Broadening the Spectrum of Undergraduate Admissions: The Kaleidoscope Project

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BY ROBERT J. STERNBERG, CHRISTINA RHEE BONNEY, LIANE GABORA, LINDA JARVIN, TZUR M. KARELITZ, AND LEE COFFIN

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The Kaleidoscope Project, a new admissions procedure at Tufts University, incorporates measures of analytical, creative, practical, and wisdom-based skills in addition to standard ratings of academic and personal merit. It shows promise as a predictor of academic performance, as well as leadership and active-citizenship potential.
Those who design admissions policies and procedures are the gatekeepers of higher education, and thereby play a role in shaping the direction of human society. Every year selective universities face the difficult challenge of sifting through the application materials of millions of high school graduates and deciding which applicants should be admitted to the next year’s class. Multiple factors render the admissions process highly complex and subjective, particularly in highly selective admissions environments such as that at Tufts. For example, the meanings of high school grade point averages (GPAs) differ greatly across schools: Earning a 3.4 GPA at one school may be more difficult than earning a 3.8 at another school; the depth and rigor of curricula vary significantly from high school to high school.

Standardized testing such as the SAT or ACT addresses but does not fully solve this problem. Thus, the SAT has been criticized by some for measuring a relatively narrow spectrum of student qualities that do not reflect the full range of students’ abilities to succeed in college (e.g., Crouse and Trusheim 1988; Grissmer 2000). Some students have fewer opportunities, garner less support, and/or face greater challenges than do others in earning “high” values on statistical markers. These factors make it difficult to compare students on the basis of statistical academic measures such as GPA and SAT. Further, the majority of applicants to selective colleges not only have similar GPAs and SAT scores, but also similar backgrounds, hobbies, and personal statements.

When the senior author arrived at Tufts as Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, he suggested to admissions officers and other administrators, as well as to professors, students, and alumni, that traditional college admissions procedures are less than fully adequate for selecting applicants who will be the active citizens and leaders of tomorrow. Although SAT scores and high school grades are reasonable predictors of academic success in college, it is not clear that they also predict future leadership potential. He recommended that Tufts consider augmenting its undergraduate admissions process so as to take into account leadership and active-citizenship potential. He formed a committee of faculty, administrators, and students to consider possible future directions for admissions. Taking into account their recommendations, he worked with the Dean of Admissions to modify the admissions process.

Tufts had specific goals in seeking a new program: One was to improve prediction of academic performance; a second was to improve prediction of extracurricular, leadership, and active-citizenship performance; a third was to render the admissions process more equitable, and to improve access to the university by members of diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. Members of diverse cultural and ethnic groups have different conceptions of what it means to be smart, and also of how being smart manifests itself in school and society (Sternberg 2004, 2007a; Sternberg and Grigorenko 2004). For example, on average, Latino ethnic groups emphasize social-competence skills in intelligence more than do Anglo
and Asian ethnic groups (Okagaki and Sternberg 1993). As another example, Eskimo children who are able to navigate large distances from one village to another in the winter on a dogsled may be viewed by their teachers as not very bright, even though the teachers themselves likely would die if they attempted the same feat (Grigorenko et al. 2004).

Individuals who grow up in challenging environments must develop creative and practical skills in order to survive, whereas individuals who grow up in less challenging environments have the luxury of being able to better develop their abstract analytical skills (Sternberg 2003). Hence, any new admissions procedure that assesses creative and practical skills is likely to provide an edge to students who previously were disadvantaged by an admissions process that very largely emphasized memory and analytical skills of the kinds assessed by the SAT and ACT.

In 2006, Tufts University implemented a new undergraduate admissions procedure referred to as the Kaleidoscope (Kscope) Project. The Kscope Project is a collaborative effort of the Undergraduate Admissions Office, the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences, and the Center for the Psychology of Abilities, Competencies, and Expertise (PACE Center) at Tufts, with the support of the School of Engineering. The goal of the project is to facilitate the admission of applicants who are academically successful students as well as engaged members of their community with superior active-citizenship and leadership potential, where “leadership” is defined as making a positive, meaningful, and enduring difference to the world at some level. This project helps to fulfill the University’s stated mission of developing “new leaders for a changing world” without compromising with respect to other considerations (such as diversity). Academic excellence and diversity are compatible goals. For four years, Kaleidoscope has been in use at Tufts as a means, among others, of determining which students are more likely to become leaders of tomorrow and hence should be admitted.

We define leaders as people who make a positive, meaningful, and enduring difference to the world, at any level—from that of the family, to communities, to nations, and to the world. Leaders are creatively, analytically, and practically skilled, as well as wise (Sternberg 2005a, 2005b, 2007b, 2008). The Kscope admissions procedure incorporates measures of analytical, creative, practical, and wisdom-based skills—qualities considered beneficial for developing leadership and making a positive, meaningful, lasting change (Sternberg 2005a, 2008, 2010). Tufts thereby aims to distinguish quantitatively as well as qualitatively among applicants who possess roughly comparable academic strengths but who have differing personal traits, interests, and/or skills relevant to leadership potential. The quantitative aspect of Kaleidoscope is important because, in our experience, attributes that are not quantified sometimes tend to be taken less seriously in the admission process.

The PACE Center at Tufts has been conducting studies to evaluate the effectiveness of the Kscope framework for undergraduate admissions. This article describes preliminary evaluations of the Kscope framework. The article begins with a discussion of related work as well as of the theoretical background and underlying rationale for the modified admissions procedure. We then present the Kscope project and results to date.

The first set of results examines the effect of the new procedure on the GPAs of (1) Kscope students (those who received at least one Kscope rating by admissions officers) versus non-Kscope students (those who did not receive a rating on Kscope measures by admissions officers) and (2) high-Kscope students (Kscope students who received mostly A ratings on Kscope measures) versus low-Kscope students (Kscope students who received mostly Bs or Cs on Kscope measures) at the end of their first and second years at Tufts. The second set of results compares the answers of high- and low-Kscope students on surveys concerning personal growth and satisfaction with various aspects of their freshman- and sophomore-year experiences. We conclude with a summary and discussion of the results as well as of future directions.

PREVIOUS AND RELATED WORK

The Kaleidoscope Project is not an isolated effort but rather part of a growing response to the concern that the procedures employed by colleges and universities for choosing each new class of incoming freshman undergraduates could be improved. Although the relationship between achievement measures and school grades is fairly strong, this relationship typically explains only about 25 percent of the variance in college GPA (Tross et al. 2000). Given that current admissions procedures may be less than ideal for identifying or cultivating the leaders of to-
morrow, efforts are under way to explore new procedures for choosing among applicants. Scientifically based and psychometrically sound instruments are being developed for assessing broader constructs (e.g., social or emotional intelligence) related to scholastic success (e.g., Stemler et al. 2006, 2009).

For example, Shultz and Zedeck (2009) studied the factors that contribute to success in law school and effectiveness as a lawyer, with the goal of revising the process by which law school admissions decisions are made. The test that currently dominates admissions decisions, the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), assesses only a few competencies; has an adverse impact on minority applicants; and is not strongly predictive of lawyers’ performance (Kidder 2000, 2003; Schmidt and Hunger 1981, 1998; Sturm and Guiner 1996; Wightman 1997). Using research in industrial psychology, as well as employment selection and promotion, Shultz and Zedeck (2009) conducted experiments with more than 5,000 law graduates that identified several factors in lawyers’ efficacy not measured by the LSAT, including problem solving, advocacy, practical judgment, and communication skills. Their work suggests that tests can be developed that predict professional performance while reducing race, ethnic, and gender differences.

Other effects of updating the process by which university admissions decisions are made focus on identifying not skills but rather personality variables associated with academic success and leadership roles. Trapmann et al. (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of the impact of the “Big Five” personality factors on academic success in college. In their review of non-cognitive predictors of graduate school performance, Kyllonen, Walters, and Kaufman (2005) discussed how measurement of personality constructs could play a role in admissions procedures. Others are investigating how achievement goals (Young 2007), background and ability profiles (Schmitt et al. 2007), and biographical data and situational-judgment inventories (Oswald et al. 2004) can be used to predict college student performance. Such studies have clear implications for admissions.

Similar in spirit to these studies, the Kaleidoscope Project grew out of work on a specific predecessor, the Rainbow Project (Sternberg and the Rainbow Project Collaborators 2006). The Rainbow Project was based upon observations dating back to 1972, when the senior author was Special Assistant to the Dean of Undergraduate Admissions at Yale. It was motivated by the belief that college admissions processes are incomplete. Based on the theory of successful intelligence (Sternberg 1997), it took into account the notion that to succeed in life, people need creative skills and attitudes to generate new ideas, analytical skills and attitudes to ascertain whether their new ideas are good ideas, and practical skills and attitudes to implement their ideas and persuade others of the value of these ideas. The Rainbow Project, funded by the College Board, was intended to determine whether measures of relevant skills would enhance prediction of academic success while reducing ethnic-group differences. The Rainbow Project used a supplementary assessment of analytical, practical, and creative skills to augment the SAT in predicting college performance (Sternberg and the Rainbow Project Collaborators 2006; Sternberg, the Rainbow Project Collaborators, and the University of Michigan Business School Collaborators 2004). Data were collected at fifteen schools across the United States, including eight four-year colleges, five community colleges, and two high schools. Participants included 1,013 students, the majority of whom were in either their first year of college or their final year of high school. Baseline measures of standardized test scores and high school grade point averages were collected to evaluate the predictive validity of current tools used for college admissions decisions and to provide a contrast for measures of analytical, practical, and creative skills.

The Rainbow assessment was found to improve the predictive validity of college GPA relative to high school GPA and SAT. Based on multiple-regression analyses, these new measures alone nearly doubled prediction of college GPA when compared with the SAT alone. Furthermore, the new measures predicted an additional 8.5 percent of the variance in college GPA beyond the initial 14.1 percent contributed by the SAT and high school GPA. The Rainbow assessment also was shown to reduce ethnic-group differences relative to the SAT alone. These findings suggest that measures such as those used in the Rainbow Project increase not only diversity and equity in the admissions process but also the academic quality of the admitted pool. The success of the Rainbow project paved the way for the Kaleidoscope project.
THEORETICAL RATIONALE:  
THE WICS THEORY OF LEADERSHIP

The underlying theoretical rationale for the Kscope project comes from the Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, Synthesized (WICS) theory of leadership (Sternberg 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007b, 2008; Sternberg and Vroom 2002). WICS has its roots in the triarchic theory of successful intelligence, which defines successful intelligence as the ability to achieve success in life according to one’s personal standards, within one’s socio-cultural context (Sternberg 1985, 1997, 1999). The ability to succeed requires that one capitalize on strengths and correct or compensate for weaknesses. It also requires that one respond appropriately to situations by adapting oneself to the environment, shaping the environment to suit oneself, or selecting a new environment that is better matched to one’s skills, values, desires, or the situation. Success is attained through a balance of three aspects of intelligence: analytical, creative, and practical (Sternberg 1985, 1997, 1999).

The idea behind WICS (which extends beyond the theory of successful intelligence that motivated the Rainbow Project) is that leaders use creative skills to form a vision for their leadership; analytical skills to ascertain whether it is a good vision; practical skills to execute the vision and convince others of its worth; and wisdom to ensure that the vision is for the common good over the long as well as short terms, through the infusion of positive ethical values. Wisdom ensures that one’s vision is not just for the good of oneself, or one’s family or friends. Thus, successful leadership involves a balanced synthesis of skills and attitudes (Sternberg 1998a, 2001). Though distinct from one another, skills and attitudes are interrelated. Skills are not innate but rather constitute the development of competencies and expertise in executing certain leadership functions (Sternberg 1998b, 1999, 2003). Attitudes are part of a developing mindset regarding expertise in those leadership functions.

As discussed earlier, undergraduate admissions officers face many challenges, including the subjectivity of grade-point averages, the questionable comprehensiveness of the “standardized” tests used to help narrow the pool of applicants, and the highly similar qualifications of applicants. Such difficulties provided an opportunity to put the WICS theory into action. If Tufts (or any) students are expected to become the leaders of tomorrow, then, according to the theory, admitted applicants should give early indications of skills and attitudes related to wisdom, creativity, analytical intelligence, and practical intelligence. The goal of the project described in this paper was to develop an undergraduate admissions process that provides the opportunity for these skills and attitudes to be taken fully into account in the admissions process.

The Kaleidoscope Project

The traditional Tufts undergraduate admission process is based on multiple pieces of information: All applicants submit the Common Application, which requests such basic information as gender and ethnicity, family background, a personal statement, a list of extracurricular activities, and an accounting of academic achievements. The Common Application also involves a Secondary School Record, which includes the high school transcript, grade-point average and rank, curriculum information, a counselor recommendation, standardized test scores (the SAT-1 and two SAT-2 subject tests or the ACT are required at Tufts), and two teacher recommendations. In addition, Tufts applicants are required to answer the question “Why Tufts?” and to write two short autobiographical essays exploring personal identity and family background.

These traditional materials are used by admissions officers to assign a set of evaluative ratings to each applicant on several measures. These measures include academic achievement (AC), personal qualities (PQ), extracurricular activities or talent (EX), and an overall (OV) assessment. The admissions officers rate AC based on a holistic review of the high school transcript (including curricular rigor and academic achievement) and standardized testing, contingent on the type of school and demographic background of the applicant. The PQ score provides an assessment of intellectual curiosity and engagement, personality, and background or defining attributes and characteristics that will enhance the heterogeneity of the class; it is based on responses to the personal essays (short and long forms), teacher and counselor recommendations, and the alumni-interview assessment (when available). The EX score is based on the listing of extracurricular activities; the score reflects the depth and breadth of a student’s involvement, demonstrated leadership, and any

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1 This list is not complete.
notable talent that emerges. The OV rating represents a candidate’s competitiveness within the applicant pool; it is not a summary of the other three categories but rather an overall evaluation of the strength of the individual’s application and his/her competitive standing among more than 15,000 applicants.

The Kscope Project began in the fall semester of 2006. It does not replace but rather supplements the traditional admissions process. The Kscope project has two components: (a) modification of the application process and (b) modification of how applications are assessed. The undergraduate application process was modified by giving applicants the option of submitting an additional exercise as part of the supplemental application form. The Tufts supplement to the Common Application asks students to submit demographic information, areas of academic interest, secondary school information, familial relationships with Tufts alumni, and three required short essays. As previously mentioned, students also can submit an optional essay (250–400 words) or other exercise as part of the supplemental application. There are several prompts from which students can choose; all were designed to elicit evidence of analytical (A), creative (C), practical (P), and/or wisdom (W)-based skills, in accordance with the WICS theory of leadership. Students are assured that the exercises are indeed optional. The following is a subset of the prompts used for the 2012 class admissions:

- In *The Happy Life*, Charles Eliot called books “the quietest and most constant of friends…the most accessible and wisest of counselors, and the most patient of teachers.” What work of fiction or non-fiction changed the way you live or the way you see the world? Why? (Analytical)
- Create a short story using one of the following topics (Creative):
  - One-Way Ticket
  - “Do Not Push”
  - Toast
  - The Back Seat on the School Bus
  - Something’s Not Right...

- Every day, people make decisions that force them beyond their comfort levels. Perhaps you moved to a different country or left behind your neighborhood friends to attend a school outside your home district. Maybe you have a political, social, or cultural viewpoint that is not shared by the rest of your school, family, or community. Where did you find the courage to create a better opportunity for yourself or others? How did you find the voice to stand up for something in which you passionately believed? Why did you persevere when the odds were against you? (Practical)
- Thomas Edison believed invention required “a good imagination and a pile of junk.” What inspires your original thinking? How might you apply your ingenuity to serve the common good and make a difference in society? (Wisdom)

In 2009, an option was added that allowed applicants to submit a video clip that demonstrated their potential for admission to Tufts. Applicants also have had the option of drawing something, such as an advertisement or design for a new product, to document their creative bent.

A team of admissions officers was given training on the Kscope measures. The admissions officers collaborated with the PACE Center to create scoring rubrics for A, C, P, and W. Admissions officers now are encouraged to consider the Kscope measures and to provide A, C, P, and W ratings in their review of each applicant (including those applicants who did not write the supplemental essay in response to the prompts designed to elicit Kscope qualities but who nevertheless presented other evidence relevant to the A, C, P, and W evaluations). The ratings may be based on the supplemental essay alone, on the essay and other application material, or solely on application material other than the essays. The Kscope measures are rated using a five-point scale (A+, A, B, C, X). The “A+” score is reserved for exceptionally notable applicants. A score of “A” indicates that the student is at a very high level; a score of “B” indicates that an applicant’s qualities are at an intermediate level; a score of “C” indicates a low level of the rated dimension (for example, a creative score of “C” meant that evidence of creativity was weak); an “X” reflects the absence of relevant evidence in the application materials. (Note that X does not mean demonstrated lack of an attribute.) Because admissions officers use the Kscope framework at their own discretion, some applicants have no Kscope score. Kscope ratings are used

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*The C, P, and W rubrics were introduced in 2006; the A (Analytical) rubric was introduced in 2007.*
only positively—that is, to increase an applicant’s chances of admission—not negatively.

Ratings are used to advocate for particular applicants before the admissions committee and to support the final admission decision for each individual. This article summarizes outcomes of the project with respect to the nature and composition of the student body. It was hypothesized that students who received higher ratings on Kscope measures would possess cognitive bases for superior leadership skills.

Applicants to the School of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering (AS&E) are rated on a 1 (strongest) to 7 (weakest) academic-rating scale. The number of applicants with weak academic ratings (i.e., 5–7) has decreased substantially while the number with very strong academic ratings (i.e., 1–2) has increased substantially since the introduction of Kaleidoscope. Acceptance rates have remained consistent, at approximately 27 percent. (See Table 1 for details relating to applications and admissions trends since Kscope was incorporated into the admission process.)

**STUDY 1**

In fall 2006, Tufts University began a pilot study of the Kscope framework for evaluating applications. It was expected that the Kscope framework would facilitate the admission of applicants who possess qualities that, given the right environment, would allow these applicants to become exceptional students with demonstrable leadership skills. Two comparisons were conducted to investigate group differences in college GPA:

- Students who received at least one Kscope rating were compared with those who did not receive any Kscope ratings;
- Among those who received at least one Kscope rating, students who received mostly A or A+ ratings were compared with those who received mostly B or C ratings. (If students received the same number of As and Bs [or Cs], they were placed in the lower group.)

The goal of this study was to ensure that selecting for students in part on the basis of Kscope qualities would not result in lower college GPAs. We hoped to demonstrate that focusing not only on students’ analytical skills but also on their creativity, practicality, and wisdom would not adversely affect the academic quality of the student body. The two groups in each comparison were not expected to differ with respect to their college GPA, as all students who are admitted are selected on the basis of excellence with respect to certain admissions criteria.

**Method**

College GPA and credit-hour data were obtained from all students in the Class of 2011 (N = 1,441) at the end of their second academic year at Tufts and for all students in the Class of 2012 (N = 1,290) at the end of their first academic year. Only 44 percent of the students in the Class of 2011 cohort had Kscope ratings on at least one of the Kscope dimensions (Creative, Practical, or Wisdom), whereas 72 percent of the students in the Class of 2012 had Kscope ratings on at least one dimension (Creative, Practical, Wisdom, or Analytical). This difference can be attributed to admissions officers becoming more familiar with the Kscope rating procedures, as well as to changes made to the Kscope rating software that made it easier for admissions officers to utilize. “College GPA” refers to students’ cumulative GPA.

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throughout their enrollment at Tufts (i.e., not just for the most recent academic year). Thus, college GPA for the Class of 2011 reflects four semesters of study whereas that for the Class of 2012 includes grades for only two semesters.

Results

Only those results that reached statistical significance ($p < .05$) are reported. The cumulative college GPA of female students ($M_{female} = 3.38$, $SD = .40$) was significantly higher than that of male students ($M_{male} = 3.27$, $SD = .51$), $F(1, 1345) = 18.82$, $p < .001$. Also, sophomores ($M_{sophomore} = 3.37$, $SD = 0.38$) earned higher college GPAs than did freshmen ($M_{freshman} = 3.33$, $SD = 0.46$), $F(1, 2629) = 4.83$, $p < .05$ (see table 2 for descriptive and comparative statistics for all college GPA analyses). All significance tests in Study 1 are two-tailed, because no a priori assumptions were made about directionality of effects.

Kscope Scores and College GPA. Consistent with expectations, there was no significant difference in the cumulative GPAs of Kscope students (i.e., those who received at least one Kscope rating, $N = 1,517$) and those of non-Kscope students (i.e., those who received only Xs or who did not receive any Kscope ratings, $N = 1,114$). However, when controlling for academic rating group ($High = 1–2$, $Mid = 3–4$, $Low = 5–7$), Kscope-rated students ($MKscope = 3.37$, $SD = 0.39$) earned significantly higher college GPAs than non-Kscope-rated students ($M_{Non-Kscope} = 3.33$, $SD = 0.40$), $F(1, 2625) = 4.71$, $p < .05$. Kscope-rated students also had higher percentages of earned versus attempted credit hours compared with non-Kscope-rated students ($M_{Non-Kscope} = 0.968$, $SD = .07$) when controlling for academic rating groups, $F(1, 2625) = 9.65$, $p < .01$ (see table 3 for descriptive and comparison statistics for all earned versus attempted credit hour analyses). In other words, students who received at least one Kscope rating from admissions officers were more likely than students who did not receive a Kscope rating to complete courses they started and to earn the full number of credits they attempted each semester.

There was no significant difference in cumulative GPA when comparing only students who received different Kscope ratings ($N = 1,517$), even when controlling for academic rating group: Students who received mostly As or A+ (“High Kscope”) on the Kscope dimensions on which they were rated earned cumulative GPAs no different from those who received mostly Bs and Cs (“Low Kscope”) on Kscope dimensions. Similarly, high- and low-Kscope groups did not differ on any other academic outcome variables tested (e.g., fall and spring GPA, cumulative earned credit hours, and the ratio of students’ attempted and earned credit hours). Thus, Kscope rating was not expected to negatively affect the academic quality of the class, and it did not. However, receiving a Kscope rating put students at an academic advantage, perhaps because those who wrote analytical, creative, practical, and wisdom-based essays, or described related activities, had higher levels of motivation, or higher thresholds of these other skills — skills needed for higher levels of academic success.

There were no significant differences by ethnic group in Kscope performance. In other words, Kscope enhanced prediction while decreasing ethnic-group differences on relevant criterion measures for admissions.
Discussion
Students in the Kscope groups were admitted in part on the basis of a set of criteria that stresses not just academic performance but also other qualities known to contribute to leadership ability. It was important to verify that the new admissions procedure does not decrease the quality of academic work by dint of lower GPAs for students admitted under the Kscope framework. In fact, the results of these analyses indicate that academic achievement (as measured by cumulative GPA, individual-semester GPA, cumulative earned credit hours, and the percentage ratio between earned and attempted credit hours3) is similar for students who obtain relatively high Kscope scores (i.e., mostly As) and those who obtain lower scores (i.e., mostly Bs or Cs). Because Kscope is oriented toward predicting leadership skills beyond the classroom, it was not expected that high-Kscope students would perform better than others. But being rated for Kscope did predict academic success independently of high-school academic indices. The results are encouraging because they support the claim that incorporating Kscope into the holistic decision-making process helps to identify potential leaders and active citizens who are also academically on par with typical Tufts students.

Study 2

The goal of the Kscope follow-up study was to compare the personal development and satisfaction of students admitted in part on the basis of their Kscope scores with those of students who were not so admitted. Participants included 486 freshmen and sophomores (35.6 percent female) from the Classes of 2011 and 2012. Six students participated as part of an introductory-psychology subject pool and received course credit for their participation; the remaining 480 students were recruited elsewhere and received $20 in compensation.

Method

Procedure. An e-mail invitation with a link to an online survey was sent to each student in the freshman and sophomore classes (N = 2,664). A total of 938 students (35.2 percent) followed the link to the survey; 687 students (25.8 percent) started the survey, and 486 students (18.2 percent) (including those participating for course credit) completed it. The survey began with informed-consent procedures. After participants gave their consent, they were asked to:

- Rate their satisfaction with various aspects of their life during the 2008–09 school year.
- Rate their personal development on various dimensions during the 2008–09 school year.
- List all extracurricular activities; time devoted to them; remuneration; level of meaningfulness of each activity; the extent to which each activity provided opportunity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Comparisons on Earned vs. Attempted Credit Hours</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F value (df)</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kscope</td>
<td>.976</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>8.19</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Kscope</td>
<td>.967</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kscope (controlling for academic rating group)</td>
<td>.976</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>9.65</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Kscope (controlling for academic rating group)</td>
<td>.968</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Kscope</td>
<td>.975</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Kscope</td>
<td>.978</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Kscope (controlling for academic rating group)</td>
<td>.974</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Kscope (controlling for academic rating group)</td>
<td>.978</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.984</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.974</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>.981</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>31.64</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>.964</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All significance tests reported here are two-tailed.

3 Due to space limitations, we do not report on all analyses in this paper.
to cultivate wisdom, creativity, practical skills, analytic skills, and leadership skills; and perceived non-mone-
tary gain.

Rate the appropriateness of various descriptors of their extracurricular experiences, and what they gained from the experiences.4

Participants. Student data were divided into the same High (N = 158) and Low (N = 110) Kscope groups as described in Study 1. Data for 218 students were omitted from these analyses because they did not receive any Kscope scores on their applications. Again, not having a Kscope score did not necessarily mean that students lacked Kscope qualities; rather, it meant that admissions officers did not rate them on the Kscope dimensions as part of their evaluation. Although a Kscope/Non-Kscope comparison was made in Study 1, it was not considered appropriate for this study. (Study 1 focused on the incorporation and implications of the Kscope rating procedure for the admissions process and not specifically on the outcomes associated with students’ particular ratings.) Thus, data on students who did not receive at least one Kscope rating were not included in Study 2 because they were not interpretable in the context of this study.

Results

Differences between the Kscope Groups. As with Study 1, only those results that reached statistical significance (p < .05) are reported. In general, high-Kscope students rated their satisfaction higher than did the low-Kscope students. A significant difference was found for students’ reported satisfaction with their interactions with other students, $F(1, 266) = 3.76, p < .05$, such that high-Kscope students ($M_{High} = 4.32, SD = 0.84$) were more satisfied than low-Kscope students ($M_{Low} = 4.12, SD = 0.87$). With respect to the personal-development items, high-Kscope students ($M_{High} = 3.85, SD = 1.02$) reported becoming marginally more socially active, $F(1, 264) = 2.74, p = .05$, compared with low-Kscope students ($M_{Low} = 3.63, SD = 1.12$). Significance tests on satisfaction and personal development items are one-tailed because it was expected that High-Kscope students would report higher ratings than Low-Kscope students (see Table 4 for descriptive and comparison statistics for all significant student satisfaction, personal development, and extracurricular activity analyses).

Extracurricular activities. With respect to the number of extracurricular activities in which students participated, there was no significant difference between high- and low-Kscope students ($M_{High} = 2.49, SD = 0.57; M_{Low} = 2.34, SD = 0.68$). However, high-Kscope students rated their extracurricular activities as somewhat more meaningful ($M_{High} = 2.39, SD = 0.57$) than did low-Kscope students ($M_{Low} = 2.27, SD = 0.68$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F value (df)</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with student interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Kscope</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Kscope</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming more socially active</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Kscope</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Kscope</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningfulness of extracurricular activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Kscope</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Kscope</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurriculars cultivated practical skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Kscope</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Kscope</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurriculars described as allowing practical thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Kscope</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Kscope</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All significance tests reported here are one-tailed.

The complete set of survey items is provided in the Appendix.
Students were asked to rate descriptors of their activities in terms of how appropriate they were to their extracurricular experiences (see Appendix 1, Question 5). Descriptors were rated 1 if they did not describe their overall experience, 2 if they somewhat described their overall experience, and 3 if they best described their overall experience. Univariate test statistics revealed a significant difference between high- and low-Kscope students in the extent to which they believed their experience of extracurricular activities allowed them to think practically ($M_{High} = 2.49, SD = 0.57$; $M_{Low} = 2.34, SD = 0.68$), $F(1, 266) = 4.18, p < .05$.

Discussion

This study yielded significant differences between high- and low-Kscope groups. High-Kscope students reported being more satisfied with their interactions with other students and becoming more socially active compared with low-Kscope students over the course of the 2008–09 school year. They reported more meaningful involvement in their extracurricular activities, and they were more likely to describe their experiences of extracurricular activities as enabling them to think practically.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This article documents preliminary outcomes of the Kaleidoscope (Kscope) Project in the first few years of its implementation. The project reduces or eliminates ethnic-group differences for groups under assessment while improving prediction of undergraduate performance. Within the Kscope framework, applicants have the option to submit an essay or other exercise as part of the Tufts-specific supplemental application form. The essays or other materials are written in response to specific prompts designed to elicit Kscope-related qualities: analytical, creative, and practical skills, as well as wisdom. Admissions officers consider the Kscope measures in their review of each applicant both in reading the materials (when they have been provided), and in considering the extent to which Kscope qualities are evident in the rest of the application. Admissions officers provide Kscope ratings in addition to their original ratings of academic merit (based on SAT and GPA scores), personal qualities (based on applicants’ personal data, essays, and letters of recommendation), and extracurricular activities.

The first study reported here describes analysis of the GPAs and other academic measures of members of the Classes of 2011 and 2012. Cumulative and individual-semester GPA, cumulative earned credit hours, and percentage of attempted versus earned credit hours were compared for (i) students who were rated on at least one Kscope dimension versus those who did not receive any Kscope ratings and (2) students who received mostly As or A+ on Kscope dimensions versus those who received mostly Bs and Cs. No significant differences were found between either set of comparison groups. Thus, although the students in the different Kscope groups may have been admitted based in part on somewhat different considerations (i.e., whether admissions officers were able to take Kscope ratings into account when evaluating a student’s application), their overall academic performance was approximately the same. The results are encouraging because they support the claim that introduction of Kaleidoscope procedures into the admissions process is not negatively affecting admitted students’ academic success. By identifying students with leadership qualities that lie outside of the more traditional academic admission measures (i.e., SAT scores and high school GPA), Tufts has increased the diversity of the student body while maintaining high academic standards and student achievement.

A promising finding was that for members of the Class of 2011, holding constant high school grades (GPA) and SAT scores, simply being rated for Kaleidoscope—that is, showing evidence of creative, analytical, practical, and/or wisdom-based skills—was associated with better academic performance freshman year. In other words, Kaleidoscope actually did improve prediction of academic performance.

The second study provides follow-up analysis of the Classes of 2011 and 2012. A survey of freshmen and sophomores compared students who earned higher ratings on Kscope measures to students who earned lower Kscope ratings. The survey asked students to rate their satisfaction with different aspects of the 2008–09 school year; with their personal development, and with their extracurricular activities. Although high-Kscope students typically re-
ported greater personal development and satisfaction, only items related to their social lives (i.e., satisfaction with their interactions with other students and a reported increase in social activity) reached statistical significance. Differences were found in the qualitative analyses of responses regarding extracurricular activities: On average, high-Kscope students reported having more meaningful experiences of extracurricular activities and reported that those activities cultivated their development of practical skills.

The Kaleidoscope Project is part of a long-term, large-scale effort aimed at improving admissions procedures. Compared with the earlier Rainbow Project (Sternberg et al. 2006), several differences—for example, the Rainbow Project’s addition of unique variance in predicting first-year college GPA versus Kscope’s addition of such variance only when consideration was given to whether participants were rated at all (and not to the level of their ratings)—emerged. Possible reasons for these differences are as follows: First, Rainbow was proctored in a classroom rather than completed at home. Second, Rainbow was timed whereas Kscope was not. Third, Rainbow was applied across a much broader range of ability levels whereas testing of Kscope likely suffered from substantial restriction of range. Fourth, Rainbow raters were blind to the identities of those being rated whereas Kscope raters were not. Finally, Rainbow had an oral-story subtest (which showed the highest incremental correlations) whereas Kscope did not.

The analyses and results reported here support further investigation of the use of the Kscope framework for undergraduate admissions. After one and two years at Tufts, students rated highly on Kscope do not appear to perform differently, at least in terms of academic achievement, than students who were not rated highly. Nevertheless, there is evidence that their subjective experiences differ and that they differ in ways that would be expected of individuals who are cultivating leadership qualities and preparing themselves for leadership roles. Moreover, as being rated for Kscope is associated with higher academic achievement,
presentation of evidence of analytical, creative, practical, or wisdom-based achievement is relevant for academic success. These preliminary results may suggest that leadership skills are related to extraversion (i.e., becoming more socially active and having more meaningful engagement in extracurricular activities). However, an outgoing nature is not necessarily indispensable to skilled and effective leadership. Leaders are those who make a positive, meaningful, and durable difference, whether at the level of the family, the community, the country, or the world. The WICS model thus allows for individuals to possess leadership skills in a wide variety of domains. This model is based on several aspects of intelligence-related (analytical, practical, creative, and wise) and not necessarily personality-related factors. Although certain personality traits (such as extraversion) may be correlated with leadership skills, an introverted computer science major could be just as skilled—or even more skilled—a leader as an outgoing law student.

As the students in our sample were only in their first and second years of college, it may be premature to gauge nuances in the development of leadership skills. The Kaleidoscope measures were developed to help identify students with leadership qualities; but perhaps such qualities are revealed only in later years, after “adjustment” to college life, or even later, when students graduate and enter the workforce.

After four years of implementation, Kscope has become a useful and integral enhancement to the highly successful undergraduate admissions process at Tufts. The framework helps students showcase their unique abilities during the admissions process, and it helps admissions officers winnow the applicant pool. As part of our ongoing effort to judge the long-term predictive validity of the Kscope measures, we plan to continue to monitor the progress of students admitted to Tufts. We look forward particularly to learning what happens when high-Kscope students graduate and enter the workforce. Are they in fact better equipped than their low-Kscope peers to become the leaders of tomorrow?

WICS provides an intensely practical theory for a highly practical admissions process. Any college can add to its application the kinds of essays we added (see Sternberg, 2010). They need not be the ones we used but rather could be any essays (or other activities) that assess creative, analytical, practical, and/or wisdom-based thinking. Some might be concerned that their college would have to hire additional admissions officers or other readers to evaluate the essays. Tufts addressed such concerns in a rather straightforward manner.

Upon arrival at Tufts in 2005, the new Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences pledged that in collaboration with the Dean of Admissions and the Advancement Office, he would seek to raise the funds required to hire any extra admissions officers needed to evaluate the new program. Fund-raising for Kaleidoscope and related projects proved relatively easy: Many donors were wealthy people who themselves had been (or at least believed themselves to have been) marginal admissions cases. They viewed Kaleidoscope as a way of helping to ensure that young people such as they themselves had been would have a chance at being admitted to Tufts. These and other donors and alumni have supported the project enthusiastically.

Optimally, Kaleidoscope would be implemented along with an augmentation or even transformation of teaching and assessment in courses such that creative, practical, and wisdom-based skills and attitudes—and not merely memory-based and analytical ones—would be cultivated. Tufts’ Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) offers seminars that develop teachers’ ability to teach and assess students with diverse learning and thinking styles (Sternberg, Grigorenko and Zhang 2007). Tufts is implementing a program for a senior-year culminating assessment of learning that will better take into account the skills and attitudes of WICS. Departments are being given flexibility to design assessments for the majors they offer.

Kaleidoscope is part of a larger program of admissions, instruction, and assessment based on the notion that a university should develop new leaders for a changing world. The program can be administered in a practical and cost-effective way that enhances academic quality, diversity, and access. We look forward to continuing to evaluate the extent to which Kaleidoscope predicts students’ success, and studying Kaleidoscope’s effectiveness in other college settings.

REFERENCES
## APPENDIX

### Survey Questions

1. Thinking about this past year at Tufts (2008–2009), how satisfied are you with the following aspects of your college experience?

   *Mark an ‘x’ in the relevant column for each line.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Satisfied</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with other students</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with faculty</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to fit in</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your overall happiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your overall experience this year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. In thinking about how you have benefited from your experience at Tufts this year (2008–2009), please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

   *Mark an ‘x’ for your level of agreement for each statement.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I developed intellectually.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gained confidence in my own abilities.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I became more active in the community.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I became more socially active.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I became more politically aware.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I became more environmentally aware.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I developed leadership skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I developed my creative thinking skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I developed my analytic thinking skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I developed a sense of “how to get things done.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned how to make wise decisions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Other ways in which your college experience this year (2008–2009) has benefited your personal growth: (open-ended)
4. What types of extracurricular activities did you participate in? By extracurricular activities, we mean any activities or interests you pursued outside of the classroom, such as sports, clubs, volunteering, hobbies, creative outlets, mentoring, or work). These can be formal/informal, organized/non-organized, or group/individual activities.

| Activity + description | Were you paid to do this activity? (Y/N) | About how many hours per week did you do this activity? (0-5 hrs/wk, 6-10 hrs/wk, 11-15 hrs/wk, 16-20 hrs/wk, 20+ hrs/wk) | How meaningful was this activity for you? (0=Not at all, 1=A little, 2=Somewhat, 3=Very) | To what extent did your participation in this activity provide the opportunity to cultivate wisdom? (0=Not at all, 1=A little, 2=Somewhat, 3=A great deal) | To what extent did your participation in this activity provide the opportunity to cultivate creativity? (0=Not at all, 1=A little, 2=Somewhat, 3=A great deal) | To what extent did your participation in this activity provide the opportunity to cultivate analytical skills? (0=Not at all, 1=A little, 2=Somewhat, 3=A great deal) | To what extent did your participation in this activity provide the opportunity to cultivate practical skills? (0=Not at all, 1=A little, 2=Somewhat, 3=A great deal) | To what extent did your participation in this activity provide the opportunity to cultivate leadership? (0=Not at all, 1=A little, 2=Somewhat, 3=A great deal) | What is the main thing you gained from this activity? |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|————————————————————————————————————————|—————————————————————————————————|—————————————————————————————————|—————————————————————————————————|—————————————————————————————————|—————————————————————————————————|—————————————————————————————————|———————————————————|

5. Below is a list of descriptors.

Thinking only of the extracurricular activities you have done in your freshman year, assign values in the column to the right of each descriptor.
1 = descriptors that do not describe your overall experience.
2 = descriptors that somewhat describe your overall experience.
3 = descriptors that best describe your overall experience.
You can use the empty cells to enter new descriptors, if you so wish.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adapt to a new environment</th>
<th>Work independently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adapt to unfamiliar situations</td>
<td>Apply what I learned in college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confront emotionally demanding situations</td>
<td>Perform cognitively demanding tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deal with uncertainties</td>
<td>Interact with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn new things</td>
<td>Lead a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multitask</td>
<td>Develop something new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take responsibility</td>
<td>Solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think analytically</td>
<td>Work with deadlines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think creatively</td>
<td>Help people in need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think practically</td>
<td>Mentor or teach others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work as part of a team</td>
<td>Participate in demonstrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in a dynamic environment</td>
<td>Present in front of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Choose 3 of the descriptors above that are most important to you.
Explain how your extracurricular activities relate to each of the 3 descriptors.
With 117,000 hits on a recent Google™ search, the phenomenon of helicopter parenting has been widely reported in the popular press. Yet the scholarly literature is anemic on the topic. This article, part one of a two-part series, presents the small body of research on helicopter parenting and describes a qualitative study of 190 participants which identifies five types of helicopter parents. Part two of the article explores the social, cultural, psychological, and economic factors that give rise to helicopter parenting; identifies implications for practice; and discusses two theories of parenting.
INTRODUCTION

From the Wall Street Journal (Shellenbarger 2007) and USA Today (Jayson 2007) to O Magazine (Rabb 2008), The Chronicle of Higher Education (Hoover 2008, Lipka 2005, Milstone 2007, Wills 2005), and ABC’s Wife Swap (“Poor Little Rich Girl” 2008, Waldo 2008), stories about helicopter parents abound. Likewise, practitioner interest in the subject has increased (see, for example, recent monographs by Carney-Hall 2008, Daniel and Scott 2001, Keppler, Mullendore, and Casey 2005). Yet the scholarly research on the topic is anemic (Toepfer 2008). Recognizing that understanding helicopter parent behavior as well as motivation is crucial to the effectiveness both of educational programs for students and of management of colleges and universities, we focused this qualitative study on those who have experienced helicoptering firsthand: academic and student services professionals. This article presents the small body of research on helicoptering; explores the topic through interviews and focus groups with professionals; and identifies five types of helicopter parents.

The term “helicopter parent” was coined by Charles Fay and Foster Cline (authors of the Love and Logic parenting series) and was popularized by a Newsweek article (Zeman 1991), which described such a person as “a nosy grown-up who’s always around. Quick to offer a teacher unwanted help.” A helicopter parent (helopat for short) is a mother, father, or even a grandparent who “hovers” over a student of any age by being involved—sometimes overly so—in student/school, student/employer, or student/societal relationships. Helicopter behavior can have a positive or negative effect. Positive results accrue when the “hovering” is age appropriate; when parents and student engage in a dialogue; when the student is empowered to act; and when parents intercede only if the student needs additional help. We label this behavior positive parental engagement.

Negative helicopter parents can be found in many settings, including educational, and are inappropriately (and at times surreptitiously) enmeshed in their children’s lives and relationships.

This study differs from the numerous anecdotal articles on helicoptering by pursuing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. While we heard hundreds of stories—sad, tragic, hilarious, and mundane—about helicopter parents, we focused on a higher level of analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994) in order to search for helicopter parent typologies and broader historical and sociocultural explanations for their behavior.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In pre-industrial American society, young people had a relatively brief coming of age period. Industrialization,
combined with population shifts to urban areas and the high school movement, meant that by the turn of the 20th century, a growing number of young people graduated from high school by age eighteen. Most entered the workforce immediately. Home, marriage, and children usually followed shortly thereafter. Psychological theories of adolescence and adulthood were based on that narrow band of time between being in high school and joining the labor market. According to Arnett (2007), Stanley Hall, who wrote the milestone book on adolescence (1904), was influenced by the notion of Sturm und Drang (storm and stress, Goethe 1774/1989). Likewise, psychoanalyst Anna Freud (1958, 1968) promoted a dark view of adolescence which was adopted by the Freudian school.

The rapidly changing economy of the post–World War II era led to concomitant changes in views of adolescence. Rejecting Hall’s (1904) theory, Offer (1969) presented adolescence as a time when young people felt good about themselves and their parents (Arnett 2007). As the Information Age dawned, society came to assume that post-secondary education was mandatory for any young person who wanted stability and permanence in the changing labor market. This meant that young people remained in school, suspended between adolescence and adulthood until their early or mid-twenties, depending on the type of education pursued.

Psychologist Jeffrey Arnett labeled this period between adolescence and adulthood “emerging adulthood” (1998, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2007). He indicated that emerging adults may be labeled slackers or selfish because of their ambivalence toward adult responsibilities and their relative freedom from work and family life (2007). He suggested that what had been recognized as an identity crisis now was deferred to this new period: “Emerging adulthood is exceptionally unstructured, the time of life when people are least likely to have their lives structured by their families and schools...” (2007). By age nineteen, most American emerging adults have moved out of their family’s household and are on their own for an average of the next seven years (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1999). Those who attend college emerge with a degree or training that better prepares them for a lifelong career rather than a single job. However, young people who enter the labor market without any post-secondary education may “…spend their twenties fruitlessly seeking a job that will enable them to support themselves satisfactorily” (Arnett 2007). Thus, early adulthood differs significantly from adolescence.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Although four monographs provide advice about working with parents of college students (Carney-Hall 2008, Cohen 1985, Daniel and Scott 2001, Keppler, Mullendore and Carey 2005), we focus instead on the four journal articles reporting empirical studies that have examined parental involvement in higher education.

The first study is the 2007 National Study of Student Engagement (Indiana University 2007), which included several questions about the involvement of family and friends in the lives of first-year college students and college seniors. The sample size was approximately 9,000 students from 24 colleges. Thirteen percent of first-year students said that their parents or guardians intervened frequently (“often” or “very often”) to help solve problems at college;
another 25 percent indicated that their parents intervened “sometimes.” Eight percent of seniors reported frequent parental intervention while 21 percent reported that their parents intervened “sometimes” (2007). Finally, mothers had more frequent contact with their children than did fathers, by approximately ten percentage points.

In addition, the study found “higher levels of engagement and more frequent use of deep learning activities” by students who had frequent parent contact. Such students showed “greater gains on a host of desired college outcomes and greater satisfaction with the college experience” (2007). However, students with more parent interventions had lower grades. One explanation may be that “the reason some parents intervened was to support a student who was having academic difficulties” (2007).

According to study director Dr. George Kuh, “Compared with their counterparts, children of helicopter parents were more satisfied with every aspect of their college experience, gained more in such areas as writing and critical thinking, and were more likely to talk with faculty and peers about substantive topics” (Mathews 2008). Mathews observed, “Parents, college officials, and college-family relations experts agree that the study is a blow to the widely accepted notion that little good can come from meddling in college children’s lives” (2007). This observation highlights the differences between the two competing theories of parenting discussed in part two of this paper.

In the second academic study, Toepfer (2008) drew on his background in marriage and family counseling and used emotional distance regulation theory (see, for example, Allison and Sabatelli 1988, Anderson and Sabatelli 1990, Barber and Olson 1997, Buber 1957, Conger, Conger and Scaramella 1997) to research helicopter parents. Using a sample of 67 female college students between the ages of eighteen and 25, Toepfer (2008) sought to quantify the helicopter parent/student relationship. He found an “inverse correlation between perceived social support from the family and family intrusiveness” (p.1).

Toepfer (2008) reported that students with higher perceived social support had sufficient freedom to make decisions without family intervention. However, students with less social support “indicated that their family is more obtrusive and less tolerant. This indicates more unhealthy and non-legitimate involvement concerning such decisions and suggests possible family enmeshment” (p.14).

Further, he proposed that negative helicopter behavior was a result of an enmeshed (as opposed to disengaged and autonomous) student/parent relationship.

In order to weed out the genuinely interested from the pathologically enmeshed, and meet the needs of these students, we must be able to discern the difference between constructive versus destructive [helicopter parent] flight patterns. [Family distance regulation theory] may help us better understand our [the university’s] authoritative role in a generation that attempts to level authority. (p.16)

Toepfer’s (2008) suggestion to examine distance regulation theory is important because many college administrators have little knowledge of this field.

In the third study, researchers at the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA studied student/parent interactions because they had observed that “…some college faculty and administrators have reported a trend of parents becoming more and more involved in the college-related decisions of their children” (HERI 2008). Six questions about parent involvement were included in the 2007 CIRP Freshman Survey (HERI 2008). Notably, the survey queried students about parental involvement in college decisions, allowing three responses: “too much,” “the right amount,” or “too little.” Students of color rated their parents as being involved “too little” in all six areas. The researchers observed: ...

...[F]ewer than seventeen percent of white students felt that their parents were not involved enough in dealings with officials at their college, in choosing college courses, and in choosing college activities, compared to 20.5 to 33.7 percent of black students, 33.3 to 39.6 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students, and 32.3 to 43.5 percent of Latino/a students. Generally, Latino/a students were the most likely to indicate that their parents were not involved enough in these post-matriculation areas (HERI 2008).

The fourth study (Wolf, Sax and Harper 2009) examined parental engagement and contact as reported by students in the University of California system. Ten thousand seven hundred and sixty UC students responded to the 2006 Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), which contained six questions relating to parental involvement and five relating to parent contact. While the survey asked about parental support, it did not include any ques-
tions that used the particular terms “helicopter parent” or “hovering.” Parental involvement was found to be greatest in the areas of student academics and personal well-being. Students reported their parents’ interest in academics (66 percent), grades (60 percent), and experience outside the classroom (54 percent). The survey also queried students about frequency and type of contact with their parents. Telephone was the most frequent mode of contact, with more than half of the students reporting at least weekly phone calls from parents. The second most frequent form of contact was e-mail, used by 62 percent of parents. Parents were less inclined to use more current technologies, such as text messaging and social networking.

Wolf, Sax and Harper (2009) also focused on differences by social class, race, and ethnicity. They found that middle and upper-class white students had higher levels of parental engagement. Students from some racial and ethnic groups reported lower levels of engagement but higher levels of contact. The authors concluded, “Levels of parental involvement that may be considered ‘excessive’ for some students could for other students represent an important source of academic and social support. We lack an understanding of which forms of involvement are most beneficial and under which circumstances and for which students” (2009).

This research literature provided some surprises. First, college students were generally positive about parental interventions on their behalf. Second, students of color generally rated their parents as involved “too little” in decisions about college. Third, the HERI, NSSE, and UCUES studies demonstrated that students desire positive parental support in college. Toepfer (2008) provided a roadmap for classifying positive and negative interventions.) Fourth, all of the studies raise questions about the nature of positive versus intrusive interventions. If levels of positive support are lower for some students, how can university administrators “level the playing field?” Fifth, given that the studies utilize terms as diverse as helicopter parent, parental engagement, and “intrusively enmeshed,” do the studies even measure the same construct? Do they measure a continuous construct with negative and positive values, or perhaps something else altogether? Could “supportive” parents also be surreptitiously helicoptering and attempting to intervene in their students’ academic and personal lives?

METHOD

The goal of this study was to explore the nature, extent, and causes of helicopter parent behavior at public four-year colleges and universities in the United States as perceived by professionals who work with college students. Research questions were as follows:

- What is a helicopter parent? How do helicopter parents act?
- How prevalent are helicopter parents? What are their demographics? Are there distinct “types” of helicopter parents?
- What factors encourage “helicoptering?”

Because this was an exploratory study, we limited our sample to public, four-year universities. As Savage (2008) suggests, there are differences not only in the levels of helicoptering but also in how public and private institutions respond to helicopter parents. We interviewed experts in student and academic services, including individuals such as admissions and financial aid staff, academic counselors, deans of students, directors of student activities, vice presidents of student affairs, placement directors, and others in similar positions.

We chose qualitative methods for this study because they “...are good for [studying] complex phenomenon for which little is known with clarity” (Lancy 1993). As Toepfer (2008) indicated, there is a dearth of research on helicopter parents, which suggests that qualitative methods are ideal for understanding and explaining the phenomenon. However, qualitative methods are highly context sensitive, which may limit the generalizability of the results.

Sample and Data

We interviewed 190 academic and student affairs professionals at public, four-year universities around the country. We started with “pilot” individual interviews to test our interview questions. After the first fifteen interviews, we began interviewing through focus groups as well as individually.

We recruited participants through announcements on listserves and newsletters and through word of mouth. We asked participants to suggest colleagues at other institutions and in other parts of the country whom we might interview. This “snowball technique” yielded professionals
from diverse colleges and different areas of academic and student services. Our sample was 62 percent female and 38 percent male. Minority representation was 28 percent.

Analysis
Our interviews and focus groups generated many stories about helicopter parents’ behavior. However, our primary focus was verstehen, deeper understanding of the phenomenon of helicoptering.

To analyze the data, we began with open coding—“...the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing” (Strauss and Corbin 1990)—of our transcripts and notes. This was followed by axial coding, “...a set of procedures whereby data are put back together by making connections between categories.” From our coding, we moved to the higher levels of analysis described by Miles and Huberman (1994). Of the thirteen levels of analysis (from the most concrete to the most abstract), we utilized seven: (1) making patterns and themes, (2) seeing plausibility, (3) clustering, (4) contrasting/comparing, (5) factoring, (6) noting the relationship between variables, and (7) developing conceptual coherence.

Limitations
This study has several possible limitations: First, our sample was limited to public, four-year universities. Second, given the diversity of the population, we had a relatively small sample size; more participants might have provided additional or different data. Third, the seriousness of helicoptering could have been exaggerated due to participants’ frustration. Finally, we interviewed only those professionals who work most closely with parents. To obtain the most comprehensive view of helicopter parenting, it would be necessary to also speak to students and parents, an approach challenged by issues of reliability, validity, and anonymity.

RESULTS
How Extensive is Helicoptering?
Our experts consistently estimated the percentage of helicopter parents on their campuses at 40 to 60 percent. Although helicoptering is more prevalent during students’ first two years on campus, it increases during students’ last year of college as they begin the graduate or professional school application and/or job hunt process. One parent called several months after the application deadline in an effort to enroll his son in our graduate program. Some parents even accompany their children on job interviews.

Demographics of Helicopter Parents
Helicopter parents are male and female and come from all racial, economic, and ethnic groups. While it is easy to believe that helicoptering is predominantly a middle- and upper-class phenomenon, we found this not to be the case. Nevertheless, the HERI (2008) and UCUES (Wolf, Sax and Harper 2009) studies suggest differences in helicoptering behavior by parent demographics. Are first-generation college parents any different? One might assume that parents of first-generation (F-gen) college students would not demand as much of staff as parents who attended college (“Continuing-generation parents,” or C-gens). In fact, we found that across institutional types, F-gen parents did engage in helicoptering, but at a lower rate than C-gens (an average of 40 percent versus 60 percent). (A companion study of K–12 administrators found that parents without a high school education were much less likely to engage in helicopter behavior.)

F-gen parents seem to have a set of concerns that C-gen parents do not share. For example, F-gen parents are anxious that their children receive the same benefits and opportunities as “continuing generation” students. Thus, they may spend more time talking with staff about the basics of programs in an effort to determine whether their children are getting an equitable share of the resources. Also important to F-gen parents is that their children pursue an education that will lead to a stable and well-paying career. First-generation parents have high academic and career aspirations for their children and so encourage them to forgo such “fluff” as extracurricular activities. This suggests that compared to C-gen parents, F-gen parents hold a more instrumental view of a college education. Does gender matter? Our study investigated the relationship of gender—of parent and student—to helicoptering. Mothers helping sons was a major theme, with some respondents estimating that 60 percent of all helicoptering reflects this pattern (see also Moser, Paternity and Dixon 1996). Several professionals indicated that fathers tended to intervene in “bigger picture” issues—e.g., grade appeals, refunds, and graduating on time. Fathers also tended to go directly to senior university administrators to resolve problems.
Are there Helopat “Types?”

On the basis of our interviews, we identified five types of helicopter parents. In this section, we describe each type and explain strategies for working with them (see Table 1, on page 20).

The first type of helicopter parent is the consumer advocate. These parents view college not as an educational journey but as a consumer transaction. They negotiate for the best possible price (i.e., they seek tuition discounting through scholarships and other awards), consider themselves “co-purchasers” of a college degree with their child, and demand a warranty (i.e., a good job or graduate school admission). To these parents, everything about the college experience is open to negotiation, from the initial application inquiry to the graduation ceremony.

Consumer advocates negotiate for their children the “right” residence hall room and the “right” schedule (usually classes that meet between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.). Consumer advocates look at the course catalog so as to understand the transaction for which they are paying—specifically, the minimum number of credit hours required for a degree. If the school fails to meet its obligations as service provider, parents seek “consumer justice.” They may threaten to share negative ratings with friends and family or even with consumer reporters or advocates who may publicize them.

As one professional at a regional, comprehensive university in the Midwest said, “I work with a bunch of parents who seem to believe residence halls are like Burger King: they should be able to ‘get it their way.’ Unfortunately [or perhaps fortunately for the future of higher education], this is not Burger King!” Consumer advocate parents are far more involved in their children’s college careers because of their perceived status as “co-consumers.” This type of helicopter parent reflects our current culture, in which many of our interactions with others are service-oriented transactions based upon the exchange of goods or services for a price.

Interacting with the consumer advocate requires patience, negotiation skills, and the ability (and willingness) to say “no.” Many consumer advocate parents believe in the adage “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” They will ask for everything they can think of, hoping to achieve at least something that will benefit themselves or their children. University and college professionals must listen carefully in order to discern which requests can be negotiated and which cannot. Because consumer advocate parents often communicate with other parents, administrators should understand that a decision for one parent may be quickly communicated to and thus expected by other parents.

The second type of parent is the equity or fairness advocate. These parents demand fairness for their children, who should live in the “best” residence hall; have the “best” major which provides the most opportunities in terms of scholarships, internships, and jobs; be taught by the “best” professors every semester; and so forth. While these parents usually present with a request for “equity,” they really want better—not equal—treatment. After all, that’s only “fair!” Fairness advocates also may argue for entitlement. These parents have been well-versed in state and federal entitlements since their children were enrolled in kindergarten, and they are well-prepared to argue the legalities of unfair treatment by the university. Fairness advocates may harbor suspicions that colleges don’t give students fair access to resources and opportunities. If only the universities would treat their students “fairly,” they would do well in college; any difficulties are the responsibilities of the institutions, not the students.

Although equity or fairness advocates may think they understand the legal issues surrounding higher education, they frequently apply secondary education requirements to colleges and universities. These parents may have experience advocating for their children in high school (particularly if their children have a disability), and so may expect the same services, attention, and processes they received in the past. These parents are often “landed” when they receive printed materials for reference and/or directions to existing policies and processes and are given reason to believe that their children will receive individualized attention. It also may help to inform the parent of certain “special services,” even if those services are available to most students.

The third type of helicopter parent is the vicarious college student. According to popular sources, these parents missed out on many college experiences themselves and want to recreate those golden four (or five or more) years spent as undergraduates. They are at every activity, parents’ weekend, and sports event. While some popular reports point to aging baby boomer parents who dropped out and so missed “normal” college experiences during
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the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, we believe the number of “boomer dropouts” to be relatively small.

Vicarious college students are best handled by two strategies: providing activities for parents and reminding them of the value of the collegiate experience to their children. Activities for parents can take many forms, including formal campus events. Some institutions plan events away from campus—for example, in cities that traditionally send significant numbers of students to the college. Reminding parents to back off and let their children succeed is difficult but may prove necessary when they insist on accompanying their children to classes, programs, and events.

Fourth are the toxic parents who have been written about extensively in self-help literature (see, for example, Forward 1989 and Neuharth 1998). These parents have numerous psychological issues and are controlling, negative, and try at once to live their children’s lives even as they “one-up” their children in the process. We believe the number of toxic parents to be relatively small. Interacting with toxic parents is difficult given the psychological subtext of the parent/student relationship. Toxic parents occasionally can be transformed by involving their children in the discussion, but only if the staff member facilitating the discussion is well-trained in family therapy. Often, the addition of the second parent, who usually is not toxic, can change the dynamic. However, it ultimately is in the student’s best interest to make a referral to the counseling center for assistance.

The fifth and final type is the safety patrol parent. These parents are focused on the safety of their children; speak frequently with campus staff about safety concerns; and may request copies of floor plans, procedures, policies, and other materials related to safety. Stunned by events such as Columbine, Virginia Tech, 9/11, and the University of Alabama—Huntsville, the number of safety patrol parents has increased rapidly. Theories relating to terrorist attacks suggest that with each shooting, bombing, or similar event, people become more afraid, more insular, and more protective of their loved ones (see Greenberg et al. 1990 and Pyszczynski, Solomon & Greenberg 2002). The fears these parents have are real. Following particularly vicious incidents on college campuses or a terror attack at any location, the first thought of safety patrol parents is to remove their children from campus. Terror management theory suggests that in the short term, this may calm the fears of parents as well as students, so some flexibility in such instances is recommended.

In some cases, higher education professionals may wish to dismiss safety patrol parents as people who are “hyper-aroused” by fear and perhaps even paranoid. However, responding in this way often results in the parent(s) working with other parents to form a coalition to express their concerns. Parents also may shift their emphasis from the institutional level to state agencies, fire marshals, or other authorities who may have jurisdiction over the institution’s safety and security. “We never close” may be an insult to safety patrol parents, who may view even a short closure in an emergency as a symbol that the protection of students’ lives is more important than “business as usual.”

While our list may not be inclusive of every type of helicopter parent, these five types were identified most often by student and academic services professionals. Research indicates that higher education professionals are most likely to encounter fairness advocates and consumer advocates. Safety patrol parents traditionally have communicated most regularly with admissions, residence life, and campus safety professionals. That said, post–Virginia Tech, safety patrols have besieged academic administrators about classroom safety and student services administrators about potentially violent members of the campus community.

This article reviewed the small body of research literature on helicopter parents and presented findings from a qualitative study of academic and student services professionals who work with parents. We identified the five most common types of helicopter parents, and we proposed effective strategies for working with them. In part two of the article, we present the broader social, cultural, economic, and psychological factors that gave rise to helicoptering; presented recommendations for practitioners; and discussed parenting theories which illuminate how engagement and individuation/separation can exist side by side.

REFERENCES
Research on the concept of meritocracy and its role in college admissions is the major focus of this article. It explores the factors that contribute to the gatekeeping process and provides a historical context that led to the evolution of today’s admission protocol. It focuses specifically on the strict meritocratic practices of many colleges as they continue to preserve the longstanding and deeply-rooted admission traditions. The authors provide a discussion about options for reforming the system, along with recommendations and topics that require additional research and exploration.
INTRODUCTION

In higher education, there are two symbolic metaphors for accessing a college degree: a key and a gate. The key represents access: it will open some doors but not all. The key is powerful, but alone it is not sufficient. Similarly, the gate represents entrance and a transition from one place to another. Someone on the other side of the gate determines whether the key a student holds will unlock the gate. The gate represents the pathway to most colleges and universities in America. As long as there have been colleges and universities, there have been keys and gates. Gatekeeping began when the first set of admissions criteria was established at Harvard in 1635 (Cabrera & Burkum 2001). “Gatekeeping” is the process of determining who obtains access to higher education. It is a phenomenon that has significant implications for society. (After all, one’s education level affects one’s social class, income, and opportunities.) Gatekeeping is perpetuated by colleges and universities as a way to limit access to advanced degrees. According to Douthat (2005), pursuing a college education is an “American rite of passage.” Over the years, gatekeeping as a process has been debated because it is at odds with the core American value of equal opportunity. Gatekeeping promotes elitism, among other phenomena (Brint & Karabel 1989). This paper explores the creation, evolution, and implications of gatekeeping, particularly as it is related to meritocracy.

ORIGINS OF THE GATE

To understand the creation of the gate, one first must seek historical perspective. According to Brint and Karabel (1989), “Going to college has been the great American ambition...” (p. 58). That ambition is based on the values of economic and social advancement, meritocracy, and power. Cabrera and Burkum (2001) identified four main eras of college admissions: subjectivity, search for uniformity, search for objectivity, and the quest for holistic approach. Subjectivity was the theme of gatekeeping essentially from the 1600s through the 1890s. At this time, admissions criteria were institution specific; and for the most part, college presidents interviewed applicants. Interviews tested applicants’ facility with classical languages; knowledge; readings; and their moral character (Cabrera & Burkum 2001). Later, faculty conducted interviews, determining who would be in their classes. A search for uniformity characterized the period from 1893 through the 1910s. During this time, North Central Accreditation had its founding, along with the intent to standardize high schools’ curricula (thereby making it easier to evaluate college applicants). At the same time, the College Entrance Examination Board Test, an essay exam, was created for use in college admissions. According to Henderson (2008), the first admissions office was established in 1915 at Columbia University, thus formalizing this gatekeeping protocol. Starting in the 1920s, the search for
objectivity emerged. However, it was not until the 1940s that the first standardized test—the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)—was used. It was followed in 1959 by creation of the American College Test (ACT). In addition to providing a measure of efficiency, the SAT and the ACT were designed to guarantee institutional quality (Stewart & Johanson 1996). The President’s Commission on Higher Education’s 1947 report called for “equality of opportunity,” which essentially meant opening the gate for greater access to a college education (Brint & Karabel 1989, p. 69). The rise of the junior college in mid century enabled four-year schools to become more restrictive in their admissions practices (Brint and Karabel 1989). To date, the 21st century has been characterized by a quest for a more holistic approach to college admissions—one that eliminates the use of race and incorporates a top percentage philosophy. Holistic review ignores cutoffs and focuses on diversity, active contributions, and other elements beyond mere test scores and grade point average.

Elitism, Efficiency, Excellence, and Economics

Sustaining the practice of gatekeeping are four main themes that not only are interdependent but also are very powerful: elitism, efficiency, excellence, and economics. Soares (2007) provides this perspective:

> Privileged social groups, in particular managerial and professional career families, strive to stay ahead by equipping their young with educational credentials that are more elite than those widely attained by middle- and working-class youths. The best insurance the professional/managerial strata have that their investments in education will pay off is their patronage of a distinctly elite sector in the educational system (p.10).

From its inception, gatekeeping was designed to protect members of the elite class. Prestigious colleges protect their elite status by differentiating themselves as much as possible from rival schools that are not elite. Elite colleges must protect their brands as intensely as Nike protects its. The culture of the elite tends to build the “strata families” capacity and drive to succeed; the inheritance of the elite creates cultural capital (Soares 2007). This capital in turn determines which college will be the best match and the recipient of a healthy investment. In other words, elite colleges woo the elite in order to establish long-term relationships that will enhance their endowments. Affirmative action for the rich (otherwise called “legacy”) is a special admissions process for the children of alumni. Legacy entitles certain students—merited or not—a seat in the classroom. Money alone almost always supersedes merit. Consider the following example that derives from Daniel Golden’s book, The Price of Admission, about Jared Kushner, now the youthful owner of The New York Observer:

> While Jared was applying to colleges, his dad, New Jersey billionaire developer Charles Kushner, pledged $2.5 million to Harvard, to be paid in installments. (Kushner pleaded guilty to tax evasion and other counts in 2004 and recently completed a prison sentence.) An official at Kushner’s high school told Golden: “There was no way anybody in ... the school thought he would on the merits get into Harvard. His GPA did not warrant it, his SAT scores did not warrant it. We thought, for sure, there was no way this was going to happen.” Kushner graduated from Harvard in 2003 (Beam 2006).

The rich have extraordinary access to deans, university presidents, and influential alumni groups—certainly far more than ordinary students or their families (Golden 2006). If your last name is Bass, Gates, Bush, Kennedy, or Ballmer, you likely will find it a lot easier to attend the college of your choice than will a peer with the same high school academic and extracurricular abilities but with the surname Jones, Lin, Martinez, or O’Neill. Elitism is in fact the template for today’s college admissions model (Stevens 2007).

Besides elitism, an economic factor also is at play in the gatekeeping process. Collectively, universities have become large, important, corporate places that determine the fate of the public. Major institutions that employ thousands, they have evolved into a national department of human resources (Lemann 1999). Major universities, especially those in the Ivy League, provide endless job opportunities—in management, admissions, placement, budget, and alumni relations—to sustain the image; a few departments within each institution are critical components of the entire operation. According to Sacks (1999), another aspect of the economic factor is the standardized test industry—a $20 billion enterprise that plays a critical role in the gatekeeping process. Thacker (2004) details the additional industries that profit: enrollment management consulting, private college counseling, scholarship
search services, athletic agents, and learning development specialists. These services reportedly generate more than $500 million annually (Thacker 2004) and perpetuate the economic impact of gatekeeping. In fact, the impact of economics on gatekeeping is far more intrusive than one might imagine. Changing this aspect of gatekeeping will be next to impossible.

To maximize profit and minimize loss, universities adopted standardized tests as the key to entrance. In devising the current meritocracy, education planners “couldn’t imagine any disadvantage to setting up school as the arena for determining individual destinies: that looked to them far more practical, more just, more efficient, and more conducive to social harmony than it has turned out to be” (Lemann 1999, p. 348). It is far more efficient to review the scores on a given test and determine if they are high enough to offer a student admission than to interview a candidate and review portfolios. Besides standardized tests, grade point averages are also an efficient way to quantitatively evaluate a student’s potential for success in college. This type of academic categorization perpetuates stratification. Efficiency is a gatekeeper.

Colleges and universities have high standards and reputations to maintain. Sometimes they are more concerned about admitting people who have high test scores (and who thus will boost the institution’s status) than about recruiting leaders. Education is undergoing a shift: from opportunities for students to explore and grow, to institutional preoccupation with rankings. Rather than training people to participate in a thriving democracy, education increasingly is about providing credentials to help graduates obtain high-paying jobs. Americans believe that an Ivy League education will:

...provide the social and intellectual equivalent of Marine Corps basic training—that being taught by all those brilliant professors and meeting all those other motivated students and getting a degree with that powerful name on it will confer advantages that no local state university can provide” (Gladwell 2005, p. 3).

Studies show that it is the college name on the diploma—not one’s test score—that determines an individual’s salary 20 years hence (Krueger 2000). Elite schools pride themselves on their success rates, so they set out to enroll the best students they can. This includes star athletes who not only will yield a high income but also the attention of financially supportive alumni. The degree of excellence maintained by Ivy League schools is based on their production of leaders and talented individuals who have left a mark on society by attaining social prominence though academic brilliance. It is the perception that only Ivy League schools can provide an excellent education—and a successful future—that misleads students into believing they will not have the same opportunities for success should they attend a different college. Excellence is a gatekeeper.

**Meritocracy**

Today’s admissions system is based on meritocracy. In *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1994), Michael Young defines meritocracy as “a society or social system in which people attain status or rewards because of what they achieve rather than because of their wealth or social status” (p. 5). When applied to the college admissions process, meritocracy is equivalent to an education selection system based on what a student has earned from his test scores and his grade point average. It is supposed to be a selection process based on merit. Meritocracy made its debut in the 1950s and created “an academic and social revolution” (Soares 2007, p. 9). It began with the Ivy League schools and progressed to high-paying occupations, which elevated social status. A new elite was established by gently pushing old-money Protestant men to the side. The new self-made meritocrats replaced the privileged family in society. The point of origin hailed from Harvard and Yale. “A shift from character to intellect by the gatekeepers of academia had produced a social revolution” (Soares 2007, p. 43). Even though the focus of the selection process changed from social pedigree to academic excellence, money provided support venues to keep the gates open. The original intent was to create a meritocratic society, one where everyone has equal opportunity to gain the rewards merited by their efforts and talents. The original founders of the system determined that there should be a “national governing elite, chosen early in life on academic criteria and elaborately trained at public expense on the assumption that its members would repay the investment in the form of public service” (Lemann 1999). This idea warped into a completely new concept of meritocracy—one which used psychometrics as the governing force in society. IQ tests
were determined to be the best measure of the ultimate human quality, innate intelligence (which of course is inherited); it was believed that scores from these tests could determine an individual’s future.

If the commitment is to foster a meritocratic society—that is, one in which people get the jobs they deserve—then it is imperative to adopt an education system that reflects the same philosophy. This does not mean sorting and classifying students according to their test performance, athletic ability, or financial status. No one’s future is determined by a test score. According to Rooney and Schaeffer (1988):

We are mired in a testocracy that, in the name of merit, abstracts data from individuals, quantifies those individuals based on numerical rankings, exaggerates its ability to predict those individuals’ future performance, and then disguises under the rubric of ‘qualifications’ the selection of those who are more socio-economically privileged.

Meritocracy, as it is known, is another system manipulated by the wealthy to prevent access by the poor to social elevation (p. 53).

Karabel (2005) declares that “meritocracy merely deflects attention from the real issues of poverty and inequality of condition onto a chimerical quest for unlimited social mobility” (p. 5). The original intention of meritocracy was to create a just society, one based on Jefferson’s ideal of a “natural aristocracy” of merit in which those selected would dedicate themselves to public service (Bowen, Kurzweil and Tobin 2005, p. 3).

REFORM

Given the history, evolution, and advancement of the gatekeeping process, it is time to advocate for change. According to McDonough (2005), “[W]e view merit criteria as the end result of an inexorable march toward maximal educational efficiency and equity and thus the highest and only reasonable altar on which to make admissions decisions” (p. 85). Despite McDonough’s claims, there are alternatives to a merit-based gatekeeping or admissions process. Reform is critical to making the transition away from a meritocratic system and toward a more inclusive model.

At one extreme, one could remove the gate altogether. Such removal would have profound effects on student success, as well as on retention and graduation rates. Because colleges are measured according to these types of outcomes and results, we do not advocate for removal of the gate. Further, community colleges ensure the presence of an “open gate”: their open admission policies and practices provide opportunities to all prospective students without particular regard to merit.

Another option is to improve the gate. Recently, Lloyd Thacker formed The Educational Conservancy, which has as its sole mission challenging the status quo of the current gatekeeping/admissions process. The organization is “a group of admission professionals committed to calming the commercial frenzy by affirming educational values in college admission” (p. 1). Thacker calls upon admissions professionals to change their practices so as to make them “more manageable, more productive, and more educationally appropriate” (n.d.). In questioning the current state of college admissions, Thacker (2004) calls attention to the abuse of the student in the gatekeeping process; he seeks to reclaim admissions from its current commercialized state and to focus instead on the true values of education: curiosity, self-discipline, imagination, and open-mindedness, to name a few. Thacker devotes 24 pages of his book to recommendations for what students, parents, testing officials, and educators can do to protect the admissions process from returning to its elitist and restrictive roots.

Organizations that question standardized testing constitute another force for change. For example, the National Center for Fair and Open Testing works continuously to “reduce the role of standardized tests as gatekeepers” (n.d.). As a result of this organization’s efforts, more than 800 colleges and universities have become “test-score optional” schools (n.d.). Such action helps open the gate because it diverts attention from a single admissions factor. The economic and financial implications are significant: this industry is a billion dollar enterprise (Sacks 1999). Because current processes and models perpetuate historical approaches, reform is not easy. Yet this is not an excuse for inaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Meritocracy does not mean the same thing to all people. There is no pure interpretation. As Lemann (1999) writes, “Merit is various, not unidimensional” (p. 345). Neither tests nor formal education can identify every form of merit. They do not identify creativity, passion, wisdom,
tenacity, empathy, humor, or moral worth. They evaluate people according to their potential, not according to their accomplishments in the field of work for which they are being selected. True meritocracy can be established by creating more inclusive educational selection processes. Schools clearly cannot select everyone, and testing certainly has its place, but the operative principle should be to educate as many people as possible and to use tests to ensure that students are learning (as opposed to using them to select people to advance to the next educational level).

Test scores are intended to ensure that very high scorers—the top 1 percent of the distribution—are provided with great learning opportunities. To that end, testing has accomplished its intent. But it has not done much to ensure educational opportunity for the other 99 percent of prospective students. People in the top 1 percent tend to think that what works for them works for everyone. But serving the elite is not in itself the sign of a system that provides opportunity to all. Educators need to focus on the merits of learning as a lifelong journey. According to Lemann (1999), “American life is a great race” that continues long after the “schooling” has ended (p. 348). We are called to repurpose schools as “expanding opportunity, not determining result” (Lemann 1999, p. 348).

As the future of the gate is considered, one recommendation is the end of meritocracy and the creation of “holistocracy,” an admissions process based on holistic criteria well beyond test scores and grade point averages. Holistocracy considers attitudinal components, a variety of intellectual skills, intellectual maturity, leadership, potential for societal contribution, motivation, and a host of other non-cognitive variables that play a role in college success. Doubtless, such a technique would be time consuming; but it would enable American higher education to return to the democratic values originally intended. While some colleges and universities have begun to move toward holistic review, its adoption is not yet sufficiently widespread to consider it a major trend in college admissions. Nevertheless, holistic review is gaining ground.

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

While the future of the gatekeeping process has yet to be determined, a variety of related topics merit additional research and exploration. For example, an historical perspective on the role of race in college admissions would provide powerful insight into society’s treatment of underrepresented races. Another unexplored topic relates to grade inflation in high schools and how it ultimately affects students’ admission to college. This is especially important given that grade point average also has financial implications in terms of the awarding of scholarships; the effect on students’ ability to access a college education is clear. College rankings by U.S. News and World Report are a controversial element of the gatekeeping process as they categorize and elevate particular schools and colleges—and do so in a financially powerful way. Ethical considerations accompany rankings in the same way they accompany the testing corporations’ (ACT and the College Board) becoming multi-million dollar enterprises that benefit significantly from the expansive and complicated gatekeeping process. In contrast, true meritocracy means stripping an application of any personal data against which a reviewer might be biased or pass judgment. It would be interesting to explore the possibility of a truly “blind” admissions process given that so much information is contained on students’ college admissions applications. Overall, a multitude of factors play a significant role in protecting and perpetuating meritocracy.

CONCLUSION

It is time to shift the focus of college admissions to factors that predict successful engagement and away from such restrictive criteria as ethnicity, grade point average, and test scores. It is time to introduce new mechanisms that reflect applicants’ traits and qualities as well as their skills. Consideration needs to be given to the true meaning of meritocracy, and policies need to be established that adhere to its definition. Selection criteria need to move beyond grade point averages and test scores if we are to continue to be a viable power in a global society. Some areas that need to be taken into account are effort demonstrated on high school projects, performance, academic fit (based on activities in and out of school), and leadership qualities. All colleges should adopt flexible admissions procedures that incorporate as much holistic review of prospective students as possible, thus minimizing reliance on formulaic or quantitative approaches. Dialogue is one of the most important factors to be considered: dialogue between and among universities and high schools, high
schools and elementary schools, and parents and universities in order to ensure understanding of the benefits of lifelong education. “Colleges and universities are critical gateways to economic and social success in contemporary U.S. society, and their decisions about who can attend—and how those decisions are made—are of great significance” (Rooney and Schaeffer 1988, p. 49).

Gatekeeping needs to be abolished as part of the effort to eliminate social stratification. This can be accomplished through concerted efforts that challenge the system by questioning current policies and providing research that advocates for the changing of current admissions policies. Education and communication can make this happen. The reality is that the meritocratic system does not fulfill its intent. Rather, “The present American meritocracy is an elite-selection system that accidentally got turned into a mass-opportunity system” (Lemann 1999, p. 147). Meritocracy is a myth. Ultimately, critical review of the “gate” forces one to ask: “Is there really a seat for everyone in higher education?”

REFERENCES


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Twenty-seven five-year-olds walk into kindergarten on the first day of school in southeastern Kentucky. On average, nine of those children live in poverty, two were born to mothers who did not complete high school, two were removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect, and fourteen are from single-parent homes: this according to statistics for the 22-county service area of Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) provided by Kentucky Youth Advocates. For several of these five-year-olds, school lunch and breakfast are the only meals they will eat that day.

"Many children who walk through the school doors each morning have had to overcome tremendous barriers before they even begin to learn how to read or count," says Dr. Jack Herlihy, director for the Center for Educational Research in Appalachia (CERA), which provides research and policy analysis support for all public schools in Appalachian Kentucky. “Academics take on much less importance to a child who doesn’t know where he is going to sleep tonight or what he will eat over the weekend when school meals are not available.”

These children, their peers, families, schools, and communities are the focus of Eastern Kentucky University’s regional stewardship initiative, which strives to reduce the barriers children face in obtaining an education and to enhance communities by developing programs to improve the quality of life in the area.

During fall 2009, Eastern Kentucky University embarked on a new initiative: the educational extension agent program, believed to be the first of its kind undertaken by any regional comprehensive university in the nation and designed to assist the schools and communities located in its 22-county service region. EKU President Doug Whitlock developed the vision for the employment of educational extension agents that serve throughout EKU’s service region. Each educational extension agent represents three or four counties and works with EKU faculty to offer university and resident resources along with expertise to respond to community needs.

The educational extension agent program is coordinated through a three-pronged system within EKU. Educational extension agents work through the College of Education, the Office of Regional Stewardship, and CERA to pool various resources throughout EKU’s campus for the benefit of the service region.

Educational extension agents serve as liaisons between EKU and counties in order to broker the services
and expertise that EKU can provide. Agents also work to connect communities with already available—if underutilized—state and local resources.

In developing the educational extension agent program, EKU hosted numerous community forums across its service area in order to help identify areas of concern. As a result, five major areas have become the focus of educational extension agents’ efforts:

- Health
- Government
- Safety
- Education
- Economic development

“By focusing on these five areas, we hope to help children and families overcome barriers to educational success. We also want to help communities improve economically so that they can provide satisfying and rewarding jobs for those children once they become adults and have received appropriate training and education,” Herlihy says.

President Whitlock continually emphasizes regional stewardship as a cornerstone of the University’s strategic plan. He states that the goal of the Office of Regional Stewardship, under the leadership of Dr. Bob Shadur, is “connecting the dots” of community needs and community and university resources. As a result of a grant proposal written by Dr. Shadur, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education awarded $288,000 to the Office of Regional Stewardship in support of regional stewardship projects within EKU’s service region. “By having educational extension agents who live within these counties, these communities have an advocate whose purpose is to find solutions to community needs,” President Whitlock says. “Having a person dedicated to such initiatives is a powerful force in improving the quality of life in our service area.”

In addition to developing community improvement programs, agents work closely with EKU faculty, specifically through CERA, to provide P–12 Appalachian school districts with data, data analysis, and research to which they otherwise might not have access. To facilitate the improvement of P–12 education, educational extension agents broker educational services targeted to the specific needs of each individual school and local community.

Each area has different challenges and strengths; therefore, it is difficult to provide a general job description for educational extension agents. Nevertheless, the program is expected to:

- Facilitate collaboration to solve community problems;
- Assist in the search for funds for after-school programs;
- Conduct need-based parenting programs;
- Promote good health through nutrition education and food safety programs;
- Facilitate mentoring programs;
- Promote entrepreneurship;
- Strengthen child and adult literacy programs;
- Bridge the educational gap by remediating at all levels of K—12 education;
- Develop programs and work-ethic training to prepare students for the workforce;
- Develop strategies to increase high school graduation rates;
- Increase dual credit offerings;
- Connect EKU and community resources;
- Facilitate civic engagement among students through partnerships;
- Increase overall educational attainment in the region;
- Partner with other agencies to promote economic development; and
- Develop student leadership programs.

Though varying in accordance with local needs, each agent’s education-based goals may be accomplished as the agents also seek to increase community involvement with schools by providing programs to improve health, wellness, safety, and even economic development at local school sites.

An initiative offered throughout EKU’s service area involves math remediation. The College of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences developed two programs: The college readiness math initiative helps high schools develop a remedial math curriculum similar to the developmental classes offered at EKU. This program is designed to help students with low math ACT scores to increase their math college placement scores so they can bypass developmental college math courses and enter general edu-
The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) welcomes you to the AACRAO EDGE, a web-based resource for international credentials evaluation. You and your staff will benefit from the knowledge provided by AACRAO’s team of experts on country educational systems. The database is populated by the most current educational information from over 80 countries. EDGE will be expanded until every educational system is included, and continuously updated thereafter. To ensure consistency, educational equivalents will follow the placement recommendations approved by the National Council on the Evaluation of Foreign Educational Credentials (CEC).

To start your subscription to the AACRAO EDGE, visit www.aacraoedge.aacrao.org, or call us with questions at (202) 296-3359.
cation math or college algebra. Another program is a K–9 initiative that embeds automaticity and number fluency elements in elementary math curricula, enabling students to increase their ability to succeed in math at higher levels.

“These math initiatives have the ability to change math as students view it today,” says Dr. Robert Thomas, assistant professor in the Department of Math and Statistics. “Through these initiatives, children are finding that they can succeed in math and are excited about the opportunities that it creates for them.”

The math initiatives are just two of many examples of ways in which educational extension agents are connecting their communities with valuable resources and expertise that will pay large dividends in the region’s future. “We are proud of this concept and the work our educational extension agents are performing in our service area,” says Dr. Bill Phillips, dean of EKU’s College of Education. “Through a program like this, we are honored to be directly involved with the business of changing and improving lives—which is the most important purpose of education.”

EKU continues to be commended for its efforts in regional stewardship. Dr. Michael Seelig, interim vice president for academic affairs at the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, commended EKU “for its innovative and creative approach” in developing education extension services. “Building a synergy of networked university resources, forming new community and regional partnerships, and providing services to school districts is a new educational community engagement model of which other institutions will take note,” says Seelig. “The Council on Postsecondary Education is a proud partner in this initiative.”

EKU hopes to expand this program, eventually having one educational extension agent per service area county. “Our journey has only just begun,” Herlihy says. “The educational extension agent program has the potential to change the educational landscape and to improve communities in positive and lasting ways. It’s exciting to be on the ground floor of a program that can truly make a difference in Kentucky.”

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The Art of Breaking Bad News: Lessons Learned at a Large Public University

By Joe F. Head

Not too long ago, a cute story circulated about a college coed who wrote home and told her parents that things could be better. She described how her car had been wrecked, she was dating a boy in a rock’n roll band, was de-pledged from her sorority, got all Fs on her midterms, was summoned to the dean’s office, and just learned that she might be pregnant. Under her signature was a postscript that said, “Just kidding, Mom. All is well at school, but could you just put some money in my checking account as I am overdrawn?” It is all a matter of how to break bad news and put things into perspective.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on how to break bad news. The style in which one breaks bad news at the collegiate level has implications both for the individual and for the institution. If not managed well by enrollment professionals, negative news can taint prospects, applicants, parents, and current students, blemishing the institution. The fallout is witnessed, at times, in less than positive public relations and/or less than positive employee morale. Bad news travels fast!

The breaking of bad news is deeply embedded in our popular culture and frequently is idolized in theater and cinematography. Potentially explosive situations often can be disarmed with creative language or preparation. Everyone remembers “Houston, we have a problem,” the alleged statement made from Apollo 13 to Houston Space Command. Consider, too, “You’re gonna need a bigger boat,” which communicated bad news about a really big shark (Jaws). When Dirty Harry said, “Go ahead...make my day,” one was certain that undesirable consequences were imminent if instructions were not followed. If only enrollment services professionals could frame the delivery of bad news so dramatically—or comically.

From a psychological viewpoint, the negative feelings that result from bad news constitute a valid reaction to a perceived loss. The Kübler-Ross model (1969) suggests that when one is threatened with loss, five sequential stages ensue: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and, eventually, acceptance. Kübler-Ross first discussed the model that bears her name in her groundbreaking book On Death and Dying.

Even though the focus of the Kübler-Ross model is death, the model is applicable to other types of loss. For example, how many times has one heard the initial stage of denial in the expression, “I can’t believe it!” or “No way!” The second stage, anger, frequently is exemplified in telephone calls and appointments with prospects, parents, and students. Behavior exemplifying anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance also is familiar to enrollment professionals. Although enrollment professionals typically are
not psychiatrists, rudimentary knowledge of the Kübler-Ross model may help them design processes and procedures for recognizing and dealing with such behaviors.

For long marchers in the field of Enrollment Services, it seems only yesterday that one could effectively use the mild quip, “What part of NO don’t you understand?” The days of this tact are far gone and polished customer service strategies are the order of the day.

For years, the Office of University Admissions at Kennesaw State (KSU) has pursued traditional “high-touch” operations enhanced with an array of 24 x 7 electronic, Web-based tools. Many of these tools have been adapted for use in managing negative feelings and have proven advantageous for better serving prospects, applicants, and current students when breaking bad news.

“Unwelcome news” includes such diverse issues as ineligibility for admission; tuition residency classification; closed classes; ineligibility for financial aid; lapsed deadline(s); academic dismissal; lost/misplaced documents; transfer credit evaluations; conditional admission with consequences; academic probation; wait listing; denied appeals; and failed degree audit check out.

KSU’s Enrollment Services uses selected 24 x 7 interactive technology to help manage the impact of bad news. Building “high-tech–high touch” operations is strategic to addressing audiences or individuals who may receive such messages. Systems that use transitional or graduated messaging to prepare people for disappointing news will reduce anxiety and even anger when the bad news is actually delivered. KSU continues to develop early warning systems that alert certain audiences that unwelcome news may be pending.

**DEVELOP TOOLS TO BETTER MANAGE THE BREAKING OF BAD NEWS**

**Use 24x7 web technology**

The KSU Freshman Admission Predictor (FAP) provides an excellent online illustration. FAP is a 24 x 7 interactive tool that plays a subtle recruitment role and a soft role in delivering bad news to ineligible prospects. (For detailed review of this tool, see Head & Hughes, 2004. Freshman admissions predictor: An interactive self-help Web counseling service, *College and University Journal*, 80, 2:49–52.)

In 2003, an increase in admission requirements at KSU resulted in an all-time high demand for appeals and informal reconsiderations. Because of the unprecedented volume of requests by denied applicants who were seeking personal appointments to plead that their rejections be overturned, it became clear that a tool needed to be developed to help educate and divert the individuals making such requests. Thus, a Web tool was developed to help prospective students, guidance counselors, and parents estimate in advance the probability of an applicant’s acceptance for admission. This tool is publicized heavily during the application process, and so helps reduce the total number of times that bad news must be relayed.

FAP may be used by freshmen or transfer freshmen (those with fewer than 30 semester hours) to estimate the probability of acceptance. (See Figure 1.) In less than 90 seconds, a prospect may indicate (1) high school classes taken, in progress, or failed; (2) SAT or ACT scores; and (3) his college-bound CPC grade point average. On the basis of this information, an advisory probability of acceptance—strong, marginal, or ineligible—is given.

(To view this tool and to demo the feature personally, visit www.kennesaw.edu/admissions and click on “undergraduate” and then “Freshman Admission Predictor.”)

FAP generates explanations as to the probability of acceptance. If a marginal or ineligible response is given, a specific explanation is displayed—e.g., courses not successfully completed; GPA or SAT/ACT does not meet entrance requirements; etc. Additional links to Web pages concerning admission requirements provide essential information that the prospect may not have viewed previously.

One goal of FAP is to reduce the number of ineligible prospects who apply. One result is that appointments with counselors are better managed. This in turn reduces the workload by reducing the collection of documents, communications, building folders, and file reviews in the face of an obvious decision of ineligibility. FAP also may help ineligible prospects save what would be wasted application fees. Even though bad news has been delivered in a non-antagonistic environment, the impact of the news is lessened by the suggestion of alternative institutions or routes the prospect may explore in his pursuit of higher education. Moreover, an invitation is always extended to apply later as a transfer student. It is wise to strategically position some good or positive news along with the bad news.
Some potentially ineligible prospects will not accept the FAP results and will still apply. A 24 x 7 online Application Status Check is structured to update applicants as to the progress of their applications. (For a detailed review of the Application Status Check as well as the FAP, see Head & Hughes, 2008. Interactive services: Staying in tune with a Web-savvy generation. In The College Admissions Officer’s Guide, edited by B. Lauren. Washington DC: AACRAO.) The primary purpose of the Application Status Check is to provide students with updated information concerning documents received, credentials not received, testing requirements, high school course requirements, and pending registration holds from the offices of admissions, bursar, financial aid, and orientation. However, incomplete application files present the possibility of bad news for the applicant if document deadlines are missed. Of course, the application status window also delivers bad news in the form of “Ineligible Due to Standards.”

Begin appeal processes online, if possible

Appeal processes are important in managing the breaking of bad news. As mentioned above, “bad news” is associated with a variety of topics which drive enrollment—from eligibility to closed classes. For many of these issues, KSU provides an online enrollment services “self-help” appeals Web platform. For many topics, a student may appeal and immediately begin the petition process online.

By having applications and information online, staff time expended on appeal processes is minimized as individuals are redirected and immediately provided needed information. Also, quickly providing individuals with an appeal method helps to mitigate negative feelings incited by looming bad news. Online appeal processes provide a controlled template with key information designed to prepare students for such news. The process thus begins to educate and to soften the blow, in turn providing a constructive exercise with deliberate instructions that enable disappointed and even angry individuals to direct their emotional energy.

KSU has developed a centralized enrollment services Web page dedicated to appeal management. Students who enter the word “appeal” into the online Virtual Advisor are directed to this centralized Web page. Virtual Advisor is a specialized search engine for enrollment management. (For further information, see Chapter ten in The College Admissions Officer’s Guide [Lauren 2008].) The Web page helps students properly submit appeals in a non-threatening environment. The information provided prepares students for unwelcome news but also encourages them to reflect on the merits of their appeal and/or to opt out totally. The Web page is under continual development due to the appeals philosophies of various university divisions. For example, some divisions support the provision of appeals online while others will provide students only with hard copy petition forms.

Even with a centralized student services or student affairs division, getting all campus departments to support online appeal applications may prove politically difficult or even impossible. Even though enrollment services offices can benefit from a strategic appeal system, some college officials may fear that the ease of submitting appeals online will result in an overwhelming, high volume of appeals. After five years of operation, KSU’s system has proven most useful; it has not generated problems or unmanageable numbers of appeals. (That said, the appeal option is strategically discrete so that one must be directed to the feature. It is neither highly visible nor posted for easy viewing. Rather, this option is used as a counseling tool. When appeal action becomes obvious, the enrollment officer can offer the Web site as a tool for managing the situation constructively.)

Batch appeals, schedule, and deliver via e-mail

Most appeals may be batched according to topic and processed in committee meetings. At KSU, appeal decisions are announced via e-mail, with nearly all communications restricted to that medium. It is believed that restricting decisions to e-mail keeps communication professional and “track-able.” We all know that emotional venting of appeals decisions often occurs over the telephone; strategic e-mail systems at least can reduce and possibly can eliminate it. Using the clout of committee action also helps individuals manage bad news. Individuals become aware that decisions are not the result of a single official; this realization can help them move more quickly to the stage of acceptance of any feelings of loss.

Conduct appeals committee meetings toward the end of the week or on Fridays. Inform petitioners in advance that decisions will be released at the end of the day via e-mail to official addresses. In most cases, using the week-
end or holidays as a grace period provides an automatic buffer during which recipients may pause, reflect, and “cool off” after receiving unwelcome news.

**Prepare staff to respond professionally to negative telephone calls or office visits**

When a prospect, applicant, parent, or student experiences loss, emotional venting may be the result—a symptom, really—of frustration or anger. Training staff to respond to such individuals is important to diffusing any “venting.” Training or otherwise equipping staff with an action plan by which to respond professionally may help frustrated and/or disappointed individuals to respond in a civil tone. Approaching calls in a step-by-step manner entails (1) being skilled at offering alternatives and couching initial information in hopeful outcomes; (2) limiting apologies on the front end; (3) allowing time for venting; (4) Not confusing matters or sending a mixed message; (5) not taking rudeness or expressed hostility personally; and (6) specifying “triggers” for handing off hostile calls to a supervisor.

**Prepare front line folks to handle “bad news moments”**

Not taking rudeness or hostility personally is more easily said than done. Yet it underscores the importance of stress management, particularly for those involved in the delivery or aftermath of bad news. Suggestions for managing stress—particularly after unsettling encounters—include (1) Debrief with a colleague; (2) Take a brisk walk; (3) Write a summary/recommendation/etc. and have a friend proofread it; (4) Have a “jam session” with staff for the purpose of reviewing and improving the situation; (5) Go home early; (6) Go to happy hour! Because self-care is important in managing stress, it is advisable to attend periodic stress management seminars.

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When it becomes “up close and personal”

Breaking bad news often extends beyond routine notification procedures. In such cases, individuals typically insist on meeting personally with someone. Nothing short of a face-to-face meeting will satisfy these individuals, and the issues will not go away until they are handled “up close and personal.” Many who file grievances come from high maintenance or politically connected backgrounds. These people are not strangers to negotiating; they thrive on requesting waivers or exceptions. Many of the “special issues populations” have issues related to home schooling, trustees, parents, coaches, learning disabilities, church, faculty, etc. Members of these populations often “get stuck” in denial and thus find it difficult to move to a place of acceptance. The additional attention they require necessitates the investment of significant time by college officials.

When interactions get intense—whether face to face or over the phone—it is wise to “unfold” the matter with some exploratory dialogue. Ask loaded questions and let the other person do most of the talking. Be careful, and avoid provoking anger. The purpose of the interaction is to help the complainant reflect on the circumstances and come to understand the issues and the reality. Engage the other in considering alternatives and a corrective path.

Situations that escalate to an in-person meeting can be emotional, threatening, and destructive. Involve a second professional to help provide balance and to assist in delivering unwelcome news. “Double-teaming” helps manage the stress level, in part by adding control. Each professional can play a specified part in the exchange, and expert resource roles can be assigned to filter interpretations, to accurately defend policy, and/or to advocate for resolution. “Good cop/bad cop” may be an effective way to managing such meetings. It also is worth noting that in this age of equal opportunity, some issues will require that special consideration be given to meeting composition in terms of gender and ethnicity. Finally, set time limits in advance in order to help direct the meeting’s outcome.

CONCLUSION

This article provides some guidelines and suggestions concerning how to manage the “breaking of bad news.” Strategically placing 24 x 7 Web technology in the path of receivers of bad news benefits both the individual and the institution in terms of managing fall-out.

Using 24 x 7 interactive technology to inform students of unwelcome news and adjusting telephone procedures so as to diffuse “venting” are effective strategies. Make provision for complainants to initiate appeal processes online; batch appeals; make decisions at monthly committee meetings; communicate decisions via e-mail; release decisions at the end of a week; and double-team in-person appeals or re-appeal hearings in order to better manage high maintenance individuals.

Breaking bad news should become an “artful science” embedded in strategic front-end steps wrapped in a culture designed to prepare individuals to receive unwelcome news gradually as opposed to cold turkey. Such a trend would help refine the process as well as allow self-elimination. Staff should be provided training in managing the impact of “bad news backlash.” Early alert tools should be positioned in the pathway of potential problems. Such 24 x 7 interactive checkpoints will help to prepare individuals by providing early warning of ominous news as well as softer delivery of such news. Perhaps most important, they help the institution to manage and diffuse tempers in a constructive, non-threatening environment.

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Pride on the Other Side: The Emergence of LGBT Web sites for Prospective Students

BY DANIEL MATHIS AND CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY

Since the advent of the printed college viewbook and college Web sites, consideration has been given to depicting diversity. It has been easier to display diversity through visual representations of different races and ethnicities than of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender (LGBT) students. Aside from icons like pink triangles and rainbow flags, the diversity of sexual orientation is more challenging to present visually. According to Einhaus, Viento, and Croteau (2008), “LGBT students have largely been ignored in diversity-oriented admissions practices.” However, that is changing as colleges and universities expand visibility and awareness by leveraging existing resources.

For several decades, colleges have maintained an LGBT Web presence for currently enrolled students. These Web sites inform students about resources, services, events, and staff. They serve as a way to communicate a school’s inclusivity and commitment to the LGBT population. Only recently have Web sites specifically targeted for the prospective student LGBT population appeared. Some colleges and universities provide limited information for prospective LGBT students on their LGBT resource centers’ Web sites while others provide it on their admissions Web sites. A Google search reveals only a small number of such easily identifiable Web sites. As acceptance of differing sexual orientations has evolved, colleges have responded by expanding their outreach and direct recruitment of the LGBT population.

Schools demonstrate varying levels of integration, for example, by connecting the admissions office with the LGBT resource center and vice versa. According to Einhaus, Viento, and Croteau (2004), “By collaborating with the LGBT student services office, information regarding the college can be more effectively communicated to students.”

Within a college or university’s Web space, the admissions office maintains the most information for prospective students. However, academic and student affairs units often also provide information for specific subsets of students. For example, units may promote programs and initiatives for women, multicultural students, or international students. These units may or may not collaborate with the admissions office to determine a site’s content and layout. Thus, a prospective student may find inconsistencies while examining different Web sites for the same institution. This scenario can be problematic, confusing, and frustrating. Further, inconsistencies may detract from the admissions office’s attempt to present a unified marketing strategy and message.
LGBT RECRUITMENT AS AN INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITY

Before exploring examples of LGBT Web sites for prospective students, it is important to consider the reasons a college would create such a Web presence. At the institutional level, one would review a school’s mission, vision, and values. One should not be surprised that a quick survey of a variety of schools’ mission statements reveals key phrases emphasizing inclusion: “supportive community,” “dignity of all people,” “inclusive academic community,” “inclusiveness and cultural diversity,” and “celebrate diversity.” If a university strives to demonstrate actions congruent with its stated value of diversity, and if that definition includes the LGBT population, then a school should consider offering information and resources to prospective LGBT students as they embark on their college search process.

At the enrollment management level, another reason to develop such a Web site is in support of an established strategic plan that includes direct recruitment and enrollment of LGBT students. Students who come out prior to the start of the admissions process expect colleges to provide them with targeted information; they are much more conscientious in evaluating a school’s commitment and outreach to LGBT students. Knowing that sexual orientation is a factor in the college selection process, enrollment managers would be remiss if they did not consider this factor in creating and maintaining LGBT-affirmative recruitment initiatives (Einhaus, Viento & Croteau 2008). Just as an effective enrollment manager would allocate resources and create a plan to attract any targeted population, so the LGBT population deserves comparable attention.

External and internal forces also affect the creation of an LGBT recruitment Web site. The addition of The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students and the online Campus Climate Index has increased awareness and prompted admissions offices to focus on their ratings and the attention they may (or may not) be receiving from those resources. An admissions professional who is an ally or who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender also may influence development of an LGBT recruitment Web site. Interest may translate into focused efforts which result in

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information online. The process is similar when an “out” student affiliated with admissions is showcased because of involvement in the LGBT community.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education’s (2009) *The Role of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Services and Programs* details the importance of internal and external relationships created by the LGBT resource center. While not specified, collaboration with the admissions office is encouraged and should be practiced. Noticeably absent from “Part 10: An Overview of Campus and External Relations” is inclusion of the admissions office in the listing of collaborating campus offices. By emphasizing the relationship between an admissions office and an LGBT student services office, the CAS Standards could shape a commitment to serving prospective in addition to currently enrolled students. One way this could happen is through collaboration on Web site information for prospective students.

**CONTINUUM OF PROSPECTIVE LGBT STUDENT WEB SITES**

Review of college Web sites and contact with admissions and LGBT resource professionals informed construction of a continuum of integration for the purpose of categorizing Web site models. As Web sites were analyzed for content, navigation, and linkages, five styles emerged: highly integrated, reciprocal link, one-way link, singular presence, and non-existent. Figure 1 depicts the five models on the Continuum of Prospective LGBT Student Web sites in order of increasing integration from right to left.

**Highly Integrated Model**

A Highly Integrated Model represents a best practice characterized by collaboration and communication between the admissions office and the LGBT resource center. Information is thorough and cross-referenced, with messaging that is consistent and intentional. The Web site is an outgrowth of a strategic LGBT-affirming recruitment initiative. Highly Integrated Models typically are found at LGBT-affirming universities where this population is a priority.

**Reciprocal Link Model**

In the Reciprocal Link Model, each Web site (admissions and LGBT resource center) is linked to the other. While this affords a prospective student the ability to toggle between information from these two resources, the user experience may not be cohesive. The links exist, but in a limited manner.

**One-Way Link Model**

A One-Way Link Model is characterized by an LGBT resource center Web site linked only to the admissions office’s Web site or vice versa, but there is no reciprocal link. Information exists in isolation and so creates a potential boundary.

**Singular Presence Model**

The Singular Presence Model describes online information for prospective LGBT students that is hosted either on the admissions office’s Web site or on that of the LGBT resource center.

**Non-Existent Model**

The Non-Existent Model denotes that no online information for prospective LGBT students exists in either domain. Information for current students may be present on the LGBT resource center Web site, but no content specifically targets prospective LGBT students.

All colleges are somewhere along the continuum, but their location need not be static. They have the ability to advance their position as philosophies are adopted, as decisions are made, and as actions are taken. These classifica-

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**FIGURE 1. Continuum of Prospective LGBT Student Websites**

![Continuum of Prospective LGBT Student Websites](image-url)
tions represent the models of LGBT prospective student Web information at the time of this article’s publication, but they are subject to change as colleges and universities evolve.

RECRUITING LGBT STUDENTS VIA THE WEB: FEATURES AND BEST PRACTICES

In response to review of college and university Web sites and through an informal survey, features and best practices of recruitment-oriented information for LGBT students emerged. Table 1 highlights seven features of institutional Web sites that target prospective LGBT students. This list is not comprehensive, but it provides an overview of the type and location of information that may aid prospective LGBT students in the college search process. Beside each feature, an institution is listed (along with the URL of its Web page) that provides an example of the feature. While many of these features are found within LGBT resource center Web sites, two of them live on admissions Web sites: LGBT information provided within the context of a diversity tab and student profiles/bloggers.

BEST PRACTICES

All colleges and universities seek to employ best practices—that is, ideal processes that represent the optimum manner of execution in any given situation. In the fields of enrollment management and LGBT outreach, best practices can be observed at institutions across the country. As the aforementioned continuum indicates, many best practices constitute part of a highly integrated approach (though some also may exist at other levels of the continuum). “Best practice” here refers to actions that facilitate information sharing and relationship building while focusing on an advanced delivery mechanism.

- A best practice considers every prospective student population (e.g., freshmen, transfers, international students, graduate students). For example, Suffolk University Law School has a page for prospective students (Gavin and Filman n.d.). At any stage in their personal and professional development, LGBT students seek affirming environments.

- Having a prominent link for prospective students on the LGBT resource center Web site is a best practice. Such a link ensures visibility and attention, especially for a Web surfer.
Going beyond the kind of online information typically made available to prospective students, Duke University’s Web site (Info, n.d.) provides an admissions representative’s name, telephone number, and e-mail address. This facilitates direct contact for prospective students who seek a personal connection.

The University of Southern California’s LGBT Recruitment Guide (a viewbook-type publication) as an online PDF represents a best practice for several reasons (University of Southern California n.d.). The 16-page guide is highly integrated in its presentation of admissions data/facts/information and LGBT-relevant content. The message from the director points to both the admissions Web site and the LGBT resource Web site, clearly indicating their partnership in support of the prospective student.

Princeton University’s 3000-word prospective student Web site in the LGBT section has extensive content to help students (n.d.). This best practice represents thoroughness in the presentation of information.

Baldwin-Wallace College offers an LGBT Host Program for Prospective Students (LGBT Host n.d.). This extended outreach is designed to provide a comfortable visit for the LGBT-identified prospective student.

Colleges and universities should strive to employ these best practices to advance recruitment efforts of the LGBT prospective student population. From print to personal connections, these practices assist in achieving the goal of welcoming LGBT prospective students as they enter the college’s front door while simultaneously demonstrating the connectedness of admissions and the LGBT resource center.

CONCLUSION

First, we examined current practices of colleges and universities to attract prospective LGBT students through Web site information. Next, we presented findings and created a continuum of Web site models based on research. Finally, we proposed opportunities for advancement of LGBT recruitment initiatives through Web sites. This article demonstrates emergence of an intersection between enrollment management practices and the world of LGBT students. To further advance this understanding, enrollment managers and LGBT resource center professionals must collaborate to share information and consider new intersections in their work. Admissions offices can maximize the venues in which LGBT resource centers interact with prospective students.

This inquiry was not intended to be all-inclusive but instead was approached from the perspective of prospective students as they conduct electronic searches. Thus, it can serve as a starting point for formal analysis to more thoroughly understand the availability, accessibility, and consistency of Web site content specifically for LGBT prospective students (Wilson and Meyer 2009). Further research should utilize focus groups and surveys of prospective LGBT students in order to document their experiences and obtain their perspectives.

It is apparent that this topic has not been explored on many campuses. Colleagues’ responses revealed that connecting admissions to LGBT centers and vice versa has not been investigated to its fullest potential. Often, our inquiry prompted action on the part of the schools contacted, with several LGBT resource centers altering their Web sites to direct prospective students to their institutions’ admissions Web pages. One LGBT resource center employee wrote:

“As far as I know, no link between the two Web sites existed. Thanks to you, the director of admissions is now aware of this page, [sic] and excited to know about it and wants to create a link.”

Many factors will influence the creation, maintenance, and evolution of these prospective student Web sites for the LGBT population: acceptance, openmindedness, commitment to diversity, leadership, and resources. Ultimately, the goal is a highly integrated model that results in pride on all sides.

REFERENCES


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Admissions officers around the country are hearing consistent calls to enhance their social media presence. Whether the pressure is from administrators, influential alumni, or peers across institutions, social media are touted as the next big thing in admissions marketing. But are social media strategies truly “strategic,” or are they merely bolt-ons designed to satisfy the demands of internal constituencies or to keep up with what peer institutions are assumed to be doing?

The need for increased attention to social media is driven by a number of factors: First, social media use by traditionally aged recruits has skyrocketed. Nearly every college-bound high school student in America uses Facebook or MySpace—and most post on a daily basis. Second, “social” Web sites such as collegeconfidential.com quickly spread information (generally of dubious quality) to thousands of potential recruits and their parents. Third, Facebook pages for admitted students provide a new venue where students can share information; admissions officers must be ever vigilant about misinformation circulating among this audience.

At the same time, admissions officers face difficult choices as they prioritize their information efforts. In an age of decreasing budgets, adding an entirely new communications program—including new technology, training, and staff—ultimately involves tradeoffs against other means of information sharing. Admissions officers struggle under these increased expectations without new (and often with fewer) human and fiscal resources.

In an effort to learn more about how prospective students—the target of all these new efforts—use social media in the admissions process, Widmeyer Communications conducted a national survey of first-year undergraduates during each of the past two years. The most recent survey (October 2009) included a nationally representative sample of 500 students; students were asked about their college search process over the past year. The sample included appropriate proportions of public and private, two- and four-year institutions. The surveys yielded three key insights that can help all higher education institutions invest effectively in social media:

**Though part of the information landscape, social media constitute the least important tool for gathering information in advance of the application decision...at least for now.**

Our surveys evaluated five common methods whereby prospective undergraduates gather information about an institution before applying. For each, we asked whether it was “one of the most important,” “very important,” “some-
what important,” “not too important,” or not at all important in their application decision. Consider the following:

- Eight of ten students (81 percent) said that college and university Web sites were “one of the most important” (42 percent) or “very important” (39 percent) factors in their application decision.
- More than six of ten students (62 percent) said that college admission publications were “one of the most important” (27 percent) or “very important” (35 percent) sources of information in their application decision.
- More than half of students (52 percent) said that other admissions-related Web sites were “one of the most important” (16 percent) or “very important” (16 percent) sources of information in their application decision.
- Nearly half of students (48 percent) said that “other college and university information Web sites” were “one of the most important” (16 percent) or “very important” (32 percent) sources of information in their application decision.

Two findings are worth noting: First, despite the low result for social networking, it did represent an increase over the previous year. In our fall 2008 survey, only 12 percent of survey respondents said that social networking played an important role in their application process (results for 2009 represented a 6-point year-over-year increase).

Second, the vast majority of students rely on digital information delivered through the Web. Nearly six of ten students (58 percent) said they relied primarily on Web-based information while just three in ten (30 percent) said they relied more on print material. College and university
Web sites dominate today; other sites need to be monitored as we look to the future.

**ALTHOUGH SOCIAL MEDIA BECOME SUBSTANTIALLY MORE IMPORTANT AS STUDENTS MAKE THEIR FINAL DECISIONS, THEY CONTINUE TO BE LESS IMPORTANT THAN OTHER COMMUNICATIONS MECHANISMS.**

Our survey also inquired about the importance of the same information sources but in regard to the **enrollment** process. While the order of ranking of these sources remained the same (with social networking again ranking last), social networking sites were the only communications methods that increased substantially in terms of their importance to students’ decision making: 26 percent of students said social networking sites were “one of the most important” (10 percent) or “very important” (16 percent) factors in their enrollment decisions. The importance of other communications methods changed little.

This seems to reflect what we hear from students in the course of our qualitative research: At the early stages of the process, students seek key factual material, which can be found on Web sites and in guidebooks. In contrast, when students make their final enrollment decisions, they seek clues about “personal fit.” Social networking sites—particularly “Class of XX” sites—can provide key insight—in an ongoing and easily accessible way—into the types of people prospective students are likely to encounter on campus.

Of course, two data points don’t necessarily indicate a trend. But if we were to pinpoint when social networking is most important, it would be when students are making their enrollment decisions.

**INVESTMENTS IN SOCIAL NETWORKING SHOULD BE STRATEGIC, AND THEY SHOULD BE TIED TO AN OVERARCHING DIGITAL STRATEGY.**

What do these data mean for financially strapped, constantly pressured admissions officers trying to implement a social media strategy? Begin by taking a deep breath. While social networking appears to have a growing impact on admissions, students continue to follow somewhat traditional routes as they begin the college search process and ultimately make their enrollment decisions.

The key takeaway from these results is the strength of digital communications overall: *The Web is now the central hub in admissions.* Investments in social media should be integrated into your institution’s digital strategy. These investments may need to be accelerated based on how quickly the landscape changes. The tipping point may come quickly as digital natives embark upon the college search process.

Social networking need not be seen as a “dark art” in communications. Instead, it should be an extension of what your institution already has in place in terms of its digital strategy. Be smart: Invest time (and a little money) in understanding your institution’s social media profile. With that foundation, you can begin to structure a social media effort that reflects your institution’s strategic goals and that takes into account your institution’s overall communications strategy.

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Commentary

The Progression of the College Admissions Professional

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY

In my sixteen years in college admissions, I have evolved in my work, role, and mission. I began as an eager recruiter, excited to help high school students get into college; now I am a seasoned director committed to college access. As I reflect on my career, a five-stage progression emerges: learn, execute, lead, contribute, advocate. While not mutually exclusive, these action-oriented stages demonstrate growth, education, and implementation. They also constitute a basic, personal interpretation of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers’s (AACRAO) Professional Practices and Ethical Standards. Whether you feel an affinity for one stage or another, and whether you’re at the beginning, middle, or end of your career, may this perspective provide guidance so that you can be an outstanding professional in college admissions.

LEARN

New admissions professionals are anxious to learn—excited to learn more about the schools they represent; enthusiastic to learn how the admissions process works; eager to know how to talk about preparing for college. College admissions representatives join professional associations such as AACRAO as part of the learning process, or they may attend new professionals workshops. Much of the learning about admissions takes place on the job. We become educated about the National Association for College Admission Counseling’s Statement of Principles of Good Practice in order to best serve our students. At this stage, we shadow other professionals in the field to learn different ways to execute our tasks and build relationships. Learning includes reading about relevant topics, subscribing to e-newsletters, and seeking knowledge to advance our understanding of the field of college admissions. Most important, if we are to consider ourselves experts in the field, the learning never stops. Fortunately, an unending stream of published articles and news stories keeps our minds active on the cause. And let us not forget that working in higher education affords us the awesome opportunity to continue our own education. After all, we educate to enroll, and we enroll to educate.

EXECUTE

The second stage is the “doing” stage. Here we put into practice all we have learned. Executing means building relationships with prospective students, setting recruitment goals, informing high school and community college counselors, scheduling school visits, attending college fairs, etc. We execute our line of work with strong communication skills, a passion for students, a positive attitude, and professionalism. During this stage, we begin to
develop our own styles of delivery. As we implement, we reflect on the impact of our actions on students. It is at this stage that we begin to see the fruits of our labor: students graduate whom we admitted only two to four years previously. Executing requires stamina, patience, and focus. When we fulfill our job responsibilities, we fulfill the missions of our schools.

LEAD

Having been roadrunners for a few years, we typically hunger to do more—more than process admission files; more than give presentations; more than recalculate grade point averages. We begin to show leadership by advancing in our careers to the position of associate director or director of admissions. Leading is where we are able to make a difference. In leadership roles, we have authority and freedom to change the course of the field of college admissions. As leaders, admissions professionals strategize, plan, and guide for the future. Preparing for these roles requires continued education and experience—a combination of the leading and executing stages. Leadership does not have to be concentrated in formal titles and roles. Rather, it is demonstrated by taking the initiative on projects, mentoring tour guides, or even partnering with another office on campus for recruitment purposes.

CONTRIBUTE

Leading is not enough. It is at this next stage that we are called to give back to our field. We may contribute by writing an article for publication or by presenting at a state or national conference (either of these in turn might be referenced by future professionals). We are responsible for perpetuating the sharing of knowledge. We are called to serve at the state or national level, either by joining a committee or by holding a position. We can contribute by mentoring other admissions colleagues on our own teams or elsewhere. This stage provides excellent opportunities for professional development.

ADVOCATE

The final stage is that we become advocates. Representing our respective institutions is no longer enough. Rather, it is imperative that we become advocates for change—that we challenge public policy, support college access, protect students’ rights, improve education standards, and uphold the integrity of our field. At this stage we must be aware of current issues in higher education that affect admissions and enrollment management. This is part of our social responsibility. As we advance to this final stage, we are expected to be the ultimate student advocates—voices for students who cannot speak on their own behalf and champions of all types of students, regardless of their personal or cultural history or background. Advocacy requires a commitment to diversity, equity, and excellence. We must encourage early college planning and develop new tools for college preparation. At this stage, we may lobby for access funding, financial aid support, or college counseling initiatives. Advocates use data and research to guide their action. Through this stage, we can transform the future of our field.

CONCLUSION

As you reflect on your career, determine at what stage you are and then decide what steps you will take to progress to the next level. As you advance in the field, the different roles you play will demand different focuses. Ultimately, we are called as educators to evolve, learn, grow, and develop as we take and give both to our profession and to society. What has your path looked like to date? What will your path look like as you set your face toward the future?

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AP: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE ADVANCED PLACEMENT PROGRAM

PHILIP M. SADLER, GERHARD SONNERT, ROBERT H. TAI, AND KRISTIN KLOPFENSTEIN, HARVARD EDUCATION PRESS, 2010, 290 PP.
Reviewed by Louis Eppich

A thrifty alternative. A badge of honor. A questionable system? Advanced Placement courses have long been an attractive option for ambitious, motivated students to potentially earn college credit or to skip college introductory classes by taking a cheaper equivalent while in high school. If good students take AP courses, though, can one assume tautologically (to use AP-worthy vocabulary) that all AP students are good students? People do, at least, college admissions people do, which leads to an additional reason for students of a certain type (the I-must-get-into-these-colleges-or-else type) to enroll in AP classes. Even without taking the exam (senior AP exam scores are reported after graduation anyway), the “AP” on a transcript looks good. Should it?

The workings of Advanced Placement (for those who lie awake at night wondering) are probed in Harvard Education Press’s AP: A Critical Examination of the Advanced Placement Program. The essays contained within delve into the history of the College Board (which owns the AP label) and of its subcontractor, Educational Testing Services, and their rise to power over the last century. Is the AP program a virtuous nonprofit seeking to provide opportunities to worthy students, or is it a money-mongering behemoth that aims primarily to expand the number of test takers in order to reap the test fee profits? Yes and no. Maybe.

One type of question repeatedly mentioned in the studies asks, more or less, “Do AP classes change students? Do they send ordinary students off to college to earn higher GPAs, to change majors less frequently, and to graduate on time (or early) more often?” The difficulty in answering these questions lies in distinguishing “ordinary” students from the kind who will succeed at school regardless—that is, due to inherent ability, drive, or family support. Because AP courses are optional, they naturally attract the latter. None of the studies contained in the volume was able to conduct a blind test during which students took AP classes without knowing it and then were observed throughout college. Instead, the studies included thorny statistical analyses of AP and non-AP students; after filtering out the top students, the data were sliced, diced, and julienned so that they led to…conclusions! Maybe. For readers who lack time to dissect the multitude of charts and data sets provided in each chapter—or to even read 97 percent of the book—the final seven-page chapter provides a suc-
cinct set of conclusions (tailored to different audiences, e.g., students, parents, teachers, administrators, college admissions personnel, college professors, and even the College Board! Zing!). The conclusions are pretty general (consider the following gem for students: “You will have a better chance of getting into your first-choice college if you take the most demanding courses your high school has to offer and do well.” Eureka). Like any good AP student, the reader should take a closer look at some of the data.

It turns out that the perception of AP’s superior curricula (i.e., more content covered more quickly and taught by veteran teachers—in short, more rigorous curricula than most high school classes) is popular, especially among policy makers. That perception has even led to a push to offer Advanced Placement courses in traditionally under-resourced schools and for “ordinary” students to take AP classes so they can benefit from superior educational practices. The chapters by Kristin Klopfenstein (chapters nine and ten) investigate the new policy attempts to improve education by mandating more AP coursework. Do such attempts work? Are funds directed to providing AP courses to under-performing students as effective as funds for other, more foundational programs? No, it turns out: Insufficiently prepared students are doomed to failure and possibly to remedial interventions. The other introductory levels remain necessary. One of the questions probed in Chapter ten (a startlingly harsh question, and also the chapter title) is, “Does the Advanced Placement Program Save Taxpayers Money?”—as in, will it cause more students to graduate in three years instead of four, saving state-funded college tuition? Not really, studies suggest. Even though passing scores on AP exams can result in the award of college credit (depending on the school)—and, theoretically, enough college credit to graduate early—that is seldom the reality. Any student who aces ten AP exams tends to be the driven sort intent on matriculating at a prestigious private school (or on winning a merit-based scholarship at a “lesser” institution). Taking the absolute minimum number of classes to graduate from college (or shirking graduate school prospects) does not fit the profile: such a student is pretty much “into” the whole education thing, taxpayers be damned.

Speaking of taxpayers, the Klopfenstein analysis focuses on studies conducted at public institutions in Texas, where only 24 percent of freshmen graduate in four years (that is, of those who eventually graduate). Klopfenstein finds that students with AP or accelerated course backgrounds fare no differently than students with non-accelerated backgrounds (though they share similar demographic characteristics). What does seem to make a difference are high school classes that count for both high school and college credit—that is, high school classes that are cross-registered with local colleges. Such classes have no national standards and typically are offered in rural or under-resourced areas without AP programs. Klopfenstein observes that community-college credit earned in high school transfers more easily than an AP score of, say, three.

Where does College Board behavior fall under suspicion? After all, AP tests and curricula mimic the content of introductory college courses (never mind that college introductory courses have no national standards, an issue the College Board skirts by having its AP curricula designed by “well-regarded” college faculty and experienced AP high school teachers). Yet as a nonprofit, the small matter of the College Board earning $530 million in revenues ($230 million from AP) in 2009—with a surplus of $55 million after expenditures—seems rather profitable. Critics further suggest that the AP program extols single test scores over comprehensive liberal arts learning in that students are encouraged to “learn the test” (i.e., you will see these kinds of questions; you will need this percentage to get this score; essay graders like to see these kinds of responses; etc.) rather than master broad content. Chapter two traces the long history of the College Board (it didn’t always make money) to 1999, when Gaston Caperton became president. As governor of West Virginia, he converted a $500 million state debt into a $100 million surplus. Over the next decade, while at the College Board, the overall trend seemed to hinge on profitability, despite—or because of—positive developments like more AP subjects and increased minority access. Collegeboard.com, launched in 2006, was for-profit during its first three years. State subsidies for AP tests (ostensibly to reduce the test fees for disadvantaged students) are paid directly to the College Board. So, yes, some of the profits are tax dollars.

While each chapter could be read independently (each concerns a different study or aspect of AP), they are organized in a reinforcing order, beginning with two chapters introducing and considering the birth and growth of the AP program; three chapters exploring what distinguishes
AP courses from other types of high school classes (including the legitimacy of exam scores); three chapters examining the correlation between AP coursework and later college achievement; and four chapters tying AP to college and state education policies. Sadler inserts an additional random chapter for college admissions specialists on how to calculate a sort of “student desirability index/coefficient number.” The volume ends with a chapter of general conclusions and recommendations.

Who would benefit from a chewy reading of *AP: A Critical Examination of the Advanced Placement Program*? According to the introduction, educators (at high schools and colleges), policy makers, admissions officials, and concerned parents all would benefit. Notably omitted are AP students themselves, who, being high school students, are subject to countless education decisions made by people (e.g., teachers, administrators, senators, etc.) over whom they have no control, save working hard and being cooperative research data. I think, however, that students of a certain caliber (i.e., the kind who care) might get a tickle out of what extremely educated researchers deduce from their readily observed numbers (e.g., GPAs, test scores, graduation rates, demographics, etc.). Ultimately, as much as the discussion dabbles with curriculum and standardized tests and politics and cushy profits and tax dollars and idealism and pragmatism and data and significant variance, it should boil down to students. After all, they are the people in the classrooms. (Oh—researchers conducting their own inquiries into Advanced Placement and the College Board might be another interested group.)

**About the Author**

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Offers guidance on the structure and content of the United Kingdom’s education system. The five-chapter guide includes a historical look at major legislative and policy changes affecting the system as a whole, and offers details on the country’s Further Education, Secondary Education, and Professional Qualifications frameworks. Additionally, helpful reference information can be found in the book’s five appendices, including: a key to system-related acronyms; listings of the UK’s higher education institutions and further education colleges; details on the National Qualifications Framework; and a comprehensive listing of professional bodies and learned societies.

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ACADEMIC DISHONESTY
BY DENNIS BRICAUT
WASHINGTON, DC: AACRAO, 2007, 66 PP.
Reviewed by Kimberley Buster Williams

Webster’s definition of a guidebook is: handbook 1; especially: a book of information for travelers. If you’re interested in traversing the dells of academic dishonesty, then this is the book for you. This guidebook investigates a serious topic in higher education today: academic dishonesty. The emergence of the Internet, coupled with societal ills and pressures, has expanded the scope of possibilities regarding cheating.

In *Academic Dishonesty*, Dennis Bricault, Associate Professor of Spanish and Director of ESL at North Park University (IL), takes an in-depth look at academic dishonesty, its prevalence, and its impact on higher education. Drawing heavily on the literature as well as a survey of 52 North Park University faculty, Bricault defines the types and ranges of academic dishonesty and examines the causes and manifestations of dishonest behavior. He then briefly reviews numerous legal issues as they pertain to academic misconduct and provides a short risk evaluation of North Park’s academic dishonesty policies and procedures. The final chapter is dedicated to a series of thought-provoking questions that administrators should ask as they take stock of their institutions’ current policies and practices.

In the introduction, Bricault states the purpose of *Academic Dishonesty*: it is a ‘guidebook’ intended to provide an overview of the forms, scope, and causes of academic misconduct, as well as key legal bases that should be used to inform institutional procedures dealing with cases of academic dishonesty. He states that the main goal is to make faculty and administrators aware of due process and the need to communicate policies in a timely and consistent manner.

The book comprises an efficient introduction followed by six well-organized chapters focusing on the nuances of academic dishonesty, a historic perspective, causes and manifestations, legal aspects, risk evaluation, and assessment plans. The appendix includes the survey instrument, survey results, sample statements of academic dishonesty, ethic policy at North Park University, and a list of sample institutional policies. The author provides current examples of issues concerning dishonesty along with established theories in the area of behavioral science. Bricault begins his book with the following quote:

“This is superior work,” wrote a professor on a student’s paper. “It was excellent when Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote it, just as it is today. Saint Thomas gets an A. You get an F.” (p. vii)

Chapter One defines the problem of academic dishonesty. Significant findings include:

- Some rely on the dictionary definition of dishonesty whereas others rely on metaphors and analogies.
- Ex: “Where cheating is compared to stealing, plagiarism has been likened to forgery or copy violation” (p. 1).
- Among scholars, plagiarism is the worst of bad behavior.
- The problem of academic dishonesty has mushroomed with the advent of the Internet.
- Academic dishonesty cases should be viewed as a set of deliberate behaviors that students use to gain an unfair advantage.

Chapter One concludes with a known verity: that the seriousness of academic dishonesty cannot be underestimated. Academic dishonesty runs counter to the goals and ideals of every education institution.

Chapter Two considers the scope of the problem of academic dishonesty. It is emblematic of the book as a whole, both in terms of how it is written and in how the material is delivered. Easy to read, Chapter Two is based on a survey of the literature and thus provides the reader with areas for further research. Among these is neutralization theory: “a way to rationalize cheating by making excuses that help deflect commitments to conventional norms” (p.6). Other topics addressed in Chapter Two include personality traits of offenders, sets of variables regarding perception of and responses to academic dishonesty, and academic dishonesty in the admissions process.

More detailed than Chapters One and Two, Chapter Three explores the causes and manifestations of academic dishonesty, again drawing heavily on the research. The author describes techniques used in cheating (e.g., term paper mills, stealing tests, telegraphing answers by using hand signals and tapping out codes, etc.) and popular Web sites, such as “School Sucks,” “Cheat House,” and “Other People’s Papers.” Highlights from this chapter include re-
view of the results of the author’s survey of 52 North Park University faculty. Three charts display the survey results: division/school respondents, respondents’ workload, and frequency of academic dishonesty cases. Profile information for the survey respondents provides a useful point of reference. The charts indicate that 61.5 percent of survey respondents are employed full time (25 percent are employed part time, and the status was not reported for the remaining 13.5 percent); respondents teach in the humanities and natural science areas; and academic misconduct at North Park is an occasional rather than a frequent occurrence.

Chapter Four—the most robust chapter—focuses on legal aspects of academic dishonesty. Bricault takes a comprehensive look at major legal areas: chief among them is the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees the accused the right to hear and respond to charges made against him. As I read this chapter, I recalled an example of academic dishonesty in admissions described for me by a colleague:

A student submitted all of the application documents electronically. Because the student was new to the district this year and we didn’t have any information on the academic performance since entering the new district, we called to obtain grades from the high school counselor. We were informed that the counselor never submitted a recommendation on the student’s behalf and didn’t know the student even applied. Upon verification of the recommendation, we learned that the recommendation and the transcript had been altered. The student’s grades and the comments attributed to the high school counselor were all fictitious. We immediately reviewed with the accurate documents and denied the student. We did not pursue making an allegation about plagiarism due to the student’s overall low performance and our ability to deny outright on the applicant’s academic merits without waiting for the judiciary process of the high school.

Reading this book reminded me that admissions professionals must be vigilant in looking for cases of dishonesty in the admissions process. We also must ensure that we provide due process and fairness. As an admissions director, I thought of important things to do to ensure that students seeking an unfair advantage in the admissions process don’t slip through the cracks. The following list of safeguards came immediately to mind:

- Work closely with other offices on campus—particularly financial aid, judicial affairs, and/or legal counsel;
- Have thorough processes in place to check for red flags in essays, letters of recommendation, and/or applications. Create audit systems (if such are not already in place);
- Look closely for discrepancies.
- Ask questions if something is incomplete.
- Don’t assume that everything is okay. (Be a detective.)
- Make clear the penalties for cheating in the admissions process.
- Look for signatures, raised seals, etc. that are out of place or missing.
- Become familiar with the look and feel of transcripts from major feeder schools.
- Beware of online or fraudulent schools.
- Utilize listservs to compare notes with colleagues.

Chapter Five focuses on risk evaluations. This brief chapter provides great examples from North Park University. In particular, the syllabus of Professor David Koeller is cited as a model in terms of its thoroughness. The author uses his institution as the basis for further conversation and astutely uses data from the survey he designed and administered. Bricault encourages his readers to improve policies and procedures at their institutions, the goal being to strengthen weak areas such as due process and the locus and timing of communication.

Bricault’s final chapter considers the importance of having an assessment plan. Questions are posed at the institutional, faculty, and classroom levels. Important things to consider include:

- Locus of communication;
- Due process;
- Relevance of policies; and
- Coverage.

This author tells a compelling story. He presents information with authority and verve. The story begins (as most do) with important background information (history, facts, and definitions). Bricault appears to want the reader to “seek first to understand, then to be understood” (a Stephen Covey principle), as evidenced by citations and examples provided throughout the text.
The one area where the author could have elaborated further pertains to detection. For example, "Turn it in," a Web site many faculty use to catch plagiarists, is not mentioned. Many instructors use Turnitin.com as a deterrent and include it on their syllabuses. Including Turnitin.com on the list of other prevention suggestions (e.g., requiring multiple drafts of a paper, offering more specific topics, and assigning more topics that require synthesis and analysis) would have strengthened the book. The overall strength of this guidebook is in the voluminous list of references: more than 100 works are cited. From an admission director's standpoint, the following cited works stand out:


In sum, it would be labor thrown away if one were to undertake reading this book in the hope of gaining more than nuts and bolts in the area of academic dishonesty (with the possible exception of legal aspects covered in Chapter Four). I was both captivated by the subject matter and inspired to conduct additional research in this area at my institution. *Academic Dishonesty* is a must read for any administrator in higher education.

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**About the Author**

**KIMBERLEY BUSTER-WILLIAMS** is Director of Admissions at the University of Michigan Flint. Williams has worked in admissions for fifteen years and holds an E.D.S. degree in Higher Education and an M.S.Ed. from Old Dominion University. She is a frequent contributor to several higher education journals and presents frequently at conferences and workshops across the country.
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