for admission;
- careful review and research of the documents that are submitted;
- requests for verification of suspicious documents;
- appropriate follow-up when verification is received from the issuing institution or educational authority; and
- the sharing of success stories in the verification process.

### The International Evaluator's Profile

Too often the job of reviewing foreign transcripts is given to an inexperienced front-line person. Perhaps nobody in the office is familiar with documents from other countries. Sometimes a “fear factor” associated with documents in

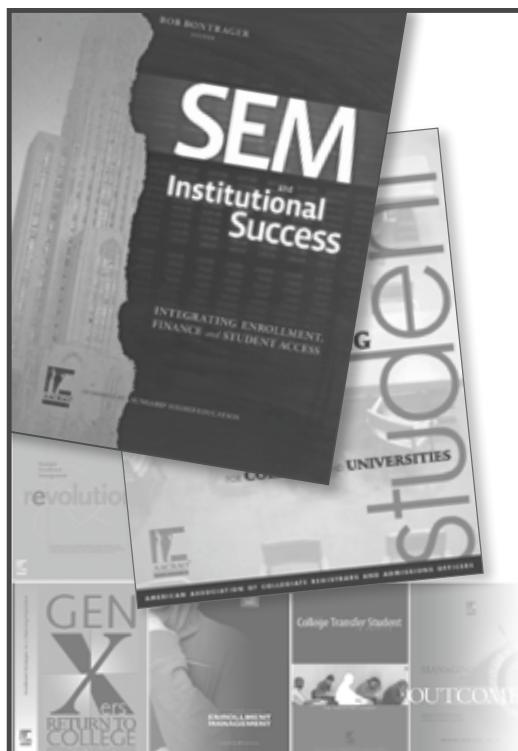
strange envelopes written in foreign languages exists. International credential analysts need to be experienced, engaged, detail-oriented individuals who are given the resources required to develop their expertise. They are the first line of protection in the battle against fraud.

### **Take a Methodical, Consistent Approach to Document Review**

The following outline presents a step-by-step approach to best practice in assembling, reviewing, researching and seeking verification of documents. Following these practical guidelines will help safeguard your institution against fraud.

#### **Step 1: Assemble the documentation in the application file and assess its completeness.**

- Learn where to find accurate information on country educational systems, names of credentials awarded and the documentation practices in the countries from which you most often see applicants—how are documents issued, in what format, in what language, what is



American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

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[www.aacrao.org/publications/catalog/sem.cfm](http://www.aacrao.org/publications/catalog/sem.cfm)

the procedure for students to obtain official documentation, etc.

- Establish guidelines for the documentation required for a complete application file, including English translations and the use of translations in the evaluation process. Evaluations should never be based on English translations alone. See below for more on the use of English translations.
- Develop a procedure for cases in which the required documentation is not available.
- Inform prospective applicants of documentation requirements and procedures as early in the process as possible. Be proactive and include this information on Web sites and all printed information.
- Inform prospective applicants of the method(s) for submitting application materials and timelines or deadlines in the process.
- Develop a procedure to follow when an applicant submits incomplete or unacceptable documentation. How and when is the applicant informed of this procedure?
- Are any of the above points negotiable? Under what circumstances?
- In applicant information, clearly define the consequences to the applicant if incomplete, untrue or falsified information or documentation is submitted.
- Communicate all of the requirements, procedures and timelines clearly. The keys to actually *receiving* complete application files that include all the necessary documentation are to *know what you need to receive* and then *communicate to applicants what is required* in a precise, clear manner. Using indigenous terminology for the foreign academic documentation is very helpful.

## **Step 2: Obtain reliable resources to help you review the documentation.**

- Determine what you will need to research about the documents in the file, and assemble your research tools.
- Resources include publications and information on educational systems, maps, foreign language dictionaries, periodical articles, documents and information provided by previous applicants, etc. You can find information about the availability of such materials from professional associations like AACRAO, conference and workshop materials, online tools, etc. Do not forget that experienced colleagues are also an excellent resource.

■ Update and expand your resource collection. As new resources become available, educational systems change, and technology expands, your research needs to change and grow.

## **Step 3: Using your resources, review and analyze the documents received.**

- Arrange the documents in chronological order.
- Confirm the origin of every document. Is it an original, copy or duplicate? How did the documentation get to your institution and into the applicant/student's file? Is this pathway appropriate for the country involved and the type of document?
- Review the biographical data provided by the applicant and compare with the "story" told by the documents. Pay attention to detail (location, age, level of education, quality of performance, test results, military service, employment history, etc.).
- Locate and confirm key information on the documents, using your resources: name and type of document; biographical information about student; name, location, recognition status, type and level of the institution; level, type and length of program or courses shown on the documents; dates of attendance and graduation or completion dates.
- If there is a course or subject listing, do the courses correspond to the field of study in which the student was enrolled, and were courses completed? Compare assessment or grade results with information about the country/institution's grading scale. Does the document show credits, units or other relative weighting of courses? Are they appropriate for that country/institution?
- If the document is presented with an English translation, check the accuracy of the translation by comparing it to other documents from the same country or institution. See below for more on the use of English translations.
- Pay attention to the format of the document as well as the contents. Does the layout of the document match confirmed sample documents shown in resources or in your files, including size of paper, typeface fonts, placement of text, signatures, stamps/seals, date, photograph, etc.? Are the lines of text aligned correctly? Are borders consistent with those seen on verified sample documents? Does the document appear to be unaltered?



FIGURE 1. Case 1: Suspicious Document

Are there any noticeable changes to the document, such as erasures, handwritten alterations, deletions or covering of text? Is there any information missing from the document that should be there? Is there information on the document that should not be there? Are words spelled correctly in the native language?

#### Step 4: Handling discrepancies, problems, omissions, inconsistencies, etc.

- Have “another set of eyes” review the document and your resource materials with you. Ask colleagues who are knowledgeable about the particular country, institution or field of study to review the document with you.

**Key to Grades**

A (4) = Very Good  
 B (3) = Good  
 C (2) = Fair  
 D (1) = Poor  
 F (0) = Failing  
 W=Withdrawn  
 Inc. =Incomplete  
 Prior to 86 a three point system was in effect  
 From 1966 to 1978 a nine point system was in effect as follows:  
 3.0 Excellent  
 2.0 Good  
 1.7 Fair  
 1.0 Acceptable  
 0.0 Poor  
 F = Failing

Effective in 1979 the institution moved to a four-point system with the use of letter grades.

Transcripts of students enrolled prior to 1979 and still enrolled at time of the change-over reflect a combined average resulting from the use of a standard formula for conversion.

Transcripts of students enrolled prior to 1978 and still enrolled at the time of the changeover reflect a combined average resulting from the use of a standard formula for conversion.



**PERMANENT RECORD – CUTTINGTON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE – SUACOCO – LIBERIA**

Name	Address	Course Number	Course Title	Gr. Mrs.	Gr. Pts.
John Doe	Male Congo mission, Box 277, Lofa County	Math 102	Military Science	Sub	1 '88
Birth date 12-16-66 Birth Place Monrovia, Lofa County	Parent or Guardian Mr. & Mrs. William Doe	FR 103	Intermediate French	I	4
Address Cuttington Univ. College, Box 277, Monrovia	Geo 101	African Geography	S	6	
Admission March, 1987 Admission Status Freshman	Eng 102	Fundamentals of Communication	S	9	
Graduation Date Major Minor	Art 160	African Textile Design	S	9	
Degree Rank Out of	Math 15.00 Pts 34.00 GPA 2.62	Math 15.00 Pts 32.00 GPA 2.28			
High School/Institution Gray High Location Charlevoix	Rel 321	Christian Ethics	S	6	
Graduation Date Feb., 1987 Rank Out of	Eng 210	Advanced Composition	S	6	
Other Colleges Attended	Eng 201	Fundamentals of literature	S	9	
	Hist 203	Western Historical Traditions	S	6	
	Math 12.00 Pts 27.00 GPA 2.25	Math 12.00 Pts 26.00 GPA 2.27			
	CIV 45(3)	PIS 109.00 GPA 2.27			
			Sub	11 '88	
			Math 101	Sub. 101 '89	
			Math 211	Sub. 211 '89	
			Math 103	Sub. 103 '89	
			Math 104	Sub. 104 '89	
			Math 105	Sub. 105 '89	
			Math 106	Sub. 106 '89	
			Math 107	Sub. 107 '89	
			Math 108	Sub. 108 '89	
			Math 109	Sub. 109 '89	
			Math 110	Sub. 110 '89	
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			Math 349		

or staff member. Send the request both in English and the other language.

- Clearly state “Request for Verification” in the opening of the request letter.
- Introduce yourself, your institution and the reason you are requesting verification (student has applied for admission at your institution; student has requested transfer credit based on these documents; etc.).
- Include the student/applicant’s name and date of birth or other identifying information for the institution. If the documents include a student identification number from that institution, include that in the letter.
- Be clear and specific about what information you need to receive from the verifier. For example, if the document is not authentic, what further information do you want to know?
- Include a copy of the documentation. If there are discrepancies in the document, highlight them.
- If your institution has applicants sign a form authorizing release of information from the individual’s file(s) at previous institutions, include a copy of that as well. In many countries, student information is the property of the institution, not the student. But in cases in which student information is protected by privacy laws, such an authorization may be required.
- Specify a date by which you need a response, if you have a specific time frame, the format in which a response would be acceptable (for example, must be in writing) and the language in which you need to receive the response.
- Include your contact information for the response.
- Request confidentiality. This information is not to be shared with the student or anyone else.
- Thank the reader and offer to assist in the future or send informational material from your institution.

## **Step 2: Keep a record of verification requests.**

- Once you have sent the verification request, put a copy of it in the applicant’s file.
- Also start a “Verification Requests” file for copies of request letters with attached copies of the questionable documents. Cross-reference the files so that you can easily retrieve the applicant’s file when the response is received.

## **Step 3: Follow up appropriately when a reply is received.**

The receipt of a verification letter is one of the most thrilling experiences in the international admissions office. There are many countries from which it is difficult to get verification due to factors that we in the U.S. higher education community may take for granted—limited financial, human and technological resources; differences in record-keeping systems; corruption; or disruptions in civil life because of natural disasters or warfare. Despite the best intentions of our colleagues abroad, we cannot always count on their cooperation in a procedure that is part of the standard of professional practice in educational administration in the United States. Thus receiving a response to a verification request is the first step in the resolution of a tense and difficult situation involving the institution and the student.

### **■ Assess the response:**

- Does the information provided adequately answer the evaluator’s concerns about the authenticity of the document? Is it conclusive?
- If the information provided is not conclusive, what further action needs to be taken? Will another round of correspondence be fruitful? To whom should it be addressed? What other avenues can be pursued if it seems that further contact with the verifying authority would not be productive?
- What if a verification fee is requested? Some educational authorities have begun assessing a fee for verification, particularly in areas where resources are limited or a large number of verification requests are received. How does the evaluator handle such a situation?

- Take appropriate action. If the documents are verified as being fraudulent, follow-up should be immediate, according to established procedures and guidelines for the consequences to applicants who submit falsified documents. These policies should be defined and communicated to staff and applicants well before this stage of the admissions review process. See below for more on establishing policies and procedures.

## **COMMUNICATING WITH APPLICANTS ABOUT SUSPICIOUS DOCUMENTS AND VERIFICATION**

Strategies for communicating with students or applicants can range from saying nothing at all to the applicant; to

informing the applicant that there are concerns about the documents and asking for explanations and/or assistance in getting verification or “better” documents; to informing the applicant that verification has been requested and that nothing further will be done until verification has been received. Each case involving suspicious documentation needs to be reviewed on an individual basis and handled with sensitivity specific to the circumstances of the particular case. Working with trusted resources, including experienced colleagues who have successfully navigated cases like these, helps admissions officers and evaluators to develop good professional judgment about how to handle cases involving suspicious documents.

## USE OF ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

In order to do an accurate assessment of applicants’ previous education, evaluators should insist on receiving official documents in the original language in which they are issued. English translations may be needed, and evaluators need to establish guidelines on how English translations will be used in the evaluation process. Evaluation should always be based on the original credential in the language in which it is officially issued, never on an English translation alone.

Translations should be literal, complete, word-for-word representations of the language in the original documents, prepared in the same format as the original, by a person familiar with both languages. If the evaluator is not familiar with foreign languages, a professional English translation may be required. However, evaluators should keep in mind that the most important feature of a translation is *accuracy* in representing exactly what is written in the foreign language. The issue of *who* does the translation

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ID# 2533				
Armand O.				
MAJOR: ACCOUNTING				
DEGREE: Bsc	ON:	12/13/88		
ADVISOR: Mason, Charles				
ACTION DATE	COURSE#	COURSE TITLE	GRADE	QUALITY
MO/DAY/YR				
01/15/85	1st SEMESTER FRESHMAN YR.			
	EDU. 100 FRESHMAN ORIENTA.	B	0	0
	ACC. 110 MANAGERIAL ACCT.	B	4	12
	ENG. 101 FUND. OF COMPOS.	C	3	6
	FRE. 101 BEGIN FRENCH I	A	3	12
	MAT. 101 MATHEMATIC I	A	3	12
SEMESTER GPA: 3.23	CREDITS: 13			
CUMULATIVE GPA: 3.23	CREDITS: 13			
06/12/85	2nd SEMESTER FRESHMAN YR.			
	PHS. 101 PHYSICAL EDU.	B	3	9
	ENG. 102 FUND. OF COMPOS.	A	3	12
	HIS. 102 HIS. OF CIVILIZA.	B	3	9
	FRE. 102 DEG FRENCH II	B	3	9
	MAT. 102 MATHEMATICS II	A	3	12
SEMESTER GPA: 3.40	CREDITS: 15			
CUMULATIVE GPA: 3.32	CREDITS: 28			
11/12/85	VACATION SCHOOL FRESHMAN YR.			
	PED. 119 PHYSICAL SCIENCE	A	2	8
	ACC. 201 ACC PRINCIPLE I	A	3	12
	ECO. 203 ECO PRINCIPLE I	B	3	9
SEMESTER GPA: 3.62	CREDITS: 8			
CUMULATIVE GPA: 3.38	CREDITS: 36			
01/10/86	1st SEMESTER SOPHOMOR YR.			
	MGT. 202 MGMT. PRINCIP. I	B	3	9
	ACC. 202 ACCT. PRINCIP. II	A	3	12
	ENG. 201 SOPHO ENGLISH I	A	3	12
	MTH. 203 CAL FPR CECISIO	C	4	8
	ECO. 204 ECO PRINCIP. II	B	3	9
SEMESTER GPA: 3.12	CREDITS: 16			
CUMULATIVE GPA: 3.12	CREDITS: 52			



■ FIGURE 3. Case 2: Counterfeit Transcript

is secondary to the question of *how accurate* it is. In some cases, a student, friend of the applicant or faculty member may be able to provide an English translation that is as accurate as a translation done by a professional translator.

The accuracy of the translation should be confirmed by the use of reliable resources on the educational system of the country that show the names of institutions and credentials in the indigenous terminology. The evaluator should base the evaluation on the original document, using the English translation only as a tool.

If the translation appears to be inaccurate or misleading, then the applicant should be required to submit a different, accurate translation. There is no reason why an evaluator should hesitate to request an accurate English

translation if one is needed. Likewise, evaluators should not jump to conclusions about the authenticity of the original document, or the applicant's intentions, if the English translation is not accurate. The translation is a tool to understanding the official document; any judgments about the authenticity of an official document should be based on the document itself, not on the English translation.

### **OFFICIAL DOCUMENTATION ISSUED IN ENGLISH**

Some countries issue official documentation in English, even though English might not be the main or official language of the country. In these cases, English translations should not be accepted. Only the official document issued by the institution in English should be considered official for use in the United States.

### **COUNTERFEIT TRANSCRIPTS AND DIPLOMAS**

Counterfeit academic documents are produced and sold for the same reasons that counterfeit money exists. Education, or at least an educational credential, is "currency." A counterfeit document can be manufactured by an individual for his or her own use or produced for sale to others. In his book *Counterfeit Diplomas and Transcripts* (2008), fraud expert Allen Ezell presents information on at least three dozen online vendors that sell counterfeit transcripts from real educational institutions in the United States and around the world. The book also includes a list of at least eighty Web sites selling counterfeit Russian and Ukrainian educational credentials and describes the large-scale counterfeit document industry in the People's Republic of China. A table in the book shows a comparison of the characteristics of a genuine University of Florida transcript with the features of counterfeit University of Florida transcripts produced by three vendors of fake transcripts.

Vendors of counterfeit credentials may advertise the documents as "replacements," "replicas" or "novelty" items and issue disclaimers that they are not responsible for the consequences of attempts by customers to present the documents as "real." Some use the wording "fake transcript" and "fake diploma" throughout the text of their Web sites. Often the Web sites include samples of the documents available, testimonials about the quality and usefulness of the documents and "special offers." Some indicate which institutions' transcripts are *not* available; often they are

schools who have taken some level of legal action against the supplier, such as a "cease and desist" warning.

How can you protect your institution's documents from becoming a victim of this type of fraud? A proactive posture is paramount: awareness of the problem is crucial, as well as vigilance in following a methodical approach to document review that includes a spectrum of verification procedures—from the use of standard resources to confirm information on transcripts, to written requests for authentication if necessary.

How does one determine the authenticity of a document from a real educational institution in an environment where potentially any institution's transcripts are for sale? Sometimes it is very difficult to tell whether a document is legitimate, especially when the fraudsters have stolen authentic templates, or even bought them from unscrupulous employees of the issuing institution or authority.

To clear up any suspicions about a document, a request for verification of the documentation should be addressed to the issuing institution. For guidance on seeking verification of documents from an institution outside of the United States, see the section on document review and verification above.

To request verification of documentation purportedly issued by a U.S. institution, contact the office of the registrar of the institution. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a set of federal laws protecting the privacy of students in the U.S., includes a provision that student data called "directory information" can be disclosed to the public without specific authorization from the student/former student, unless the individual has requested that this information not be shared. This directory information includes data such as the dates of enrollment, level and mode of enrollment (undergraduate or graduate, full-time or part-time), major and degree, including date of degree, if awarded. For details on FERPA, see *U.S. Department of Education, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* ([www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpcbo/ferpa/](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpcbo/ferpa/)), as well AACRAO's FERPA-related resources.

### **DEGREE MILLS, ACCREDITATION MILLS AND BOGUS FOREIGN CREDENTIAL EVALUATION SERVICES**

A "diploma mill" or "degree mill" is an entity that produces and sells documents that appear to be academic credentials (diplomas, degrees, transcripts) from what ap-

pear to be universities or colleges, but in reality are academically worthless documents from fictitious “educational institutions” that represent inappropriately little academic work or none at all. These documents are meant to give the impression of academic achievement, but in actuality are purchased papers that have no academic value.

Awareness of diploma mill fraud is especially important for reviewers of international student records because many of these entities purport to be “foreign universities.” Typically these entities claim to be a university in a country outside of the United States, while the operators themselves may be located in the U.S., located in another country or have different parts of the process located in different countries. For example, in their book *Degree Mills: The Billion-Dollar Industry That Has Sold Over a Million Fake Diplomas* (Prometheus Books, 2005), John Bear and Allen Ezell outline a well-known diploma mill ring called the “University Degree Program” (UDP), an operation masterminded by a rabbi from New York, with telemarketing done in Bucharest, Romania, mail-forwarding services in Ireland, diplomas printed in Israel, and banking in Cyprus. The book lists three dozen known fictitious “university” names used by the UDP. If one takes a comparative look at the documents from these “universities,” one would see that they have the same format and essentially the same content, except for differences in the purchaser’s name, the name and date of the “degree” and course titles on the transcript, depending on the field of “study.” (See Figure 4, Case 3 for a copy of a bachelor’s degree diploma from the UDP entity “Sherwood University” using the standard UDP degree template.) There have been many spin-offs of this operation as former employees have started their own diploma mill businesses.

Accreditation mills represent a related area of fraud. Some diploma mills use claims of accreditation to sell their



■ FIGURE 4. Case 3: Diploma Mill Degree, Sample 1

“degrees.” It used to be more common for diploma mills to speak disparagingly of accreditation, stating in their descriptive materials that they did not need accreditation, did not agree with the philosophy of accreditors or otherwise were somehow exempt from or above the notion of accreditation. It appears that in the last decade or so, diploma mills have found that embracing the concept of accreditation can pay off. Some not only create their own bogus accreditors to try to add to the appearance of legitimacy of the “university,” but also sell this bogus accreditation to other bogus entities. Instead of decrying accreditation, they have created ways to make it financially lucrative.

Some diploma mill operations are large fraud rings that also produce other types of fraudulent documents, such as driver’s licenses, social security cards and other identification documents. Many offer associated “student services,” including transcript verification, foreign credential evaluation and even alumnae associations. By calling a toll-free telephone number, the bogus documents can be verified, the accreditation of the “university” confirmed and an evaluation of the “foreign transcript” showing that the “degree” is equivalent to a U.S. degree received by the

“graduate.” These “services” are offered by the same people who set up the fraudulent diploma operation.

This was the case with the St. Regis University diploma mill operation. The masterminds and agents behind this organization, who operated in Washington State, Idaho and Arizona, created virtual “universities” and even “high schools” claiming to offer distance education from Liberia and recognition by the Liberian Ministry of Education. They created a bogus Liberian embassy Web site that showed that these “schools” were recognized and accredited by an equally-fictitious “National Board of Education.” This was accomplished by bribing a Liberian embassy official in Washington, D.C. In addition, they offered many “student services” and had a foreign credential evaluation service on board to give the “degrees” U.S. degree equivalencies. It was the tenacity of researchers such as Professor George Gollin of the University of Illinois and federal law enforcement agencies, combined with the hubris of the operators, that brought this outfit down.

How can the international transcript evaluator determine whether an institution is a real, recognized, legitimately-accredited educational institution that really teaches and awards recognized educational credentials? Understanding the way in which diploma mills work allows for recognition of these entities. Diploma mills operate in many of the same ways that other fraud operations work—by imitating legitimate activity. Their goal is to look like a real university. Here are some things to watch out for:

- **Name:** The “institution” has a distinguished or traditional sounding name, or a name similar to a well-known or legitimate institution. (Is your institution’s name being used? Check the Internet regularly to see how your school’s name, or variations on it, appears.)
- **Location:** The “university” has a Web site but no physical address, or there is conflicting information about a physical location.
- **Foreign:** It gives the impression of being a “foreign” university, but may be operating from a completely different location. See comments above.
- **Internet address:** It may use “edu,” “ac” or “uk” in the URL, giving the impression of being a U.S. or British educational institution.
- **Contact:** No contact information is given on the Web site. The only way to contact the “university” is by

e-mailing your contact information or providing it via the Web site.

- **Accreditation or recognition:** The Web site includes false, misleading or meaningless claims of accreditation, recognition, affiliation, membership or other types of status that are meant to give the impression of legitimacy, but really mean nothing in the legitimate higher education community.
- **Speedy degrees:** The amount of time required to get the “degree” is suspiciously fast. A large number of credits, or the whole “degree,” might be given based on “life experience” only; “send us your résumé and receive a degree.”
- **Costs:** The Web site shows a price list or lump sum prices for the various “degrees” and “transcripts.” Different rates might be charged for including specific courses, grades, majors, etc. on the transcript. Payment may be acceptable by credit card or PayPal. There might be special deals or discounts for buying immediately.
- **Sample documents:** The Web site shows samples of diplomas and transcripts.
- **Network of diploma mills:** Several “university” Web sites may operate from the same computer or network. Researching IP addresses behind domain names, domain registry information and other “behind the scenes” computer information can yield valuable results in investigating a “university’s” true identity.
- **Support services:** Diploma mills set up their own verification services available through a toll-free telephone number; the people answering the phone to verify are the same ones selling the degree. The entity might offer foreign credential evaluation and “Apostille” services if the institution purports to be foreign.
- **Advertising:** Print advertisements appear in well-respected publications, as well as in popular tabloids and comic books. Electronic media have made worldwide distribution easy and cheap and made it difficult to pin down just where such activity originates.

Using a methodical approach to document review, as outlined above, is essential to identifying whether the documents presented are from a real, legitimate and appropriately-recognized institution. Research using official and reliable resources is crucial. Mindful of the ways in which diploma mills operate, the evaluator first needs to identify what country the institution purports to be

operating in, then determine the legal body in that country that supervises higher education. Is it a national ministry of education, a commission or council for higher education, or a provincial or state authority? Does this legal body publish a list of recognized institutions? Does the suspected diploma mill appear on the list of officially recognized institutions? Once the appropriate authority has been identified, the evaluator should contact that office to ask about the status of the institution in that jurisdiction.

## **LEGAL ISSUES IN DEGREE FRAUD**

“Aren’t diploma mills illegal?” is a commonly-asked question.

The response is, “It depends.” Diploma mills exploit legal loopholes. Where laws are weak, vague, complex or not enforced, diploma mills thrive. Some diploma mill operations move around the United States and the world to avoid legal trouble and/or set up various parts of their operations in different states/countries so as to make legal prosecution difficult.

In the United States, the establishment of educational institutions is regulated at the state level. Regulations vary from state to state. Some states have no laws, or lax or poorly-worded laws, while others have clear laws but little enforcement. The number of states that regulate the use of degrees is growing and now includes Alabama, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Virginia and Washington. Oregon in particular is a model of a state with clear laws, effective law enforcement and a commitment to public information on degree fraud. The Web site of the Oregon Office of Degree Authorization ([www.osac.state.or.us/oda/](http://www.osac.state.or.us/oda/)) has a section for information on diploma mills, including maps of the U.S. showing states with good and poor track records in controlling diploma mill and degree fraud, a list of diploma mills and an employer’s guide to college degrees.

On the federal level diploma mill operations have been prosecuted successfully on the basis of federal offenses such as aiding and abetting, conspiracy, false identification, mail fraud, fraud by wire, obstruction of justice, money laundering, criminal forfeiture, trademark violation and tax evasion.

In other countries education is regulated by law either at the national level or at a sub-national level. Govern-

ments oversee the establishment, funding, operation and administration of educational institutions. Public institutions established by law or private institutions that have the same legal standing as public institutions are “officially recognized” institutions. Government entities bestow the authorization to offer academic programs and awards.

Complex legal systems and cultures of corruption invite diploma mill fraud around the world. Some countries or regions are noted for problems with diploma mill activity. Many examples of diploma mills operating from areas outside of the United States that have no higher education institutions or where higher education is not regulated exist, such as some Caribbean islands, some Pacific Islands and some cantons of Switzerland. Two well-known examples of diploma mills hail from internationally unrecognized “self-declared autonomous” entities within sovereign countries, the “Hutt River Province” in Australia and “The Principality of Seborga” in Italy. For identification and discussion of problem areas of the world, see the section on degree mills in the Boston College Center for International Higher Education’s newsletter ([www.bc.edu/content/bc/research/cihe/ihe.html](http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/research/cihe/ihe.html)).

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICIES ON FRAUD**

Be proactive. Proactive policies and clear, viable procedures can be effective tools in fighting fraud. If your institution does not have policies, or if existing policies are not effective, not extensive enough, not current enough or not backed up by effective procedures, the following are some things to consider in establishing or adjusting policies on handling cases involving fraud.

- Define “fraud.” Identify the types of fraud to which your institution is vulnerable and the various scenarios in which fraud can play a part. Examine cases of fraud that you have encountered or instances you have seen or heard about from others. What could/should have been done to prevent the problem? What was learned as a result?
- Identify the “market value” of your institution, particularly to international students. What is attractive about your institution? Why would fraudsters want to capitalize on your institution? What is the reputation of your institution? Is it prestigious or an easy target?
- Review the policies of your institution on student and faculty/administrator behavior (academic dishonesty,

- honor code, code of conduct, code of ethics). Are any of these relevant to the type of fraud your office might see?
- Identify the various offices or departments in your operating environment that should be involved in discussions about policies on handling fraud cases.
  - Work with your institution's legal counsel to become informed about appropriate federal, state, county and city laws and ordinances for the cases you might encounter.
  - A procedure or protocol to be followed in fraud cases should be clearly spelled out and communicated to all those who might deal with such cases. Who does what? What is the procedure, step-by-step? Should it be the same in every case? Is there an appeal process if the applicant disputes the findings? What is the procedure for that?
  - In addition to policies and procedures, another effective tool in identifying and preventing fraud is a team to coordinate anti-fraud efforts across the campus or organization: keep an eye on the "big picture," continuously educate and inform, train others, proactively function as "watchdogs" and monitor the Internet for usage of the institution's name, assist with questions, prepare cases for review and judgment, track results, review and critique policy, etc.
  - Publish your institution's policies and procedures, as well as the consequences for breaking the rules in clear, concise, unambiguous language and in easily-accessible locations (in application packets, in publications, on the Web, etc.).
  - Incorporate a section in your application materials that must be signed by the applicant, attesting to truthfulness, completeness and accuracy of information provided; the understanding that institutions issuing the documents submitted may be contacted for authentication of the documents or further information relevant to the student's education there; agreeing to abide by relevant policies, regulations, etc. and accepting consequences if rules are broken.
  - Act quickly when a case of questionable documentation is uncovered. Address the situation immediately, to squelch the flames that can quickly escalate into a raging inferno. Be a confident and assertive first responder, with appropriate policies and procedures to support your work.
  - Seek the advice of experienced, expert, neutral third parties if you need help, in accordance with the guidance of your legal counsel. Only use trusted, informed resources, keeping in mind that parties that produce or use fraudulent degrees and transcripts may also operate or use fraudulent verification, accreditation and foreign credential evaluation services, thus possibly having duped other otherwise reputable institutions and services into recognizing their "degrees."
  - Keep a log or record of cases involving fraud. Cross-reference information and notes between various files so that data is easily retrievable. Note general information in generic files and information specific to a particular student or applicant in the individual's file. This record-keeping is useful should the person ever apply again.
  - Incorporate what you learn from each case into the institution's response to such cases. Each scenario presents a different set of circumstances, with new twists and perspectives. Review institutional policy regularly, adjusting it as appropriate.

## RESOURCES ON FRAUD

### AACRAO Resources

- Bear, J. et al. 2006. *Guide to Bogus Institutions and Documents*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.
- Ezell, A. 2002. Degree diploma mills—past, present, and future. *College and University*, Winter.
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### Other Resources

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- Bear, M and T. Nixon. 2006. *Bears' Guide to Earning Degrees by Distance Learning*. Ten Speed Press. The Bears (John and his daughter Mariah) have written many guides to non-traditional education over the past thirty years and their books list many "fake," "substandard" and "dubious" institutions and their equally "fake," "substandard" and "dubious" accreditors. Older editions are sometimes available from used book vendors.

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## About the Authors

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**ANN M. KOENIG** is the Southwest Regional Director with AACRAO International Education Services. Her career in international education spans 25 years, including foreign credential evaluation and campus-based work in international admissions, student records management and academic advising, at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, a University of Maryland University College program in Germany, Golden Gate University in San Francisco, and the University of California, Berkeley.

Ms. Koenig has given numerous workshops, conference presentations, and training sessions on country educational systems, best practices in international admission and credential evaluation, document verification, and credential fraud, for AACRAO, NAFSA, NAGAP, EAIE, and other organizations in the US and Europe. She has served on the AACRAO International Education Committee and the NAFSA National ADSEC committee. As a specialist in evaluating credentials from the Eurasia region, she has done in-depth research, writing, and presentations on several countries in the region, including the PIER workshop report on Poland (1992), the ECE monograph on Albania (1993), contributions to the NAFSA guide to world educational systems and the AACRAO EDGE, and to the AACRAO country guide *The Educational System of the Russian Federation* (2008). Ms. Koenig also contributed to the 2007 AACRAO seminar report on the impact of the Bologna process on graduate admissions in the United States, and her writing on the challenges of fraudulent credentials and institutions can be found in AACRAO's *Guide to Bogus Institutions and Documents* (2006) and *The AACRAO International Guide, A Resource for International Education Professionals* (2010).

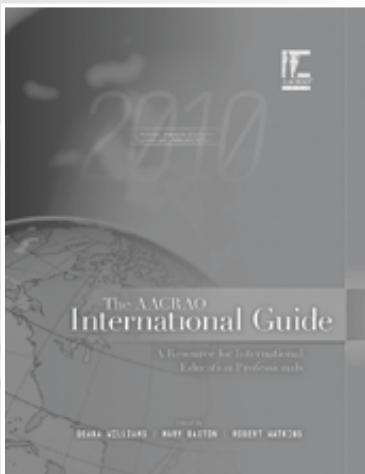
**ED DEVLIN** is a foreign credential evaluator with AACRAO International Education Services and retired Director of Special Projects for AACRAO IES. He has worked in the field of international education for over 40 years, directing international student programs at Monterey Peninsula College (MPC), directing English language and academic orientation programs at Stanford, MPC and the University of California Santa Cruz, and in international admissions at Golden Gate University in San Francisco. He has served as a consultant for many schools and programs in the United States and abroad.

Mr. Devlin served on the International Admissions Committee of AACRAO and several NAFSA committees. He has given presentations, workshops and training sessions at numerous AACRAO and NAFSA conferences. His publication contributions include many articles for AACRAO and NAFSA publications. The author of the AACRAO publication *Australia: Education and Training* and co-author/ editor of the 1992 PIER workshop reports on Poland and the Czech/Slovak Federated Republics, he developed the first model for the AACRAO EDGE (Electronic Database for Global Education). Ed Devlin is a Life Member of NAFSA.

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### The Greatest Gift of All

BY CLAYTON SMITH

In the final episode of the Harry Potter movies—*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*—Dumbledore tells Harry that “help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it.” He goes on to say, “I’ve always prided myself in my ability to turn a phrase. But I would, in this case, amend my original statement to this: help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who deserve it.” Something between these two statements is probably the truth. At least, that has been my experience in my professional career. The most important thing I have learned is to recognize that I need and deserve help to be successful—and that I need to ask for it often.

Mine has been a career that has included positions in government and higher education, with the last 25 years having been spent working at four postsecondary institutions in the United States and Canada. In all cases (and I mean *all* cases), I have been blessed by having a caring and supportive mentor (sometimes more than one).

As a high school student, I had an incredible history teacher by the name of Mr. Kelley who always took time to talk with my friends and me after school about how history lives in current events. He opened up the excitement of learning in a way that led to an awakening of my intellect and a lifelong thirst for knowledge across academic disciplines.

While in college, I connected with Edwin Pert, who then served as clerk of the Maine House of Representatives. I met Mr. Pert while hitchhiking (it was safe then) to attend extracurricular events. He and I had many conversations about the role of government in changing society and improving the lives of all of us. His down-to-earth communication skills, which were as much about listening as speaking, became the basis of how I relate with peers to this day. Mr. Pert also guided me to staff positions in the Maine House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

I was blessed along the way to have had many excellent faculty mentors who gave me the confidence to complete four degrees with a number of work gaps in between. I remember three faculty mentors, in particular: Dr. Oliver Woshinsky shared his faith in the human spirit during many conversations after class; Dr. David Leslie inspired me to think of how I might foster development in the minds and hearts of America’s youths; and Dr. Jon Dalton spent countless hours guiding me through the writing of my doctoral dissertation. I truly appreciate the time they took. It made a real difference in my career path.

The first person in my higher education career with whom I connected was Mary Elisabeth Randall, my supervisor at the time and a future president of AACRAO. (I am sure I never would have become active in AACRAO

without Mary Elisabeth's support—though she did encourage me to go to my first professional conference on my wife's birthday.) Mary Elisabeth taught me the importance of professional competence and how to work with colleagues in a respectful and honest manner. I will never forget the necessity of doing so.

Mike Bussell, a community college colleague, taught me how to balance the twin responsibilities of creating access for underserved populations (and those for whom postsecondary education is a reach) and maintaining academic quality through decisions made every day. Our frequent lunch conversations demonstrated how this gregarious and thoughtful colleague lived the community college dream and inspired me to embed it in my spirit.

Dr. Kenneth Wing hired me to increase enrollment at an institution that was struggling. What I remember most is his fatherly guidance throughout the challenges. Although he is retired now, he sends holiday updates each year. And when I get back to Maine, we always find time

for a meal together. He is just that type of fellow: supportive and caring always.

Professor Neil Gold hired me for my current position at the University of Windsor. He taught me patience; how to find time to listen and time to act; and the importance of internationalizing higher education (which recently has become an important focus of my work).

Two of my current colleagues have left their mark as well: Dr. Alan Wildeman, my current president, connected with me in his first few months on the job when we experienced a faculty strike. He taught me how important it is to reach out to students, parents, and staff during such moments. His calm during periods of crisis is forever in my mind. My current provost, Dr. Leo Groarke, has been instrumental in showing me how to establish priorities so the important work of the university is foremost in my mind. This has been particularly helpful as I balance my twin portfolios of student engagement and internationalization (it is easy to get caught in the “weeds!”).



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Uncertain as to the particular type of enrollment management practices in place across the Canadian landscape when I first came to work in the country, I sought out a colleague to guide me to a deeper understanding so I might avoid making a few mistakes along the way. Our director of registrarial services told me one day, “You will need to call Susan Gottheil.” I learned much from Susan over the years, and my guess is that she learned a few things from me. We have presented together at probably no fewer than 20 conferences; we started and still serve as co-conveners of the Canadian SEM Summit; we co-managed Canada’s online SEM library; and we edited AACRAO’s first book on Canadian strategic enrollment management. Ours is a partnership I cherish. (Knowing that we have helped to support the development of SEM in Canada is a thrill!)

I have benefited from the influence of many other mentors. Some have been supervisors, others colleagues in other departments or at other institutions. Some of my most long-lasting mentors have been AACRAO members, and some are AACRAO Consulting colleagues. I remain friends with many of them to this day.

Looking back over my career, I believe that the most important thing I have done as a leader has been to learn from my mentors and to serve as a mentor not only to those with whom I work but also to colleagues throughout my career network. There is nothing more influential than a mentor who knows you, cares about your future, and remains connected to you over an extended period of time.

In recent years, it has been my privilege to serve as a mentor to student government leaders and the leaders of student clubs and societies at the University of Windsor. Some of my most enjoyable moments have transpired dur-

ing a barbecue at my home when I have listened to the plans of student leaders and have been privileged to help them to their next stop. I am hopeful that I will remain connected to these people throughout their careers. This may be one of the best ways I have found to live out my educational values. I hope to do so for many years to come.

If you are reading this in search of some morsel of wisdom, let me encourage you to first seek out the mentors that are already in your world. They are waiting for you to ask them for help. They have so much to offer! Also consider becoming a mentor yourself (after all, giving is more important than receiving...or, at the least, it is another way of receiving). Don’t worry about how experienced you are. One can serve as a mentor at any age and with any amount of experience. It just takes a willingness to share and to enrich those around you. Being a mentor really is the greatest gift of all.

## About the Author

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**CLAYTON SMITH** is Vice-Provost, Students and International at the University of Windsor, where he also serves as Dean of Students. Smith has served as the University’s registrar and secretary of senate. Prior to becoming vice-provost, he held senior enrollment management positions at the State University of New York College of Agriculture and Technology at Cobleskill, Tallahassee Community College in Florida and the University of Maine at Augusta. Dr. Smith holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from the University of Southern Maine, a Master of Arts degree in Political Science from Drew University, a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Maine, and a Doctor of Education degree in Higher Education from Florida State University. He currently serves on the editorial boards for *College and University*, *Journal of Student Affairs Research & Practice*, and the *Journal of International Students*, and he co-chairs the annual Canadian Strategic Enrollment Management Summit. Dr. Smith is a senior consultant with AACRAO Consulting and a frequent national and international presenter on strategic enrollment management, student engagement, student affairs and internationalization topics and has consulted at a wide range of post-secondary educational institutions in Canada, the U.S., and abroad.

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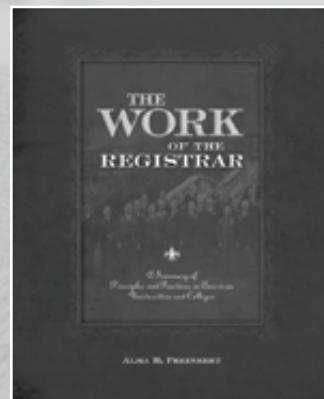
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## Reflections on the Essentials of Leadership

BY CHRISTINE KERLIN

Two “philosophers” on leadership have had great influence on me: Warren Bennis and John W. Gardner. I cannot speak or write about leadership without referring to one or both of them. I regard their perspectives as timeless.

Yes, I have also adopted the mantras of Kouzes and Posner, Max DuPree, and Robert K. Greenleaf, and I have paid attention to Covey’s seven habits. And I would hope that you would consider their propositions as well, because they are solid and provide positive direction. But I will use this opportunity to discuss my interpretation of Bennis’s (1996) “guiding vision, passion, and integrity” and Gardner’s (1961) “excellence” perspectives because they are essential ingredients for those who are regarded as leaders—or who wish to act as leaders—in higher education and elsewhere. These perspectives illustrate how leaders can plant and cultivate the seeds of success in an organization or society, doing more than what is necessary simply to keep the farm’s machinery running (though, of course, we value those people who keep the machinery running).

### GUIDING VISION

Do you have a clear idea of what you want to do, and do you have the strength to persist? Your vision may include how your milieu is organized, how it functions, its goals, and its culture. You have looked beyond the immediate

horizon and have envisioned “the best.” This vision is the result of your own education and experience, your values, and consultation with others.

Most of us have several visions that guide us. We live in a complicated world where the ability to adjust, change, and transform is critical. We also have many divergent enterprises, such that a single vision just won’t do. We have personal, community, and professional lives that call for different responses. That said, I believe that having a larger sense of how things should be—and the stamina to work toward its attainment—defines a leader.

How do these visions manifest themselves? On the individual level, we have seen colleagues lead committees, become executives, serve on boards, author chapters of books, and give conference presentations. In our organizations, we have seen examples of guiding visions: re-defining admission processes to recognize diverse learners; incorporating innovative technology for instructional and administrative purposes; internationalizing campuses; and, in AACRAO’s case, in particular, advocating for public policy that is favorable to higher education and its constituents. On a larger scale, we have seen such examples of guiding visions as the GI Bill, the community college movement, and the Fulbright program. All of these—and more have required leadership and the strength to move beyond the status quo.

## PASSION

We need to love what we are doing. That may be difficult to do every minute of the day, but we need to have an overriding passion for the promise of what we are doing.

Passion is linked to our guiding vision. It fires us up to carry through with our vision and our course of action. Passion also enables us to articulate our vision and build hope and inspiration in other people. Passion is contagious; used well, it encourages other people to buy in and strengthens their sense of purpose. This can put energy into a meeting, into a day, into a project—even into those times when things otherwise seem either a bit dry or terribly overwhelming.

In eleventh grade, my class was required to read *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl. There are many lessons one can choose to internalize from this book, but the lesson I have returned to over and over again is that we need to find what we love and hold on to its expectations of us; doing so provides the meaning and fulfillment that sustain what we need or want to do. This is, in short, the passion that energizes us.

Leaders work within systems, such as enrollment services offices, where some people may not occupy positions of any particular power and where their work may be tiring, routine, or monetarily unrewarding (or all three). Where is the passion there? I have found it particularly important to communicate the vision and the meaning (*i.e.*, the passion) of the work to such individuals and to recognize the ways in which their work has meaning and impact (often more than my own!). Kouzes and Posner (1990) offer insightful and relevant examples with their principles of “Model the Way,” “Inspire a Shared Vision,” “Enable Others to Act,” and “Encourage the Heart.”

## INTEGRITY

We often refer to people we respect as having integrity. What is that intangible characteristic? Bennis (1994) identifies three essential aspects of integrity: self-knowledge, candor, and maturity.

*Self-knowledge:* How well do you know yourself—your strengths, your weaknesses? Do you vanquish the lies you could easily tell yourself? Do you identify your flaws and your assets and deal with them?

*Candor:* As the key to self-knowledge, are you honest with yourself? Have you identified the principles upon

which you stand, and do you acknowledge them? Are you honest in your communications and actions?

*Maturity:* Are you able to locate within your own experience of being a follower the qualities of dedication, observation, teamwork, and honesty? Do you recognize those qualities and observe them in others? Have you learned from your errors?

I would add one further aspect of integrity: *conscience*, an inward sense of right and wrong. Stephen Covey (2002) notes that conscience is the one quality that is the difference between “leadership that works” and “leadership that endures.” We can ascribe such values as fairness, respect, and contribution to the person with a conscience.

These personal characteristics enable the leader who possesses them to be a whole person—one with the capacity to develop a compelling and viable vision, to communicate an honest passion, to do the right thing, and to earn others’ trust.

Many of us have worked with individuals who have been appointed leaders but who are neither honest nor fair, who have not faced their flaws, and whose experiences have not matured their perspectives. We don’t respect or trust them. Such experiences in themselves should inform us of how we can strengthen our own integrity.

As leaders with integrity, we can point to the director who realizes that one of her shortcomings may be a poor understanding of the emerging technologies needed to achieve a vision or goal; who does not pretend that she does; who locates and acknowledges those who do possess that knowledge; and who engages openly with them on such issues. She demonstrates integrity even as she models how to empower others and direct their passion toward a vision.

## EXCELLENCE

One aspect of excellence to link to the essential ingredients of leadership is the ability to recognize and extoll excellence in its many forms. Key to the success of an enterprise is the leader’s recognition of the contributions that many make and that excellence comes from many quarters. No activity or action is too lowly to be regarded as valuable; neither does any high position ensure excellence simply because of its rank. Gardner’s (1961) oft-quoted view is this: “The society which scorns excellence in plumbing as a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good

plumbing nor good philosophy: neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.”

The virtue of striving for excellence as we seek to achieve our mission goes almost without saying. Nevertheless, leaders, in emphasizing and recognizing excellence and value in their diverse forms and sources, can address those disquieting issues that arise when there are hierarchies—or even simply false distinctions—between leaders and followers. All of the people on our teams should be aware of their value and should be expected to produce excellent results; after all, it *all* has meaning, and it all matters.

## SUMMARY

The power of these essential ingredients produces a leader who becomes a servant. In the end, this is truly the role of the leader. The leader is attuned to the knowledge that she alone cannot achieve a vision or be the only one with passion. By recognizing the excellence and value present within the enterprise, the leader builds and shares vision and models and fuels passion. As a result of her self-knowledge, candor, and personal maturity, the leader inspires the trust of her colleagues to accept her service in the interest of moving forward *together*. Empowerment is shared.

I do not intend that the brevity of this essay should imply that leadership is simple and easy. Rather, leadership is a continual work in progress, and it certainly springs from more “ingredients” than those described here. Further, leadership is situational. We slip in and among roles of leader, follower, manager, and team member. Each role has its challenges and requisite skills.

These, however, are the essential points that inspire me. They have proven relevant to the situations I have endured. Whether I have lived up to the mark of leader is something for which my colleagues would have to vouch. I only know that it is a daily—if not hourly—challenge.

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## About the Author

**CHRISTINE KERLIN, ED.D.**, retired from the position of Vice President at Everett Community College, WA, having served in leadership roles for the University Center, Strategic Planning and Enrollment Management from 1996–2012. Prior to arriving at Everett in 1996, Christine served as Director of Admissions and Records at Central Oregon Community College and as the Director of Admissions at The Evergreen State College. She is currently a senior consultant for AACRAO Consulting.

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### The Challenges of On-campus Recruitment Events

BY AMY MCCOY

With thousands of colleges and universities in the United States, how does a typical high school senior select a college to attend? There is no doubt that the recruitment efforts of college admissions offices are one of the many factors influencing a student's decision. By the time a college-bound student is a senior in high school, she will have received direct mailings, e-mails, social media updates, and telemarketing calls from current college students. She will have attended local college fairs and will have had college representatives visit her high school. But on-campus admissions events are the secret weapon that colleges and universities use to convince students to apply and enroll.

On-campus events vary depending on the size, location, and type of institution; they include campus visitations, open houses, preview days, scholarship events, admitted student events, and summer yield events. These events take months to plan, and admissions staff members spend endless hours ensuring that event details are executed efficiently and effectively. The purposes of this article are to identify four challenges institutions must overcome when planning and implementing on-campus admissions events and to provide specific suggestions for addressing these challenges in a proactive manner. The four challenges are scheduling around conflicting events; marketing and advertising ef-

orts; budgetary constraints and cost concerns; and involving faculty and academic department staff. Certain key components can help ensure admissions events' success, including the avoidance of problems through careful planning.

#### SCHEDULING AROUND CONFLICTING EVENTS

The first challenge admissions staff typically face is setting an event date that does not conflict with other campus or community events. In order to identify a suitable date for an on-campus event, admissions staff should research possible conflicting events, including other campus events, national holidays, festivals, community events, SAT/ACT testing dates, and high school functions. Despite staff members' best efforts, it is sometimes impossible to schedule an admissions event so it will not conflict with other events. This can be problematic—especially if the conflicting event will require the sharing of campus resources such as venue, transportation, parking, and catering.

A few strategies can be utilized to avoid the logistical nightmares that can arise as the result of a conflicting event. The first is to confirm logistics as soon as possible. If concerns arise during the planning process, meet with the planners of the conflicting event to discuss logistics. To-

gether, the respective event planners can work to address concerns and to brainstorm creative solutions. This will facilitate clear communication and may help prevent the particular event conflict from arising in the future.

## **MARKETING AND ADVERTISING EFFORTS**

The second challenge admissions event planners often confront is how to market and advertise the event effectively. There are many ways to advertise college admissions events, including invitations, reservations, web sites, social media, and signs. Admissions staff first must identify the target audience; this will determine which advertising medium is most appropriate. If invitations are to be extended, the number of invitees—based in part on the size of the venue and other factors—must be determined. Historical trends and economic factors also can play key roles in determining how many guests to invite. Event planners should use attendance at past events to predict how many students should be invited to yield the maximum number of registrants the venue can accommodate.

A related challenge is determining how to have guests register for the event. An admissions professional should consider the type and size of the event before identifying the most appropriate registration method. For example, if an event is somewhat intimate—a formal dinner, perhaps—then the planner may consider having invitees call or e-mail the admissions office to RSVP. However, if the event is much larger—like an open house preview—then a reservation web site might be the best option.

Another challenge related to advertising is deciding which materials to provide attendees to enhance their experience. Admissions professionals should think about guests' needs and determine how marketing materials such as agendas, maps, and signs could help meet them. The size and location of the event will determine at least in part which marketing materials will be needed. For example, an event at which guests choose which sessions to attend may require a program and a campus map; if guests are to attend a dinner party with the president, a schedule of events likely will not be necessary.

## **BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS AND COST CONCERNs**

The third challenge is working within budgetary constraints and addressing cost concerns. Higher education institutions—and, consequently, campus offices—are ex-

periencing drastic budget cuts. Admissions offices play a vital role in generating revenue through enrollment. As a result, spending thousands of dollars on recruitment efforts can seem wasteful and unnecessary. Some specific ways to address concerns relating to costs are to demonstrate the impact of admissions events through assessment—to include yearly reports that present data such as the number of attendees and the percentage of attendees that later apply to and/or enroll at the institution.

Event planners also must keep budget records from year to year. Data in these records can be used to inform decisions to revise the format of certain events as well as to eliminate certain event costs. To ensure the support of the campus administration, admissions professionals should examine the event budget carefully and make appropriate adjustments to expenses for such line items as food, promotional items, and printing. If budgetary concerns regarding an on-campus gathering are significant, one option may be to charge admission. Some institutions have no choice but to do so and are able nevertheless to stage successful events. (Of course, consider carefully whether requiring guests to pay might discourage their attendance and so hurt the institution's recruitment efforts.)

## **INVOLVING FACULTY AND ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS**

The final challenge is to involve faculty and academic department staff. It is imperative to get buy-in from these key constituents. On most campuses, student affairs departments (*e.g.*, student life, study abroad, the career center) are eager to participate in on-campus events. However, faculty and academic department staff typically are less enthusiastic about attending admissions events. Given the importance of having faculty and other department representatives available to speak to prospective students and their parents, time and effort should be spent recruiting them to participate.

Two important strategies for enhancing the participation of faculty and academic department staff are communicating the details of the event and providing data that demonstrate the impact of faculty and departmental involvement. Focus, too, on when and how communication about on-campus admissions events is disseminated. For example, if faculty members are notified about an event too far in advance, they may forget about it; alternatively, if they receive the invitation too near the date of the event, their calendar



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may already be filled. Determining who will communicate the details of the event and the role faculty and academic departments will play is also key to securing participation. For example, faculty will be far more likely to attend if they are invited to do so by the president or provost.

Once faculty and department staff agree to participate, it is imperative to clearly communicate the role they are expected to play (*e.g.*, presenting information sessions, leading tours of the department, staffing a booth at an academic fair, etc.). These details can be provided informally via e-mail or a letter or formally via an information session or a presentation at a faculty-senate meeting.

Communication with faculty and departments must continue up to and even after the event. It is always a good idea to send reminders about the time and location of the event, parking, and other logistics. A number of things can be done after the event is over to help ensure faculty participation in future events: First, the admissions event planner can send faculty a survey soliciting feedback and suggestions regarding how to improve the event. Second, send personalized thank you cards and/or a small gift to demonstrate the office's gratitude. Third, notify faculty members, chairs and/or deans of their participation in the event and

describe how their involvement made the event a success. Finally, share with faculty the assessment of the event; highlight comments about faculty members' participation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Admissions event staff confront many challenges when planning and implementing on-campus events. Four of these challenges are scheduling around conflicting events; marketing and advertising; budgetary constraints and cost concerns; and involving faculty and academic departments. One of the most rewarding aspects of working with college admissions events is overcoming the unanticipated challenges that inevitably arise; but good planning can minimize the number of surprises.

## **About the Author**

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**AMY MCCOY** is the Coordinator of Special Events at the University of South Carolina. She has worked at USC since 2008, serving as an Admissions Counselor for two years before transitioning into her current position. Along with the Assistant Director of Special Events, Amy currently plans and coordinates all on- and off-campus events for the admissions office. Just recently, she received her Master's degree in Higher Education Student Affairs at the University of South Carolina in spring 2012. A native of Pittsburgh, she earned a B.A. in public relations in 2008 from the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford.

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## Flying Blind: National Graduation Goals and Adult Student Retention

By CHRIS TILGHMAN

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) recently cited a mid-sized private university in California for failing to benchmark undergraduate student retention levels against those of similar universities or against nationally available norms. The trouble is that this university exclusively serves adult and professional students through its main campus and online programs. As such, it faces the same problem that most universities serving nontraditional students face: where can benchmarks of student success for working adult students be found?

Were this institution serving primarily traditional, full-time students, such a citation likely would not have been issued. Universities that accept U.S. Department of Education Title IV funding must report first-to-second-year retention rates of all first-time, full-time students, as well as four- and six-year graduation rates for those students. Those figures are made public through IPEDS and are easily viewed on the Department's College Navigator website (<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>). However, part-time and transfer students are not included in the retention or graduation calculations, with the result that most working adult enrollees are uncounted in these standardized retention figures. Now, however, the Department is angling to include part-time student data in institutions' graduation rates.

Despite the WASC reviewers' charge, institutional data regarding part-time, non-traditional students' retention and graduation rates are not widely available. Nor is there a standard in the United States for recording and reporting such data. Moreover, the national, federally mandated definition of retention—focused as it is on first-time, full-time students matriculating in a second academic year—certainly is not the right metric to apply to universities and programs that primarily serve working adults. The vast majority of these students are enrolled part time and have transfer credit that is the result of prior college enrollment, work experience, and/or military training.

The goal of this article is to shed light on a variety of metrics institutions and some accreditors currently use to track the retention of working adults. Further, it identifies a number of important principles that all stakeholders should consider when creating a standard measure of adult student retention. Finally, it describes a few errors to avoid in developing and mandating such a standard.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF DEFINING AND MEASURING ADULT STUDENT RETENTION

Why does any of this matter? The refrain is familiar: The United States' international standing with regard to higher education attainment is declining. Of the 3 mil-

lion students who begin degree programs here each year, 1.6 million (53%) will never graduate ([http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/do9/tables/dt09\\_198.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/do9/tables/dt09_198.asp)). To regain the nation's leadership, President Obama has charged it with increasing the number of 25- to 34-year-olds with a college degree by 8 million—to 60 percent (just 60 percent!)—by 2020—an achievement that several organizations have noted must include increasing degree attainment by traditional-aged college students *as well as* working adults ([www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education](http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education) and <http://chronicle.com/article/To-Reach-Obamas-2020-Goal/63646/>). In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Labor launched the \$2 billion Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant program, which provides community colleges and other eligible institutions with funds to increase completion rates and to better prepare students for employment in high-wage, high-skill occupations ([www.doleta.gov/taaccct/](http://www.doleta.gov/taaccct/)). Philanthropies such as the Lumina and Gates foundations also are leading the charge, establishing large-scale college-completion initiatives into which they are investing considerable sums ([www.gatesfoundation.org/postsecondaryeducation/Pages/why-college-completion.aspx](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/postsecondaryeducation/Pages/why-college-completion.aspx) and [www.luminafoundation.org/goal\\_2025.html](http://www.luminafoundation.org/goal_2025.html)).

The trouble is that while this remarkable consensus on the nature of America's higher education attainment challenge has emerged (as has consensus on the need to produce more qualified college graduates), no concomitant agreement has arisen regarding how to measure *intermediate* progress toward increasing the graduation rates of part-time, adult students. Even the Department of Education's current efforts seem to focus more on community colleges than on the broad population of degree-pursuing students at *all* types of universities, including those offering online and hybrid programs.

How can senior administrators, policy makers, and philanthropies manage people, processes, and resources toward improved graduation rates of this critical population if they cannot manage first toward improved student retention rates? The answer is that no one can reliably measure intermediate progress toward the long-term goal of increasing graduation rates at either an institutional or national level, given current circumstances. The fact is that we do not even have a common definition of "adult student retention."

## CHALLENGES IN DEFINING AND MEASURING ADULT STUDENT RETENTION

Most institutions define adult students as those older than 24 years of age who are pursuing a degree, certificate, or diploma. (This excludes intentional one-time course-takers.) In some cases, universities further refine their definition to include only working adults—*i.e.*, students who are attempting credits at a pace slower than typical full-time undergraduate or graduate students but not formally part time, as defined by financial aid rules.

"Retention," on the other hand, has no shared definition as it pertains to adult students. At some universities, the definition includes adult student participation in any credit-bearing activity over the course of a year. At others, it means the rate at which adult students complete individual courses. Still elsewhere, adult student retention is defined as the persistence of a cohort of in-coming students by academic term through graduation.

Mechanisms for measuring adult student retention vary in three important dimensions:

- length of period ("over what time span is retention measured?");
- enrolled student cohort ("who is being measured?"); and
- qualifying activities ("what counts as retention?").

"Length of period" for adult student retention varies from the first academic term, usually defined as a course or two, to as long as seven to ten years. Enrolled student cohort filters vary from students in a single course to the entire student body. Qualifying activities for retention run a wide gamut that often reflects the character of the institution itself.

### Length of Period

Some retention metrics focus on retention over the duration of a single course—and sometimes, over only the first one or two weeks of a course. A brief period of measurement allows institutions to see quickly how many students are persisting in the early stages of their enrollment. Usually, attrition is highest in the initial terms—that is, from term one to term two—and then it decreases over time. Knowing the retention rate of a group of new students after a brief period may signal where an institution's graduation targets will be at risk over the long term.

By contrast, measuring retention over a longer period can also be useful, especially if the period includes the graduation of many students (repayment of student loans correlates closely with graduation rates). Finally, longer periods of measurement allow for “smoothing” of the data that reflect the natural “stop-in-stop-out” model that many institutions experience with regard to adult students (particularly those on active or reserve military duty). Over time, students’ entries, exits, and re-entries balance out to yield a curve that reflects the real retention of a group of students.

### Enrolled Student Cohort

Institutions “slice” retention along a number of dimensions—level of financial aid, completion of a trial course, number of incoming transfer credits, gender, academic program, student age, term of entry, number of credits attempted per term, first course attempted, and marketing code—to name a few examples. Often, a university determines the cohort to study following an institutional analysis of underlying causes and correlates of retention. Institutions typically show better retention rates when the student body is slightly older, has higher incoming levels of education, has higher income, is more heavily female, and avoids enrolling in difficult math classes in the initial semesters of matriculation. Whatever sub-analyses they may run, many institutions also track retention of the student body as a whole—particularly as overall retention correlates with such other important factors as total tuition revenue and institutional fiscal health.

### Qualifying Events

How institutions count a student as being retained varies widely. For some universities, “satisfying a retention requirement” means that a student makes a grade-worthy attempt at a course. For other universities, a student is retained when he transfers in credits from another institution, completes a prior learning assessment, or takes a credit-bearing exam, regardless of course participation. Another group of institutions counts students who participate in such non-

credit-bearing activities as meeting with a faculty member or using an academic support resource as retained.

### EXAMPLES OF ADULT STUDENT RETENTION METRICS

In establishing their own definitions of adult student retention, institutions implicitly answer the questions “who was retained, over what period, and how do we know?” in their own ways. Those that have well-developed systems for the measurement and management of adult student retention typically use more than one metric, because they track the retention of multiple populations over various lengths of time for a number of strategic reasons. Common adult retention metrics include:

- *Term-over-term re-enrollment of the entire student body in courses.* This metric answers the simple question “how many of the students who were enrolled in courses last academic term remain enrolled this term?” Some institutions add to this figure the number of new enrollments in the same period to yield a “net” enrollment figure that tracks changes in the overall size of the student body.
- *Term-over-term re-enrollment of all students entering the university and taking courses for the first time on a specified start date.* Many institutions refer to this met-

**Table 1.**  
Term-Over-Term Re-Enrollment of the  
Entire Student Body, Including New Enrollments

	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall
Total Enrollment	100	95	75	105
New Starts		15	10	40
Retention from Prior Term—Count	80	65	65	
% Retained (Term-Over-Term)		80%	68%	87%

ric as “cohort-based retention,” with “cohort” meaning a group of students who share a common start date at the institution, not necessarily those who attend classes together and know one another.

**Table 2.**  
*Cohort-Based Retention*

Term of First Enrollment	% Students (of Initial Pool) Still Enrolled in...								
	2009			2010			2011		
	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer
Fall	100	85	70	80	70	55	60	50	40
Spring		100	70	85	75	60	70	60	50
Summer			100	90	80	65	75	70	55
Fall				100	85	70	80	70	55
Spring					100	70	85	75	60
Summer						100	90	80	65
Fall							100	85	70
Spring								100	70
Summer									100

■ *Year-over-year qualifying activity (broadly defined) by any student.* This definition is based on the idea that adult students are retained if they remain actively engaged with the university. Such measures are often used at institutions that offer self-paced curricula. “Qualifying activity” may include course enrollment, use of academic support resources, attempts at credit-bearing exams, attempts at practice exams, successful transfer of credit from another institution, and the award of credit on the basis of an assessment of prior learning.

In addition to these fairly straightforward metrics, some universities calculate annual retention metrics based on their accreditors’ definitions. For example, the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, which accredits many for-profit institutions, has a standardized definition of retention that incorporates data pertaining to continuing students, new students, and re-entering students.

### PRINCIPLES FOR A COMMON NATIONAL METRIC

Given consensus on the nation’s need for more graduates and the consequences of failing to produce them, it would be too easy to rush headlong into defining a national metric for adult student retention without considering

the consequences. Any effective metric would need to account for a number of important principles in order to prevent misinterpretation.

### Simplicity and Comparability

A common metric would need to be simple enough to allow one institution’s results to be compared meaningfully to another’s. To do so would require taking into account a wide variety of academic term structures and program lengths; this is not impossible. Though widely divergent in their details, most adult-serving institutions’ academic calendars share important characteristics. For example, they enroll significant cohorts of new students in August–September and January–February of each year. Thus, a common metric could focus on the retention of students entering the university for the first time at these times of year—just as the standard measure for traditional students focuses on fall-to-fall retention.

### Validity and Seasonality

Retention measures are subject to seasonality effects that can easily obscure changes caused by administrative policy. Consider this example: University A tracks retention of the entire student body from one academic term to the next as its primary measure of retention. Most new students en-

ter the university's academic programs in the fall semester. Every year, the university posts relatively good retention results in the fall semester, relatively poor retention results in the spring semester, and middling results in the summer term. Why the variation? Because most new students enroll in the fall, and because attrition is highest among new students, the spring semester retention report is more heavily influenced by high-attrition-risk students than the report for any other semester. A more insightful measure would compare like-semester retention—*i.e.*, this year's spring semester retention and last year's spring semester retention. Such a comparison would be more likely to yield a true picture of changes in retention based on incoming student demographics and changes in university policies.

### Accounting for Stop-Outs

Most administrators at adult-serving institutions—particularly those serving students on active or reserve military duty—note that many of their students stop in and out of course-taking as their priorities shift.

Every institution has a story—often, many—about the student who took ten or more years to graduate. Such stories become totems in the argument against any standardized measure of retention of adult students. It makes sense to exercise caution when comparing metrics used to define the retention of traditional, full-time undergraduate students to those used to measure adult student retention. However, caution should not obscure the clear need for a standard indicator of adult students' contribution toward national graduation goals.

Still, frequent breaks in enrollment by adult students are a reality, so we need standard measures of retention that take a longer view than from the fall of a student's first year of enrollment through her (possible) enrollment a year later. This can be achieved by looking at like-cohort performance over a long time period. For example, if a college enrolled approximately 300 new students in fall quarter 2008, what are the retention and graduation rates of those students in subsequent quarters? The rates could be compared to those for a group of 300 similar students (similar in terms

of academic program and incoming characteristics)—who first enrolled in fall quarter 2009. This is an example of the cohort-based retention analysis described above.

Any intra-institutional comparisons must take into account the relative portion of the average student's overall degree requirement that was completed prior to his matriculation. It will be no surprise to find that institutions that tend to enroll students who have high numbers of prior credits earned produce graduates at higher rates—all else being equal—than those that do not.

### Remembering Transfers

A large portion of adult students who enroll at an institution transfer credits for coursework completed elsewhere. Any national measure of retention must account for this pattern. Adult students move for work-related reasons. They stop out, and they stop in again. But many continue their education at institutions better suited to their new circumstances than the institutions they attended origi-

**Table 3.**  
*Retention as Year-Over-Year Qualifying Activity*

Satisfactory for Retention:	Jan 1 2010–Dec 31 2010		
	Student #1	Student #2	Student #3
Attempted Course?	Yes	No	No
Attempted Practice Exam?	No	No	No
Met with Academic Advisor?	Yes	Yes	No
Transferred Credit In?	No	Yes	No
Taking Gen Ed Course at Partner Community College?	No	No	No
Retained?	Yes	Yes	No

nally. Should universities be penalized for the behaviors of students who do not graduate but who continue their studies at other institutions—particularly when they do so within a limited amount of time? No.

One solution is the National Student Clearinghouse ([www.studentclearinghouse.org](http://www.studentclearinghouse.org)), which already gathers data pertaining to students who recently transferred out of their academic programs. These students can be “added

back” to a national retention number so as to provide some proxy for students making academic progress, regardless of at which university they are enrolled.

### Other Correlates with Graduation

Is retention really a leading indicator of graduation? David Kalsbeek and the institutional research team at DePaul University make one of the sharpest arguments against using retention as a leading indicator of graduation. Kalsbeek, in his presentation, “Putting the Spotlight of Retention Strategy on *Progress*” (delivered July 22, 2010 at the InsideTrack Leadership Forum in Atlanta, GA—available for download at [www.insidetrack.com/downloads/file/put\\_ting\\_the\\_spotlight\\_of\\_retention\\_strategy\\_on\\_progress/](http://www.insidetrack.com/downloads/file/put_ting_the_spotlight_of_retention_strategy_on_progress/)), provided evidence from his research that the graduation rates of traditional undergraduates correlate more closely with annual academic progress than with annual retention. Stated simply: A number of first-time freshmen return for their sophomore academic year without having met the requirements for sophomore status. These students are much less likely to graduate than are similarly retained students who earned sufficient credits for sophomore status ([www.insidetrack.com/videos/s/476](http://www.insidetrack.com/videos/s/476)). Is the same pattern true of adult students? The question deserves consideration. If it becomes clear that academic progress is a better indicator of graduation than retention, then we should engage the task of standardizing a national metric for it.

### CONCLUSION

Why has no standard means of measuring adult student retention yet emerged in the United States? There are at least two answers: One is that retention information is sensitive. Compared to the graduation rates of institutions that serve traditional undergraduate students, those for institutions (and the divisions thereof) that cater to part-time, working adult students look very low.

Another answer has to do with institutional non-comparability. Adult-serving institutions meet a wide variety of educational needs; consequently, they serve students from a variety of backgrounds. “Apples-to-apples” comparisons thus are difficult to make in a way that administrators believe to be fair. Almost by definition, institutions that serve larger numbers of at-risk students have lower graduation rates than those that do not. Should they be penalized for serving such students? Certainly not. Nevertheless, this same challenge exists with regard to measures of traditional undergraduate retention. The solution is to compare like institutions’ results, not to create different metrics altogether nor to dismiss the need for some common metric.

Until the United States has at least one standard for measuring and comparing adult student retention, we will know whether we are producing more college graduates in the United States only when we find out how many graduates we are producing each year. This is a lagging indicator, not a leading one. Surely, at a moment when achieving higher levels of educational attainment is such a prominent national goal, we ought not to spend billions to fly blind when it comes to student success and economic growth. Rather, we should define at least one national standard for tracking and reporting adult student retention.

### About the Author

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**CHRIS TILGHMAN** is Associate Vice President, Program Development at InsideTrack. Tilghman works with senior administrators to develop programs that improve student outcomes. A keen observer of trends in higher education, he has written articles for a variety of publications, including AACRAO’s *College and University*, UPCEA’s *Continuing Higher Education Review*, and CAEL’s *Forum and News*. Previously, Tilghman served in product development, strategy, and investor relations roles for technology companies. He holds a B.A. in Social Studies from Harvard University and Master’s degrees in Business Administration and Education from Stanford University.

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## Non-Profit/Higher Education Project Management Series: The Project Plan

BY KARL E. BURGHER AND MICHAEL SNYDER

Welcome to the second installment of the AACRAO management series focusing on project management in the academy. In this article, we focus on white papers (often called charters, briefs, or fact sheets) and their partner, the work plan.

These documents are the foundation of all work we do. Typically, a work plan is written once a proposal has been funded. At times, a work plan may need to be written to help sell an idea—that is, to demonstrate that a solid and complete plan of action exists to deliver results. But most work plans are written once the “sale” is complete. The work must be clearly defined, with precise schedules, budgets, responsibilities, deliverables, and assessment plans.

White papers are used as proposal and short status documents. Often, they are scaled-down versions of work plans that are used to pitch ideas to the busy people who hold the purse strings. In this article, we focus primarily on work plans; a few paragraphs at the end of the article are devoted to white papers. (White papers almost always come first in the work planning process, but they are easier to understand in the context of an established work plan.)

In our previous article, we explained why we can (and should) treat so much of what we do as a series of projects and why we respond by applying project tools and techniques. Remember the context within which we work—

*i.e.*, the compression of the product/project lifecycle, the knowledge explosion, global competition (which really just means lots of competition), downsizing and the use of contractors and consultants, mass customization, international development and an increased focus worldwide on western education, and lots of small projects that can give us fits if they are not well organized (Clifford Gray and Erik Larson (2007), *Project Management: The Managerial Process, 4th Edition*, Irwin/McGraw Hill). As part of an effort to help align your people with various types of projects, we also described eight types of project managers. Every person has a unique skill set that can and should be optimized.

Work plans document all activities to be undertaken, keep everyone moving in the same direction, and allow for comparison with and prioritizing against competing projects. If we do not know where we are in our work at any given point in time, we cannot accurately plan, schedule, or proceed with future efforts. Once projects are under way, we need a map to remind us of what is next, when it is due, and who is responsible for it. Work plans are not only for construction and IT but for anyone who must accomplish work quickly and efficiently. Work plans allow for unit capacity building and even promotion. (If someone else cannot track the work, how can sponsors see that

it has been done well, and how can subordinates advance the work?) Before we turn our attention fully to work plan development, we need to give some thought to time. The topic has a special place in our next discussion, as available time (and thus our schedule) correlates and holds causality with money, efficiency, balance, productivity, family, and—ultimately—relationships and personal health.

### THE ILLUSION OF “CATCHING UP”

We would like to introduce you to what we believe is a workplace illusion: the concept of “catching up.” We believe it is a fallacy to think that one day we finally will get caught up with our work and that our lives will get back to normal, whatever that may mean. How many times have each of you said one of the following?

- “That project will have to wait until I catch up.”
- “Once I finish a few things, we will finally get organized.”
- “Once we get over the top on this one, we will examine your proposal.”
- “This time of year (applied to any time of year) is always busy.”
- “Let’s have lunch...right after I get a few things off my plate.”
- “When I catch up at work, we’ll take that vacation I promised you.”
- “Once work slows down, I will start coming home earlier and we will [fill in the blank].”

Over time, the thought process reflected in these statements crushes morale and destroys workplace productivity—especially as it begins to take its toll at home. Think about it honestly: Do you ever really catch up? And if you do, how long does it typically last? For most, working at 110 percent is the daily reality. We strive to combat this reality by working more hours. (After all, being the last one out of the parking lot and saying you worked all weekend have become badges of honor.) But consider this: Working all weekend means not only that employees are working ineffectively but also that they are being managed ineffectively. (After learning that Karl was working Sunday afternoons, a former mentor would ask, “What’s wrong with you? You slow?”) The longer the pattern continues, the more the stress builds, the more morale goes south, the greater the risk of project blunders, and the

greater the likelihood that good employees will feel that they are failing one another and becoming unproductive. This is burnout, it is real, and it leads to inefficiency and poor physical health.

Certainly, we do not pretend that we always understood that catching up was an illusion; we have made plenty of mistakes over the course of our careers. Nevertheless, we understand it now. And we reject the notion that most will ever catch up. There is more work than ever and fewer resources to complete it. It is time to let go of that thought process and embrace the competitiveness.

So how do we survive in this new world? We know you want to choose to get home at a reasonable hour and actually watch your child ride a two-wheeler for the first time. But how do we let go and do that? First, we accept “crazy.” It is the new normal. We must get past that and move on. Next, we integrate our deliverable schedule with our life. What does that mean? It means you learn to integrate your work life with the rest of your life but not at the *expense* of the rest of your life. Did you know that some companies have adopted such practices as no time clock and unlimited vacation? Instead, they measure success according to deliverables and projects.

What we have long understood is that one must be *organized* to manage a heavy work load efficiently. We must learn to use our hours as effectively and efficiently as possible. We also must learn to walk away from the chaos for a time so that we have time to rest, to eat, to exercise, and to be with family—in other words, to have a life. It is possible to have a robust career and a life, but one must be efficient and organized to do so. Project management techniques and tools can help.

Once we accept that we are never going to catch up, the next step is to stop sprinting all the time. Rather, accept that we are running a marathon and that we are perpetually at the 15th mile. What is needed is a consistent pace through each project. People can give 110 percent much of the time—but not 125 percent; that means 44 hours a week but not 50 (let alone 60). This refers to actual *work time*, not time at the water cooler or mere “seat time.” (Actually working 44 hours typically might take at least 50 hours to accomplish.)

Getting organized can be a huge project in itself—one that must be prioritized and integrated into an already full schedule. But stay committed, and within three months,

you may be able to exhale. At six months, life will start to get better, and people will begin to have fun. A year later, you will be good to go. A year seems like a long time, but in context it is not. It is well worth the time to save your office, your health, and even a relationship or two from chaos. Our blue skies may be a bit too clear for some, but we are believers. This is how we work.

Our goal is to teach you how to survive inside in chaos with PM. The secret is to accept, engage, and embrace the chaos. Then we can excel, deliver, and learn how to live both inside and outside of the workplace.

Between the two of us, we manage or are responsible for well over 100 efforts, with 50 to 60 teams, in a matrix organization. We are well organized, we make choices, we plan, we run only efficient efforts, and we communicate as effectively and as often as we can. We know the status of our efforts at all times, we keep our schedules, and we use our time deliberately. What we do not do is work all the time.

We start between 7:00 and 7:30 am, and we are home between 5:30 and 6:00 pm—90 percent of the time. Our commutes are between 10 and 20 minutes. We rarely work on weekends at any extended level of effort; instead, we ensure that we get sufficient rest and faith and family time. We do admit, however, to being tied somewhat to our phones. In part, this is to avert project bottlenecks. The mantra of a program manager (and, ideally, of any manager) is to never slow the progress of anyone else's work. That said, we do not let the devices run our lives. We also choose to observe what we call "zero tech time," when we turn off our gadgets for hours at a time so we can focus on family and restoration. We are paid by deliverable, not by seat time (this is another newer paradigm; the old term is "managed by objective"). Pay attention, bosses: Quit micromanaging today's knowledge workers, and free them to deliver and manage their whole lives, not just their work lives. Empower your employees!

## WORK PLANS

Now consider how to prioritize and schedule—that is, how to write robust work plans. Work plans protect managers from over-scheduling their resources; better yet, they protect managers from others who might over-schedule their resources. When a department's resources can be shown in detail exactly how they are to be utilized for the

next six months, the planning argument shifts from "just piling on more work" to the prioritizing, scheduling, and delivering of the work. Indeed, that is the foundation of the following exercise.

### Work Planning, Work Writing

At Indiana State University, we used fairly simple textbook project management techniques to initiate more than 300 projects led by 45 teams that were based on our five-year strategic plan. This included using project management for the proposal and work planning stages of eight education and research centers. We now use hardened PM techniques within information technology as we are gradually building a project management office (PMO). We spent the last year working through the process of work planning with the registration and records office, examining well over 50 projects and 50 recurring activities that we treated as projects for planning purposes. It works, and it does not have to be complicated. But that does not mean that it is easy. It is difficult to write about work—to stay organized, on schedule, and to keep folks focused. But the use of project management principles can improve all aspects of an organization.

Many people believe that when they draft a proposal or develop a schedule, they are writing a work plan. However, this usually is not the case. Writing work plans is an art form in that it is done well by some and poorly by most. Authors often leave out far too much detail. While it is not necessary to write a novel, it is preferable to "over-communicate." The work plan should be sufficiently detailed to allow another team to take over the work once one has finished writing about it. Write well; define, schedule, and cost out work; determine who is going to do the work; and, finally, determine how the work will be assessed.

### Work Plan Outline

The basic work plan consists of the following seven sections:

- Introduction/background/specification: "The what" is it we are doing?
- Proposal/purpose/justification: "The why" should we bother?
- Work/action steps/process: "The how" in painful detail.
- Reporting and deliverable schedule: "The when" things get done, including completion?

- Cost estimate/budget: “The how much” in terms of dollars and people?
- Stakeholders/management plan: “The who” cares and “the who” is in charge?
- Outcome assessment/testing: “The how well” did we do, and how do we know we are finished?

There is nothing magical about these sections. You will find them (or something similar) in many a project plan or project charter template. But if it is not common for you to negotiate a process like this, it can be difficult even for great writers to write simply and clearly about each topic.

Why? First, it can be difficult to describe an entire project step by step. Second, to do so requires defining exactly what will be done, by whom, and when. This is management with full accountability; both are difficult to master, but they are well worth the effort.

This process forces managers and their teams to evaluate all work across the organization in a standard format that facilitates comparison. Allocations of time, scope, and resources can be evaluated quickly and easily, and determinations can be made as to which projects have priority and what the dependencies are.

Clearly, everyone’s work cannot be given top priority; nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that all serve on the same team and so must work toward common and well-understood goals. When each team member is successful, the team is successful—and so is the manager. Everyone needs to contribute to help get the win. This is good for projects—and for careers.

## Drafting A Work Plan

### ***The Introduction/Background/Specification: “The what” is it we are doing?***

It is here that we define our project. We introduce the uninformed reader to the task at hand, our science, and perhaps a brief history. Most important, we specify what it is we plan to do. We all need to be able to write a thesis statement about our work, and we must place it in a context the reader can understand. If the people who control the resources do not know exactly what we want to do, then how can they determine whether it should be supported? Many work plans are doomed by their opening sentences. If “the what” is not communicated clearly, the plan will be

moved to the bottom of the pile or even to the recycling bin. There is a saying that “paper keeps people friends.” Paper also can define a project so that everyone knows what she is supposed to do and when he is supposed to do it. Specify, clearly and completely.

### ***The Proposal/Purpose/Justification: “The why” should we bother?***

This section is for the pitch. If the introduction was so fantastic that the project is already sold, then this section will justify why the plan is what it is. This section does not repeat specifications; rather, it explains why resources should be allocated to the project. Instead of “we will create a process to collect co-curricular data to better understand the non-academic activities of at-risk students,” the pitch might specify “we will create a co-curricular data collection process so we can determine which activities most benefit students in terms of retention behaviors; then we will allocate time and money to those activates in order to increase retention.” Consider the difference. Be sure the work plan specifically addresses the project’s contribution to the organization or to the system.

It is no longer acceptable simply to get the work done for the sake of getting the work done. There is not enough money to just “do work.” Instead, we need to do work that increases stakeholder success and that has an immediate purpose. Those who lose sight of why their work should be done either spend their careers working on others’ projects or are invited to find other work. Carefully describe how your project helps the organization as well as your team, your area, and your unit.

### ***Work/Action Steps/Process: “The how”***

This section describes in detail how the objectives will be accomplished. Project management professionals may utilize Microsoft Project and Primavera to manage work for large construction or IT projects; others may utilize Excel or even Gantt charts to depict the dependencies associated with a project, allocate labor, and identify critical steps toward a completed build. We like to hang our depictions of project processes on the wall so everyone can be reminded of progress and of who is supporting whom. Sometimes there is nothing better than a transparent peer management process.

It is in this section that we describe the allocation of resources to the various aspects of the project; this, in turn, helps us develop the schedule (see below). (Often, the work activities and the schedule are determined in conjunction with one another.)

This part of the work plan can prove tedious as you record in detail each step in the process. “Just do it” (the project) it is not sufficient. People need a “road map” if they are to accomplish work effectively and efficiently in an environment defined by chaos. Tightly scheduled action steps can decrease the re-mobilization time that is required between efforts. People will know what to do next without having to allocate much time to thinking (or meeting) because they will have done the thinking and the organizing in advance.

While the steps should be clear and concise, we encourage you nevertheless to use more language than a basic technical writer would. Write so the project manager can understand what to do—and thus can undertake the project. Also be sure to leave yourself plenty of time to write; this particular section—and work plans in general—will require considerable effort, particularly in the beginning. (Limit work plans to ten pages and white papers to two; long documents are easier to write than short ones.) Thinking through the action steps is a critical component in the development of any work plan.

#### ***The Schedule: “The when” are we going to meet milestones and finish this project?***

This step is not all that hard to accomplish if the action/work steps have been laid out in detail. However, if the work and action steps have not been clearly defined, then you likely will find yourself in trouble because you will lack a sense of when various project milestones can be reached or when the final deliverable will be complete. This section is about making promises to the sponsor: faculty, students, your boss, the provost or president, or even an external stakeholder. Why is everything so often late? Many times it is because of the lack of well-defined action steps that provide for the determination of accurate levels of effort and the achievement of certain milestones; absent these, it is virtually impossible to estimate a project completion date. Action steps also help determine how long processes will take given project resources. This is important to the organization as a whole: Balancing

resources among projects correlates with prioritization, scheduling, and completion, and it protects against resource re-allocation, new work, and lost labor.

Allow us to digress for a moment. Once everyone is organized and knows what to do when, and all is good and working nicely, life has a way of introducing change. Someone always ends up disrupting the system. In most cases, the disruption takes the form of yet another project; alternatively, someone quits or a mid-year budget cut is introduced. In such circumstances, you ask yourself, “How are we going to get that done with our already over-allocated budget and extended faculty and/or staff—on top of all of the other things we have to do?” Your first step needs to be to write a work plan for the new project—or to rewrite old work plans (at least the schedule portion) based on the new set of resources. Once the plans are complete, you will have a new understanding of time and money requirements, as a result of which you will be prepared to defend a request for additional resources; alternatively, you can ask your sponsors what the new project’s priority is so you can adjust schedules, labor, money, and deliverable dates on other work accordingly.

Without project definition, you will not be in a position to push back with regard to deliverables and schedule. (In higher education, time—and, thus, schedules—typically are what are modified; very rarely is additional money or FTE support awarded.) You must be able to demonstrate that your people are allocated, busy, successful, and productive. Do this with work plans. In the past, those most adept at bargaining typically were awarded the resources. We contend, however, that this is not so much the case anymore. Instead, it is mostly about the work (and if it is not, then it should be).

If you are not organized, you will not be able to defend anything because *everything*—and, consequently, nothing—will be a priority. Your team members will become grumpy and inefficient. Eventually, they will experience burnout. In contrast, good PM ensures that faculty and staff know what they are supposed to do. They feel accomplished because they are accomplishing work. They work well with one another and are efficient and productive; as a result, your job as manager/leader is simplified. (It may not seem so when you are developing and implementing your first work plans/PM organization drills, but it will get better—we promise!)

### ***The Cost Estimate/Budget: "The how much" in terms of dollars and people?***

Most PMS perceive budgeting, resource allocation, estimating, and costing as other painful processes. Certainly, they can be difficult and tedious, but if you do “the how” rigorously, then this step can prove more a “bean-counting exercise” than a philosophical discussion. If you know every activity that is expected, then you can estimate how long those activities should take, how many people will be required, and what contracting needs, supplies, equipment, and software will be needed.

This is called “bottom-up cost estimating.” “Top-down” is beneficial when a quick estimate is required, but more accurate estimates are the sum of the needs for all of the tasks associated with a project. Bottom-up cost estimating is laborious—and it can seem restrictive if a client or sponsor holds you to it—but it must be done. For example, when you and the sponsor agree to a cost estimate, there may be some complicity. Thus, if something happens to the project externally, you can point to your tasks, milestones, and cost estimate and show what happened that was beyond your control; on that ground, you may argue for a change order. (A change order is a request to the sponsor to adjust the work plan because of an outside perturbation to the project.)

If you are not organized, how can you ask for a change order? By contrast, once the sponsors learn what happened despite your tightly defined work plan, they may extend a little more sympathy. If your work plan lacks detail, you can expect your cause to be lost. You will look bad, the organization will suffer, people will be upset, and the likelihood that you will obtain additional resources may approximate zero. Economically challenging and competitive times call for detailed cost estimates so as to reduce project risk. Remember: It is not that risk exists; it is about managing risk.

### ***The Stakeholders/Management Plan: "The who" cares and the "who is" in charge?***

This section comprises two separate but important items. The first is a definition of who your project’s stakeholders are. Who cares, who should care, and who will be affected by the work you plan to do? Once the plan is written, you will want to share it with the project’s stakeholders both so they can take some ownership of the work and so they

can evaluate and define it. We encourage full transparency. We must make sure that we are good stewards of taxpayer and student money. We cannot afford to waste resources; everything—every step—needs to be a “win.”

The second part of this step is about putting a name—*i.e.*, that of a responsible party—on each piece of the work/intermediate deliverable to be accomplished. Everyone must know who is responsible for what and what kinds of dependencies exist for the people as opposed to the work. This step can make people nervous—particularly when schedules (and, perhaps, Gantt charts) and work efforts are defined and posted on the wall. People also become nervous when everyone can see how everyone else is doing all of the time (“Did you finish your work?”). Management plans are tied to schedules, and staff can see the interdependencies. Note that staff do not necessarily like being dependent. Nevertheless, we believe this is a good thing. (A bad thing is when others do not know that you are waiting, for example, for Bob to finish work on his component of the project, and they think instead that you are late.) A good management plan delineates who is responsible for what task, who is the lead project manager, who the stakeholders are, and who is the sponsor of the work. If a team member is delaying progress, the manager needs to give him the opportunity—and the requirement—to change.

### ***Outcome Assessment/Testing: "The how well" did we do/how do we know we are done?***

Prior to starting a project, we need to define how we will know when we are done and how well we did in terms of accomplishing the objectives that were set. This seems as though it should be simple, but it often proves to be one of the more difficult sections to write. If a *process* is being assessed, we need to be able to define how well we are doing, perhaps by utilizing benchmarks and metrics. If a *tool* or *product* is being assessed, we need to determine how well—*e.g.*, how quickly, how easily, how efficiently—it is working, thus requiring the use of more metrics and benchmarks. Metrics and measures not only help us assess our progress but also help us know when we are finished; and they help us communicate as much to our stakeholders. We need to assess *all* work, not just those aspects of work we are accustomed as academics to assessing. It is far preferable to help define how your work will be assessed

than to be judged according to a metric created by a party that is comparatively unfamiliar with your work.

Like every other section of the work plan, the section on assessment is important. Two key items must be communicated: how success will be judged by predetermined metrics (qualitative and quantitative) and how to determine when project objectives have been accomplished. Only then can we can avoid scope creep, declare victory, and move on to the next project. If we fail to define in advance when we will be done, we may never be done; this is the paradox of projects that never end—of projects that are always only 90 percent complete because assessment and deliverable definitions were never defined.

## WHITE PAPERS

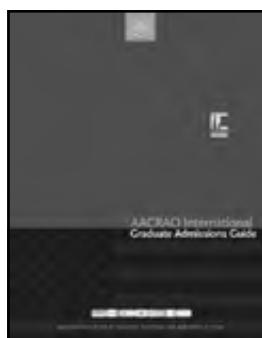
White papers are written for two primary reasons: First, only rarely will a senior administrator read much more than two pages. These individuals are very busy, and they have short attention spans. You must sell or “brief” your idea very quickly. Second, white papers allow for the quick

comparison of a wide variety and number of projects. Sponsors cannot read hundreds of pages to make go/no go decisions or to determine which projects should advance to full proposal stage.

When we present our projects, we strive to “make the sale”—including “the ask”—in 5 minutes or less. When we brief our boss on a project, we seek to describe all of the project’s components in 5 minutes or less, thereby getting to the question (and, hopefully, to the “yes”) quickly.

It is important to quickly get an answer—whether yes (great!) or no (so we can move on)—concerning our project’s status. (One must be careful of the ego: While it may be tempting to feel that we are being treated unfairly in that we are getting only a few minutes to talk about something to which we plan to devote ourselves, we need to let that go. This isn’t about us; it is about work.) Let the deliverables speak for themselves. Let the idea speak for itself. Prepare as best you can, but then let the project be judged on its merit.

It can be difficult to communicate your message in two pages or less. Anyone can write a novel. But not anyone



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can write an ego-less document that provides a complete description of work in two pages. Fewer still can sell an idea in five minutes or less.

In a previous life we spent a lot of time obtaining contracts. The white paper was the tool of choice and needed to be concise so the sale could be completed quickly (relationship building often was primary). Five minutes and two pages could gain the next \$100,000 contract or project. Do not ask busy people to listen or to read any longer. (They would much rather talk about something else for 25 minutes of your half-hour meeting, if only to get some relief!) If you have a concise two-page document, you can chat about the weather, pass out the document for all to read, and then ask the question in the next five minutes. Everyone will get to network a little, read the facts, and respond to your question. Thus, you can leave knowing what to do next.

So how exactly does one write a white paper? Understand that they are hard to write well. Expect some pain, and budget ample time. (The white paper may take more time to write than the work plan!) In time, you will be able to write a white paper in about an hour, but getting to this point will require persistence, practice, and patience.

Ask yourself: what are the most important things about the project to emphasize? They will differ for each project, schedule, budget, deliverable, and author.

The white paper takes the same format (almost) as the work plan:

- The introduction: “the what.” You need a thesis statement.
- The justification: “the why.” Include a few sentences about the business use.
- The process: “the how.” Describe the five (or so) high-level steps.
- Reporting and deliverables: “the when.” Specify the status/schedule and finish date.
- The cost: “the how much” in terms of dollars and people (hours per week) and, thus, the total dollar amount.
- The management plan: “the who.” Who cares, and who will do the work?
- Assessment/finish: “the how well” did we do, and when are we finished?

The detail for these sections follows that of the work plan. The text needs to be brief, and the writing needs to be

impeccable. Find some good white papers/briefs/proposals and read them. Conduct Google searches of the EPA, the DOE, white papers, briefs, and even fact sheets. (We also recommend our own strategic planning site, [www.indstate.edu/strategicplan](http://www.indstate.edu/strategicplan); click on the link to the “Document Warehouse.” Also click the “Initiative Fact Sheet” button at the top of the page. Read ten of the proposals/white papers in the warehouse. Read ten fact sheets, and then begin your effort. You may wish to utilize a template from the resource document section. Recall that each white paper should have a budget section that accounts not only for cash but also for faculty and/or staff hours.)

Write a white paper for every process and project for which your office is responsible. Total the hours, calculate the budget, and determine available capacity. This in turn will help you determine how many more projects the administration (or “them over there”) can “gift” you with next week.

We will discuss budgeting and capacity in much greater detail in a future article. A case analysis will demonstrate how an office of registration and records described every aspect of its work (*e.g.*, maintenance items, activities-processes, and projects) into separable white papers/work plans. Doing so enabled the office to prioritize and manage staff efforts and to attempt to manage the number of new responsibilities it was assigned. Of course, success is always mixed, and some would assert that “the higher-ups just want you to work harder anyway.” But in this case, our methodology of unit organization enabled the office to demonstrate that it was working at full capacity and thus allowed it to relinquish responsibility for certain less important tasks. The office does get assigned new work, but its organization has justified its discussion of prioritization, schedules, and deliverable dates.

## SUMMARY

We hope you have learned two things from this article: First, get over “the illusion of catching up.” Most of us never will. We must accept this and then learn to flourish anyway. There is no free time anymore—only managed time. Accept it, schedule it, and be efficient: Make choices, and move on. Second, a primary tool for flourishing in the new world is the rigorous work plan—a detailed document that defines each aspect of a project. The work plan is often preceded by a white paper—a two-page version of

the work plan that is used as a proposal or brief. Once the work plan and white paper are written, introduce them to the stakeholders, owners, clients, management parties, and anyone else who needs to understand your project and/or allocate monetary or political resources.

Work plans help us run projects; they also help us understand our work. You have to understand your work if you are to prioritize it. And to become efficient, you must understand how your resources are being allocated; only then can you protect your people from “the project of the day,” someone’s most recent vision, or the new political paradigm for the semester. The next time you are “gifted” another project (or piece of work or responsibility, or functional oversight because of budget cuts, or because someone quits and is not being replaced), you need to be prepared to pull out your plans and define “where you are.” Then you can have an honest conversation about priorities. Set the stage so you can ask how the schedule will be modified, whether by adjusting dates or removing work. Ideally, you will achieve compromise and avoid burnout.

The first leap into this territory will be time consuming. Nevertheless, it can lead to a much more productive, efficient, and happier environment for all as work is finished on time (most of the time), with purpose, with satisfied stakeholders, in an environment where everyone acknowledges existing dependencies.

We help one another move forward, we share the work load, and we get along better because we are not disorganized, stressed, and, thus, “grumpy.” The mantra is this: “Tightly defined work presented in a transparent manner leads to higher performance, project success, and civility.” Try it—it works if you work it.

## About the Authors

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**KARL E. BURGHER, PH.D., P.E.** is Chief Strategy Officer and Professor at Indiana State University. He has been with ISU since January of 2010 managing the implementation of ISU's five-year strategic plan. He oversees 45 teams, more than 250 people, and well over 300 specifically defined projects in a PM-like matrix fashion. Karl learned PM techniques “on the street” working in the construction industry for ten years as an explosives engineer early in his career. He then moved on to manage many federal research and education contracts as a Center Director and then as a Vice President of Research and Contracts. Prior to arriving at ISU he taught management and project management at his Missouri alma mater. Karl earned a B.S. and a M.S. in Mining Engineering from Michigan Technological University, and a B.S. in Economics and a Ph.D. in Mining Engineering from the former University of Missouri-Rolla (now Missouri University of Science and Technology.) Karl is just finishing his 27th year in the academy.

**MICHAEL B. SNYDER** is a director in the Office of Information Technology, a program manager for strategic initiatives at Indiana State University, and a certified PMP. He has been a Project Manager for more than twelve years, actively working in higher education for the past four. Prior to his current position he worked for many years in the private sector. Currently, Mike reports to both the CIO and the Chief Strategy Officer managing multiple projects that impact various specific areas on campus as well as others impacting the entire university. Most recently he is managing a very robust co-curricular data collection effort culminating in a student Co-Curricular Record. In addition, he is ramping up a Business Intelligence Unit and student success “War Room” helping the CSO and Associate VP of Student Success initiate campus wide Strategic Enrollment Management practices. Mike earned his bachelor’s degree in computer science, specializing in business systems from Pacific Lutheran University in Washington State and is currently working on his M.B.A. at Indiana State.

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### REFRAMING ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

BY LEE BOLMAN AND JOAN GALLOS  
JOSSEY-BASS, 2011. 288 PP.

Reviewed by Jerry Ross

How does a good leader in higher education develop? That is the question that Bolman and Gallos seek to answer in *Reframing Academic Leadership*. Concepts of leadership vary greatly from one person to another, and definitions often are determined by individuals' experiences and personality traits. We know good leadership—and bad leadership, for that matter—when we see it. Although some in higher education set out to be leaders, it is more often the case that individuals find their way into leadership positions over time. We all bring to our positions our past experiences as well as what we learned from those who preceded us. Sometimes this occurs when we become responsible for managing others; at other times, it occurs when we manage a project or a program for our institution.

Leadership and management are related but distinct constructs. Leadership has been defined as the “act of leading” or “providing guidance or direction”; management, more simply, is “to exercise authority.” Both are important qualities for any leader to have, but they sometimes are mutually exclusive. Certainly, most leaders manage people and/or projects, but not all managers are leaders. Perhaps

the most important task for any leader (or for someone striving to be one) is to improve his own leadership skills while cultivating leadership qualities in those around him. Reading books such as *Reframing Academic Leadership* can help with both of those tasks.

Although far from perfect and not entirely new conceptually, *Reframing Academic Leadership* is a useful text for those who hope to improve their leadership. Theoretically, this book is a descendant of other works by Bolman—in particular, his classic, *Reframing Organizations* (2008), co-authored with Terrence Deal. Bolman and Gallos (2011) apply many of the same concepts from Bolman's earlier works to higher education, and they cite several interesting cases to illustrate their theories. In contrast to many other works on leadership, *Reframing Academic Leadership* is clearly an academic effort targeted to that audience (consider many of the more corporate-focused works in this genre). By focusing on higher education, the authors provide a highly applicable text.

*Reframing Academic Leadership* is well written and is in three sections: leadership epistemology, reframing leadership challenges, and sustaining higher education leaders. Although the ideas in the book build upon one another, the independence of each chapter permits the reader to delve into (and, it is hoped, put into practice) each part separately.

The authors' style and use of fictitious examples enables the reader to draw on his own experiences. The underlying theory of the book is that leadership in higher education is not always cultivated. Rather, administrators advance through institutions of higher education without benefiting from clearly defined leadership development pathways. This is particularly evident in registrars' and admissions offices because their work often is shaped by these leadership challenges. In addition, we sometimes are plagued by the same problems. We do not always have the intentionality we need for our own leadership development.

The first section of *Reframing Academic Leadership* is summarized by the opening sentence: "Thinking and learning are at the heart of effective academic leadership." This quote describes how the authors approach this section and provides the reader with a clue as to the thesis of the work: that higher education institutions are learning organizations, and leaders of these institutions should continue to learn themselves. The crux of this work is in its second chapter, "Sensemaking and the Power of Reframing." To the authors, 'sensemaking' is the lens through which we evaluate our surroundings and what shapes our ability to make good decisions. It is deeply personal, incomplete, and interpretive—as well as action oriented. For example, it helps us decide which course of action to take when we are confronted by a challenge. As they do in each chapter, the authors begin with a fictitious case—here, a new college president asks her peers for advice on how to proceed. The chapter ends with guidance on how to make better decisions through reframing, though it fails to make definitive recommendations on how best to proceed. The authors conclude the chapter by providing five suggestions for enhancing one's reframing skills. The theory is that if we are better able to reframe individual situations, we will make better decisions.

Section two provides useful guidance for higher education leaders as it demonstrates the complexity of leadership in higher education. Leadership in general—and in higher education, in particular—requires a multitude of responses. As leaders, we have to adapt according to the situation and our audience. That is, our response to any given situation—our leadership—will vary according to several factors, including audience, severity, needs, and power. The authors illustrate this through four chapters that identify the many roles leaders must play. At any

given time, we must be analysts and architects, compassionate politicians, servants and coaches, and prophets and artists. How we manage each of these roles, as well as how we determine which part to play (a choice based on organizational need), will determine how successful we are as leaders.

Shared governance is one of higher education's unique identifiers. It means that decision making often is a collaborative or team process. Leadership in this environment is often about moving people in the direction you want them to go. The authors explore this application of sensemaking in chapter five, "Leader as Compassionate Politician," in which they describe four essential political skills for academic leadership: setting agendas; mapping the terrain; networking and building coalitions; and bargaining and negotiating. Successful leaders build coalitions and work with their "opponents" as well as their supporters to advance their goals. For those in the registrar's office, these are important skills. We must utilize different strategies according to the environment and the players involved. We must build coalitions because our power often derives from our ability to obtain buy-in from administrators and governance groups.

The final section of *Reframing Academic Leadership* identifies core challenges so higher education leaders can develop the skills to address them. The authors' thesis is that there are never going to be prescriptive answers for these situations; rather, to succeed, we need to know the right processes to use when difficulties arise.

Those of us in registrar and admissions offices often feel the crush of being in the middle. We are subject to pressure from above and below as well as from the side. Affected by factors inside and outside the university, our reality is what Bolman and Gallos (2011) describe as "managing from the middle." We must balance roles of influencing policy with implementing changes on our own. Bolman and Gallos (2011) identify strategies for leaders to implement to ensure success even while leading from the middle.

Bolman and Gallos (2011) have provided an important text for current and aspiring leaders in higher education. They believe that good leadership can be developed and nurtured and that it can cure higher education's ills. I would submit that in fact, this is one of the book's faults: Good leadership is vital, but it will take an institution only so far. Many other factors help determine its success or

failure. Nevertheless, the concepts articulated in this book are worth considering. Higher education administrators should not restrict their intellectual curiosity to their academic pursuits but instead should also apply it to their own leadership development. We must cultivate leadership skills in ourselves as well as in those around us. “Be thankful for all you have learned in the past, but recognize it won’t be enough to get you where you really aspire to go. Recognizing and accepting this is important to your own future, but it’s not just about you. It’s about the people and the institutions you serve. They need more than your current best—they need you to keep getting better” (Bolman and Gallos 2011).

## About the Author

**JERRY ROSS** is Associate Registrar for Academic Services at West Virginia University in Morgantown, WV. He previously worked at the University of Southern Mississippi where he earned a doctorate in Educational Studies and Research.

## HOW WE DECIDE

BY JONAH LEHRER  
MARINER BOOKS, 2010. 320 PP.

Reviewed By Beth Wolfe

The world of enrollment management revolves around the decisions students make. Their choices—from where to enroll to which courses to take—shape our work in countless ways. We strive to base our work on data, yet we can never account fully for students’ personal decisions. If we knew more about how the brain works when confronted with a choice, could we better serve our students and accomplish our enrollment goals? *How We Decide* may provide us with information to help us do so.

Lehrer draws on extensive brain research to challenge the centuries-old idea that reason makes human thought superior to that of animals. While emotions sometimes must be ignored for success or even survival, they can promote better decisions. An effective storyteller, Lehrer provides both anecdotal and scientific examples of how each part of the brain controls different types of thought and the strengths and weaknesses of each. These examples can help us better understand or even predict our students’ choices.

The first three chapters, “The Quarterback in the Pocket,” “The Predictions of Dopamine,” and “Fooled by a Feeling,”

describe how emotions can win Super Bowls or lead to financial ruin. Prior to the NFL draft, the National Football League administers a brief IQ test known as the Wonderlick to prospective players. Quarterbacks’ average score is 25 (computer scientists’, by way of comparison, is 28); coaches get nervous if a hot prospect has a much lower score because quarterbacks are key offensive decision makers. Yet several Hall of Fame quarterbacks, including Dan Marino and Terry Bradshaw, scored well below the benchmark of 25. Why is the Wonderlick an insufficient predictor of a quarterback’s potential? The reality is that there is a significant difference between succeeding on an IQ test and executing a complex football offense: A quarterback does not have time to calculate throwing angles and velocities when a defensive lineman is in his face; he has to know immediately when, where, and how to throw the ball. That instinct is made possible by emotion, which is fueled by dopamine. A chemical in the brain, dopamine underlies perceptions of fear and pleasure. But many of its releases are responses learned through repetitive experience. Patterns do not have to be obvious, however, to influence the release of dopamine: “Dopamine neurons automatically detect the subtle patterns that we would otherwise fail to notice; they assimilate all the data that we can’t consciously comprehend” (p. 48). So when a new student is asked why she chose a particular university and she responds that she “just knew” or that it “felt right,” she has not had a mystical experience. Rather, her brain has taken in information through observation and research; as it has done so, it has identified favorable patterns and revealed the student’s choice through the release of dopamine—recognized by her as a positive emotion.

The ability of dopamine to signal future events and respond to patterns also has a negative side. For example, dopamine drives gambling addiction. Because the brain cannot understand “randomness” (characteristic of slot machines and roulette wheels, in particular), it tries to identify a pattern where none exists and thus is continually surprised. The release of dopamine in response to surprise is three to four times greater than when an outcome is predicted accurately. Consequently, the brain becomes conditioned to striving obsessively to determine the pattern that precedes a payout; the addict will continue to play without conscious regard of the consequences.

Chapters 4 and 5, “The Uses of Reason” and “Choking on Thought,” explore the benefits and drawbacks of

rational thought. Reason generates in the prefrontal cortex, the final area of the human brain to mature. As a result of the timing of this development, our traditional-aged freshmen sometimes “make bad decisions because they are literally less rational” (p. 114). The prefrontal cortex regulates impulses and helps individuals realize, for example, that ground beef labeled 85 percent lean is exactly the same as that labeled 15 percent fat—even though emotionally-driven thought might suggest that 85 percent lean is preferable. Similarly, when considering different institutions’ scholarship offers, students may consider either the net cost of attendance or the scholarship amount. Thinking that is focused on the net price is generated by the rational prefrontal cortex; that which is focused on the scholarship amount—even if the net price is greater—is generated by the amygdala, the emotional center of the brain.

Reason is the superior basis upon which to evaluate college costs, but it has its limitations. The prefrontal cortex can process only about seven pieces of information at one time. And the rational brain is particularly bad at ignoring facts—even those it knows to be worthless. College guides, recruitment materials, and presentations during campus visits are full of facts and figures. We tell students our average class size, the number of full-time faculty, the percentage of our students accepted to medical school... virtually any statistic a student wants, we provide. Students themselves attend college fairs, lists of questions in hand, and inquire about student to faculty ratios and the institution’s most popular program. This exchange of information seems on the surface to be thorough and helpful. Yet how relevant is an institution’s average class size if its tuition is unaffordable? Does it matter which major is most popular if the institution does not offer the one in which the student is most interested? It is entirely possible for a student

to be led astray by random pieces of information that have no bearing on his personal education-related needs and aspirations. This is why students need to utilize both reason and emotion in making their college decisions.

The final three chapters, “The Moral Mind,” “The Brain is an Argument,” and “The Poker Hand,” describe how emotion and reason can work in concert. For choices as complicated as which college to attend, Lehrer offers this advice: “We often make decisions on issues that are exceedingly complicated. In these situations, it’s probably a mistake to consciously reflect on all the options, as this inundates the prefrontal cortex with too much data” (p. 236). Rather, it is best to gather all the relevant information needed to make a decision and then step away and allow the unconscious, emotional brain (which Lehrer calls the “supercomputer of the mind”) to process the data. The best decision will manifest itself as a positive instinctual emotion.

*How We Decide* is an accessible, entertaining, and educational read. From the viewpoint of enrollment management professionals—particularly those in recruitment—this book is invaluable. Knowing how students make their decisions and which parts of their brains are involved should enable us to tailor our messaging to appeal to them within that context. We will always face the challenge of students’ decisions being highly personal, but incorporating knowledge about the brain into our planning can help us help students make the best choices possible.

## About the Author

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**BETH WOLFE** is Director of Recruitment at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. She earned a B.A. in Education and an M.S.E. in Engineering Management, both from Marshall University. She is currently a student in Marshall’s Ed.D. Higher Education Leadership program, specializing in the marketing, promotion, and development of higher education.

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# Index for Volume 87

Compiled by Louise Lonabocker

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