



# COLLEGE *and* UNIVERSITY

Vol. 94 N° 3 ♦ Summer 2019

Educating the Modern Higher Education Administration Professional

How to Recruit and Retain  
Transfer Students:

Comparing the College Choice  
Decision Process among Two- and  
Four-Year Transfer Students

Looking Back, Looking Ahead:

How Working on a Team  
Helped Us Each to Grow

Graduate Enrollment  
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## FORUM

### Commentary

Three Years and Counting:  
Lessons from a Newbie  
to a Newbie

TES-ting the Waters of  
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### Research in Brief

Diploma Mills and  
Counterfeit Operations

Effects of Residency  
Determination Services on  
Applications from Students  
at Two Rural High Schools  
to the North Carolina  
Community College System

### Campus Viewpoint

The Next Generation  
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# Editor's Note

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C&U is looking for book reviewers. Are you a reader of books on higher education? Do you like to write? We'll provide the books! For more information, please contact me or our Managing Editor, Heather Zimar.

This edition includes three feature articles. In "How to Recruit and Retain Transfer Students: Comparing the College Choice Decision Process Among Two-Year and Four-Year Transfer Students," Casey Lukszo and Shannon Hayes employs a case study approach to understand and compare factors in the decision-making process for students transferring from two-year and four-year institutions to a four-year institution.

In "Graduate Enrollment Considerations: Informing Practice and Research," Jeannine Kranzow reviews the literature related to graduate college choice and factors that influence prospective graduate student enrollment.

Continuing our interview series, Sharon Cramer, SUNY Distinguished Service Professor Emerita, and Connie Cooke, Director of Financial Aid, both at SUNY University at Buffalo, have a conversation, "Looking Back, Looking Ahead: How Working on a Team Helped Us Each to Grow."

There are two Commentaries, "Three Years and Counting: Lessons from a Newbie to a Newbie," by Joseph Wolk, and "TES-ting the Waters of Transfer Technology," by Amber Andrade. In addition, we include two Research in Brief articles, "Diploma Mills and Counterfeit Operations (Part 1)," by Allen Ezell, and "Effects of Residency Determination Services on the Applications from Two Rural High Schools," by Andrew Johnson.

The three Campus Viewpoint articles are: "The Next Generation of One-Stop Student Service Centers: Part Two," by Francisco Maldonado Altieri, "Critical Languages and College Choice," by Hannah Schultz, Rodney Parks, and Alexander Taylor, and "Graduating in spite of us? Identifying and Reducing Friction Points for Students," by Tammy Aagard and Shelley Dodd.

No book reviews this edition. Alas!

My thanks to all who contributed to this edition of *College and University*! I hope, dear reader, that you will be inspired by something you read here to submit an article or book review for a future edition! Enjoy a wonderful summer!

# Comparing the College Choice Decision Process among Two- and Four-Year Transfer Students

Transfer students are an important population in higher education, and this has prompted a significant amount of research on their completion and success. Yet research on transfer student college choice and factors involved in the decision-making process remains fairly limited. Using a case study approach, the current research aims to identify and compare the factors in the decision process between students transferring from a two-year to a four-year institution and those transferring from a four-year to a four-year institution. Findings indicate that the decision process differs greatly between two-year and four-year transfer students, and this, in turn, affects transfer credit processes. Despite these differences, students in both groups utilized similar resources—including family, peers, and websites—to navigate the transfer process. A discussion and recommendations for colleges and universities is included.

In recent years, economists have noted high correlations between economic growth and higher education attainment. According to data compiled by the Brookings Institution, the average bachelor's degree holder will contribute \$278,000 more to local economies than will the average high school graduate (Rothwell 2015). Traditionally, policy makers have focused closely on the high school pipeline as the main pathway into higher education. Yet the number of high school students is beginning to decrease (Bransberger 2017, Kelderman 2019), so colleges and universities may not be able to rely exclusively on high school students to maintain their enrollment numbers (Seltzer 2016). Instead, colleges and universities will need to recruit more heavily from nontraditional populations, such as transfer students.

According to data from the National Student Clearinghouse, almost 40 percent of first-time students will transfer at least once within six years (Shapiro, Dunder, Huie, Wakhungu, Bhimdiwali, Nathan and Hwang 2018). Of the students who transfer to a public, four-year institution, 55 percent transfer from a two-year institution, and 45 percent transfer from a four-year institution (Shapiro, *et al.* 2018). Institutions and states are experiencing a significant increase in the number of students who transfer. For example, the number of transfer students (both two-year and four-year as well as in state and out of state) in the state of Maryland increased 61 percent between 2014 and 2018 (Institutional Research Information System 2019). Despite

the fact that transfer students are an important population in higher education, transfer student baccalaureate completion is low. Currently, only 42 percent of transfer students complete a baccalaureate degree within six years of transferring (Shapiro, Dunder, Huie, Wakhungu, Yuan, Nathan and Hwang 2017). This concerning statistic has prompted a substantial amount of research investigating transfer student completion and best practices to support transfer student success.

While more is becoming clear about the transfer student experience, little is known about students' actual decision-making process—such as their reasons for transfer—when selecting a transfer institution. Scholars tend to focus on one institutional pathway—particularly that from the two-year to the four-year institution. Despite the growing need to focus on transfer student success, research on transfer student college choice and the factors involved has remained fairly limited. More information about why students choose to transfer, factors in the transfer choice process, and experiences during the transfer process can help colleges and universities better serve transfer student populations. The purpose of the current research is to understand and compare the factors contributing to the transfer decision process and initial transfer experiences among students transferring from a two-year to a four-year institution and from a four-year to another four-year institution.

## Key Terms

As discussed in more detail in the conceptual framework section, this process is intentionally referred to as

students' transfer "decision" rather than "choice" process. In her research on college pathways, Iloh (2018) presents a model of college choice that specifically omits the word "choice." She argues that "choice" is a privileged term and is impacted by students' location, family needs, income, and greater resources. For this reason, the current research also looks specifically at students' decision-making process and does not refer to it as a choice. In addition, for the purposes of this paper, a student's first college is referred to as the "sending institution," and the college or university to which the student transfers is referred to as the "transfer institution."

## Literature Review

Literature exploring the college choice process for students entering higher education is extensive (Cabrera and LaNasa 2000, Hossler and Gallagher 1987, Mullin 2010, Perna 2006). Beginning in 1987 with Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase model, scholars began to advocate for multidimensional models of choice (Perna 2006). However, while the choice process has evolved to address the experiences of students from a variety of backgrounds (George Mwangi 2015), little research has delved into what it means to undergo a "second" college choice process. In other words, there is not much literature exploring *why* students choose to transfer from one institution to another and how these students make their decision. The literature review begins by exploring traditional college choice literature (*e.g.*, Hossler and Gallagher 1987) in order to provide a foundation and definition for how college choice has been discussed historically. What follows is a discussion regarding what current scholars are saying about how students make the decision to transfer.

## College Choice

In 1987, Hossler and Gallagher proposed a model in which students move from educational aspirations to college enrollment. Students follow a linear path through three phases: predisposition, search, and choice (Hossler and Gallagher 1987). While useful, the linear nature of this model has been critiqued by a variety of scholars because it fails to recognize the complexities of the college choice process, such as how the process works for nontraditional students or students who fol-

low alternative pathways to college (Cabrera and LaNasa 2000, Mullin 2010, Perna 2006).

Alternative theories of college choice tend to fall into one of two categories: economic or sociological. Economic theories, often rooted in Becker's (1962) human capital theory, are based on the assumption that individuals make rational economic decisions about whether to invest in higher education (Perna 2006). These decisions are based on the anticipated costs (*e.g.*, tuition, lost earnings) and benefits (*e.g.*, better career opportunities) of pursuing a postsecondary degree. Sociological theories, which emphasize the importance of students' social and cultural capital, explore the ways in which the college choice process differs across particular student groups (Perna 2006). These theories honor students' individual differences by acknowledging the impact of parents, friends, teachers, high schools, and communities on students' educational and career aspirations (Cabrera and La Nasa 2000, Mullen 2010).

In general, college choice models have looked specifically at the choice process from high school to a four-year institution. Yet some scholars have sought to also understand why high school students choose to enroll at a community college (Hearn and Holdsworth 2005; McDonough 2005; Somers, Haines, Keene, Bauer, Pfeiffer, McCluskey, Settle and Sparks 2006). For example, in a study focusing on the college choice process of students selecting community colleges, Somers and associates (2006) found that students primarily chose to enroll at community college because they felt unprepared for a four-year institution, because the community college offered financial and geographic benefits, or because of the influence of family and peers. The work of Somers, *et al.* (2006) and others (*e.g.*, Hearn and Holdsworth 2005, McDonough 2005) has helped clarify an understanding of the choice to enroll at community college. However, this research does not account for—or even mention—the fact that baccalaureate-focused students must then undergo a second decision-making process when seeking to transfer from the sending to the transfer institution.

## Making the Decision to Transfer

In a recent review of transfer literature, Taylor and Jain (2017) sought to clarify the transfer pathway and function, transfer access and experiences, and state transfer policies. Through their review, the authors found that

the two main reasons students transfer are (1) to pursue a bachelor's degree (57%) and (2) for personal reasons (38%). These data are representative of both two- and four-year students, suggesting that institutions need to understand that many students transfer for personal reasons or reasons unrelated to academic factors.

Research by Tobolowsky and Bers (2018) confirms this assumption. In an effort to better understand the transfer choice process, Tobolowsky and Bers (2018) conducted four focus groups and four individual interviews with transfer students attending universities in the Chicago and Dallas–Fort Worth areas. The purpose of the study was to better understand factors that impact college choice decisions for students transferring from one institution to another. The authors found that “not all transfer students approach transfer the same way” (10): while some students always planned to transfer, other students made sudden, rash decisions. (The authors did not note what led students to each transfer strategy.) In their literature review, the authors cite Hossler and Gallagher (1987), Perna (2006), and Somers, *et al.* (2006), among others. Although these

scholars provide a strong foundation for understanding choice, the transfer process is complex. Traditional linear models and those that look specifically at high school student decisions limit understanding of the transfer student experience.

Iloh (2018) proposed a model that accounts for all pathways within the higher education landscape. She critiques current college choice models as ignoring nontraditional student populations and suggests that an ecological model of choice is needed to address three main gaps in understanding: (1) the growth of post-traditional students; (2) returning and highly mobile students; and (3) open admissions institutions of higher learning.

The current work borrows from Iloh (2018) in order to develop a unique conceptual model of students' decision-making process when they are planning to transfer. Yet it is important to acknowledge that in addition to making a choice to enroll at an institution, students are also making a choice to leave their first (or “sending”) institution. According to Taylor and Jain (2017), it is necessary to situate transfer decisions within student

**NAVIGATING  
TRANSFER  
CREDITS**

**OVER 1/3 OF STUDENTS TRANSFER**  
at least once before earning their  
bachelor's degree, many also crossing  
state lines in the process!

SOURCE: Hossler et al. *Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Pre-degree Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions* (Signature Report No. 2). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

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departure literature in order to reveal why students transfer or depart from their initial institution. For this reason, the current conceptual model is also built on theories of student retention.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study draws from college choice as well as retention theories. As suggested above, this decision was intentional given that community college transfer students are currently enrolled students who are not just making decisions about their transfer process but also are seeking to persist through the higher education pipeline. The decision to transfer thus is a dichotomous process wherein students are departing their sending institution while also making the choice to persist by selecting to enroll at the transfer institution. Iloh's (2018) ecological model of college-going decisions and Bean and Metzner's (1985) conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition inform the current work.

Iloh's (2018) model emphasizes the role of ecology, which takes into account the individual student's environment and the external factors that influence decisions that are made. Iloh (2018) argues that this approach allows for flexibility and does not assume that students come from the same background. Within the model are three bidirectional forces that shape the college-going decision process: information, time, and opportunity. These forces are not sequential and may look different for each student. The current model supports Iloh's (2018) focus on information, time, and opportunity while also taking into account further contextual factors first introduced through the work of Bean and Metzner (1985).

Bean and Metzner's (1985) research focuses specifically on nontraditional students. According to the authors, a nontraditional student is typically older than 24 years of age, does not live on campus, attends part time, may not be greatly influenced by the social environment, and is chiefly concerned with academics at the transfer institution. It is important to note that nontraditional students likely will not identify with all of these factors but may associate with some combination of them. Given the variety of nontraditional student profiles and these students' unique experiences in higher education, Bean and Metzner (1985) identified variables that impact these students' persistence. Spe-

cifically, they looked at background and defining variables, academic variables, environmental variables, and social integration variables. The authors also identified three key elements impacting the student experience: external environmental factors, utility, and academics. Environmental factors, in particular, have been found to be significant for transfer students. These variables include finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibility, and opportunity to transfer.

Bean and Metzner's (1985) research suggests that making the decision to transfer from one institution to another is a dynamic process affected by a student's context. The three main forces identified by Iloh (2018)—information, time, and opportunity—are all situated within a unique context shared by external environmental factors, utility, and academics. (*See Figure 1, on page 7.*)

## Methodology

This study employs a descriptive case study approach (Yin 2014) using data from State University (a pseudonym), a large, public university. The purpose of a descriptive case study design is to describe a phenomenon within its real-world context (Yin 2014). Because this study explores the dynamic experiences of transfer students in their transfer environment, a descriptive case study design was an appropriate methodological choice. Data include semi-structured interviews with transfer students from State University, observations of pre-transfer advising appointments at State University, and a review of documents from State University. All interviews were completed between spring 2016 and fall 2017, and observations and document review were completed in early fall 2016.

Interviews were conducted with 24 transfer students, including seven students who transferred from four-year universities and seventeen who transferred from community colleges. (The pseudonyms of participants as well as gender, race/ethnicity, and college major are noted in Table 1, on page 8.) Researchers used an interview protocol that was piloted with three students and revised accordingly. The final interview protocol included twelve open-ended questions with several sub-questions. Questions included "Why did you want to transfer?" "When you started thinking about transferring, what resources did you use to plan your transfer

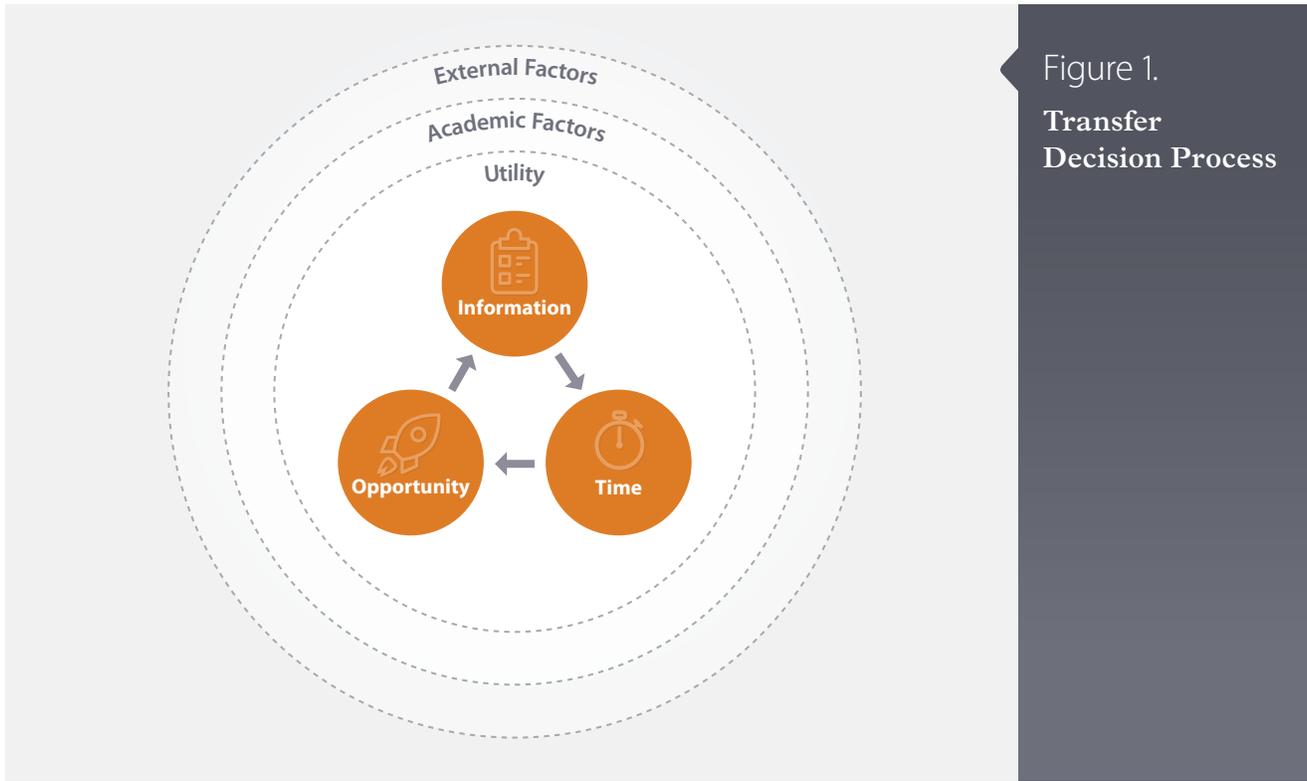


Figure 1.  
Transfer  
Decision Process

process?” “Did you talk to anyone about transferring?” Interviews were between 30 and 50 minutes long; were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants; and were transcribed verbatim. Eight observations were conducted of pre-transfer advising meetings between State University advisors and prospective transfer students using an observation protocol. Finally, documents such as admissions documents and advising tools from State University were included in the data.

After data collection, the researchers began coding the data using inductive and deductive techniques—specifically, pattern matching whereby findings were compared to predicted findings from the conceptual framework (Saldaña 2016, Yin 2014). This categorical aggregation technique was used to derive findings (Stake 1995).

The researchers used several strategies to ensure the findings and conclusions’ trustworthiness and credibility. Interview transcripts were shared with participants to ensure that they were accurate and complete. Yin (2014) indicates that data triangulation is critical to establish the validity of case studies. Thus, three sources of data—interviews, observations, and documents—were used to confirm findings.

In qualitative research, the positionality of researchers is a critical consideration (Jones, Torres and Ar-

minio 2014). Both of the current researchers are white females and serve as administrators at a large state university. One researcher was a community college transfer student who began college as a nontraditional student. She has five years of experience working with transfer students in an academic setting through admissions, academic advising, and student affairs. The other researcher attended a large, research-intensive institution as a traditional, full-time student. She also worked as an academic advisor for four years before transitioning into a pre-transfer advising role in which she now advises prospective transfer students on the admissions process. It is critical to identify how the authors’ identities may impact the study. For example, it was important for the researchers, as practitioners, to listen carefully to the students in order to gain an understanding of their experiences as well as their perceptions of policy. Throughout the study, the researchers maintained memos so as to be reflective about how their identities may have shaped data collection and analysis (Glesne 2011).

## Findings

Study participants shared a great deal about the transfer process and their overall transfer experiences. While the

Table 1. Student Interview Participants

| Name     | Gender | Sending Institution | Race/Ethnicity         | Major                        |
|----------|--------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Shuly    | Male   | Two-Year            | Asian/Pacific Islander | Computer Science             |
| Alan     | Male   | Two-Year            | White                  | Business                     |
| Don      | Male   | Two-Year            | White                  | Undecided                    |
| Rose     | Female | Two-Year            | Hispanic/Latino        | Psychology and Education     |
| Dwight   | Male   | Two-Year            | NA                     | Computer Science             |
| Jane     | Female | Two-Year            | White                  | Secondary Education          |
| Ed       | Male   | Four-Year           | White                  | Undecided                    |
| Kathy    | Female | Two-Year            | Black/African American | Economics                    |
| Allie    | Female | Two-Year            | White                  | Undecided                    |
| Monique  | Female | Two-Year            | Black/African American | Undecided                    |
| Olivia   | Female | Two-Year            | White                  | Math and Secondary Education |
| Sarah    | Female | Two-Year            | White                  | Nutritional Science          |
| Brittany | Female | Four-Year           | Black/African American | Psychology                   |
| Arielle  | Female | Four-Year           | White                  | Biology                      |
| Mariam   | Female | Two-Year            | Asian/Pacific Islander | Art Education                |
| Jason    | Male   | Four-Year           | Asian/Pacific Islander | Undecided                    |
| Jessica  | Female | Four-Year           | White                  | Undecided                    |
| Sunnitha | Female | Two-Year            | Other                  | Computer Science             |
| Castro   | Male   | Two-Year            | Black/African American | Business                     |
| Melissa  | Female | Four-Year           | Asian/Pacific Islander | Bioengineering               |
| Sophia   | Female | Two-Year            | White                  | Psychology                   |
| Tina     | Female | Two-Year            | White                  | Bioengineering               |
| Owen     | Male   | Two-Year            | White                  | Undecided                    |
| Ellie    | Female | Four-Year           | Hispanic/Latino        | Journalism                   |

community college students shared many of the same challenges as students who began their education at a four-year institution, findings suggest that the decision-making process and the overall transfer process differ greatly among these two populations. These differences are supported by the study’s conceptual framework, which is cited throughout the findings. The findings described below are drawn from multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and documents.

## Planning to Transfer or Transferring for a New Plan

The first major difference among the student participants was in the amount of planning that went into the transfer process; the time and the opportunity impacting the transfer process differed greatly between community college transfer students and four-year transfer

students. All of the community college students who participated in the study planned to transfer from the beginning of their college education. For example, Olivia (a two-year transfer student) shared, “I always had the goal of bachelor’s degree just from the start, and I kind of [saw community college] as a stepping stone to get there....But I always knew that I would get a bachelor’s degree and graduate. That was my overall goal.”

By contrast, four-year students chose to transfer anytime between one semester and two years after they began their education, and all of the four-year students encountered a challenge that forced them to rethink their college experience and develop a new

plan. For some, this challenge was financial: “Money is a big part of the reason I transferred. You know, \$50,000 out of state is not really money I can throw around. That’s a big part of the reason I came back. And my parents are footing the bill, and I don’t want to make it hard on them” (Ed, a four-year transfer student). Finances are an example of an external force influencing the transfer decision-making process.

Other external forces were institutional fit and social factors. Some students shared that their first institution was not a good fit either socially or academically. One student shared her realization soon after the semester started that the first four-year institution was not a good fit. Another student, Jessica (a four-year transfer student), explained:

*I know since I went to school around here...high school and middle school. I knew a bunch of people around*

*here, and I had stayed in touch with them. They were having a much more relaxed and normal college experience and went to football games and bars and stuff like that. That was more what I wanted. The fact that I wasn't very happy at my university was obviously a big factor [in my transferring].*

Other students indicated that they decided to transfer once they determined a career path and realized that the major they needed to prepare for that career was not available at their first institution. Thus, their motivation to transfer was to find a college or university that offered their new major.

## Transfer Credit

This difference in transfer intentions led to very different transfer experiences among two-year and four-year transfer students, particularly in terms of transferring credits. Because four-year transfer students did not plan to transfer, they did not necessarily choose courses at their sending institutions that would transfer; community college students were much more intentional about choosing courses that would transfer. As a result, four-year transfer students seemed to experience more difficulty transferring courses than did community college students.

Brittany, one of the students who transferred to State University from a four-year school, indicated, “I didn’t even think about [transferring credits] before I was accepted. Because I’m a college student coming from a four-year accredited college, they should be able to take all my classes. That was just my assumption.” Monique, by contrast, attended an in-state community college and planned her courses according to their transferability. In describing how she selected classes at community college, Monique shared, “I did it mostly because I knew what I wanted to do.... Most of the courses I took were general education courses that were applicable to what I wanted to major in.”

Observations confirmed this finding. Community college students who obtained pre-transfer advising were often early in their academic careers and able to learn from advisors which community college courses to take that would transfer seamlessly to their degree programs. By contrast, most of the four-year transfer students who visited pre-transfer advising were in the process of applying to the university and were unable to

receive information about transferrable courses to take. For example, one student had transferred from a four-year institution to a local community college and was exploring transferring to State University. During his appointment with the pre-transfer advisor, he learned that the English class he had taken at his original institution would not transfer to State University, and he would have to retake the course after transferring. Academic factors also influence students’ decision to transfer. For those students who had an academic goal in mind, the transfer credit process was a more seamless experience. Those who did not have a particular goal, however, did not have similarly smooth transfer experiences.

Another difference between two-year and four-year transfer students was their familiarity with the state’s transfer course database. The database provides course-by-course comparisons so students can determine how their credits will transfer to four-year schools within the state system. Most students transferring from a four-year university indicated that they had not heard of this database prior to transfer whereas approximately half of community college students indicated that they had used this tool to plan their transfer. Jessica (a four-year transfer student) shared that she was not familiar with this tool and just assumed that her courses would transfer: “I didn’t even know [the transfer course database] was a thing. I knew that most of the classes I had taken since I was a freshman were just general education/core requirements.... I figured it couldn’t be too different here since it was general courses.” By contrast, Sunnitha (a two-year transfer student) shared that she had heard about the database from her advisor and used it to inform her choices of general education courses: “I used it after or before I took some general classes to see if I could transfer it here.” Sunnitha’s experience utilizing the database helps illuminate the role that academic factors have on the transfer process—as well as the role of information. Iloh (2018) indicates that access to information can greatly impact a student’s experience when making the decision to transfer. Students in the current study had varied levels of access to information; this affected how they made decisions throughout the transfer process.

## Support Through the Process

One consistent finding relates to the support systems available to students during the transfer process. While

two-year and four-year participants may have arrived at their decisions to transfer differently, both populations cited family, peers, and websites as sources of information most frequently used to navigate the transfer process. These sources were utilized not only to learn about the transfer process but also to determine if the transfer institution would be a good fit. Bean and Metzner (1985) emphasize the role of external factors, such as family, in their research. In seeking institutions that will support their persistence, students from both two-year and four-year institutions relied heavily on family and friends.

Both two-year and four-year participants indicated that their family members were influential in their selection of State University as their transfer institution. During one observation of a pre-transfer advising meeting, a community college student explained that her mother was a major factor in her prospective transfer to State University. In addition to parents, siblings and extended family were important influences: “I decided to transfer to [State University] because my sister was going [there] at the time, and my parents thought that we could be closer together to feel more comfortable. She is my only family member in the United States” (Melissa, a four-year transfer student).

Other students indicated that peers were a big influence on their choice of transfer institution. Mariam (a two-year transfer student) shared, “I had heard from friends who had graduated with an education major. One of my friends is a full-time teacher now and had graduated from the School of Education here, and she absolutely loves her job. So that inspired me to come here.” Peers also influenced four-year students’ decision to transfer to State University. In some cases, they encouraged students to leave their current college. Jessica (a four-year transfer student) shared that students transferring from her sending institution made her consider transferring herself: “There were people I was kind of friends with...and then coming back sophomore year it was like, ‘Oh, that person’s not here anymore. They transferred...’ And then a couple people in my sorority decided to transfer. Also, I was noticing that more and more people in my circle were starting to leave.” External factors, such as peers, impacted the context in which students made their decision. Time and opportunity were also factors as students saw their peers transferring and determined it was an opportune time for them to also make a change.

Both two-year and four-year transfer students indicated that websites were helpful sources of information. Melissa (a four-year transfer student) indicated that for an out-of-state student such as herself, websites were particularly helpful in planning: “I think the electronic [resources], like the websites, are the most important, because especially when you’re planning from afar or transferring from a different state, it is really hard to meet with someone in person.”

Despite websites being a primary source of information for community college and four-year transfer students, many students found them difficult to navigate; for some students, they led to problems in the application process. Sunnitha (a two-year transfer student) said, “The website was really helpful” but went on to explain that once she had been admitted to the transfer institution, the website had not indicated that she needed to take a math placement exam, which meant in turn that she could not register for a particular math course she needed and resulted in her being behind a semester in terms of her coursework.

## Discussion and Conclusion

It is becoming increasingly important for colleges and universities to focus on the needs of transfer students—to improve their recruitment as well as their retention and completion. Succeeding means that colleges and universities will need to improve their understanding of all transfer students—including community college as well as four-year transfer students—and build structures that meet their needs.

One of the first tasks a college or university can complete is to better understand their transfer populations. The conceptual framework of the current research posits that context matters; findings indicate that two-year and four-year transfer students often have different experiences and needs. For that reason, institutions should consider the specific characteristics of their transfer student populations in order to serve them more effectively. For example, institutions may review the numbers of transfer students applying, accepting admission, and matriculating at the institution itself, at sending institutions (*e.g.*, in-state community colleges, out-of-state universities), the retention and graduation rates of transfer students, the average time to completion of a baccalaureate degree, and whether transfer students are satisfied with their experiences. These data can help



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administrators determine what areas of transfer should be highest priority and/or what things are going well. Leaders can use the information not only for planning, but also to advocate for changes that might improve the recruitment and retention of transfer students.

To improve the recruitment of transfer students, it is important to consider what information students can access during the transfer process. As evidenced by participants' descriptions of the transfer credit database, students with access were able to plan better and were far more intentional in selecting courses for transfer. To help ensure that information is available to all students, institutions should list the specific resources they offer to transfer students, including transfer centers (such as those at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of California, Berkeley), institution-level transfer scholarships, transfer clubs and organizations, student success courses, and learning communities for transfer students. Once an institution creates a list of these resources, the list can be incorporated into marketing materials for transfer students. If no such resources are available, colleges and universities may find it worthwhile to develop some. Given the important role of family in transfer college selection, institutions also may want to consider adding family programs to their recruitment and retention processes.

The current study's findings indicated that ensuring an institution was the right fit for students was very important to their retention, particularly for four-year transfer students, who often transferred because their first institution was *not* a good fit. One strategy for improving retention is to help students determine whether the college is the best fit for their needs. Colleges and universities can pursue this strategy by being transparent about the transfer credit process and providing information about available majors and career resources as well as any other topics that might be pertinent to transfer students (*e.g.*, whether the institution offers evening/online classes, housing options, etc.). This will help prevent students from transferring to another college or university because they received inaccurate or incomplete information that led to them select an institution that is a poor fit.

As participants in the current study noted, many transfer students seek information online; thus, it is crucial that universities and colleges have clear information for transfer students on their websites—including information about the transfer application process

as well as other information to help students determine whether the institution is a good fit for them. Resources such as the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) Transfer Handbook (2015) and publications from the Community College Research Center offer suggestions on how to utilize technology to improve advising for transfer students. Examples of universities with robust transfer websites include the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill,<sup>1</sup> the University of Minnesota,<sup>2</sup> and the University of Maryland.<sup>3</sup>

Colleges and universities should examine their transfer credit processes to determine whether they are fair and equitable for all transfer students, including those from four-year universities as well as those from out of state. Participants in the current study shared that they were very surprised by the credit loss they experienced as a result of their decision to transfer. This is not uncommon among students but can be very detrimental to long-term goals and persistence to graduation. While investigating and addressing current transfer credit practices can be a daunting process, data about the current transfer student populations can assist in determining where to begin. For example, if the majority of transfer students at an institution come from in-state community colleges (or even a few specific feeder colleges), that institution can first work with those colleges to develop improved communication about the transfer credit process, determine where transfer credit problems exist, and develop transfer credit articulation agreements. By focusing on how to expand articulation policies both within and across state lines, institutions can help improve the retention of transfer students, which is a compelling need for colleges and universities.

Transfer students represent a growing segment of higher education and an increasingly important population for college recruiters. As noted, the higher education landscape is becoming more and more diverse. As a result, colleges and universities must become more aware of transfer students' needs not only to recruit but also to retain them and help them succeed. Improving support and services to transfer students is an important investment in the future of higher education and will support the goal of graduating more baccalaureate students.

<sup>1</sup> See <[studentsuccess.unc.edu/transfer-students](http://studentsuccess.unc.edu/transfer-students)>.

<sup>2</sup> See <[transfer.umn.edu](http://transfer.umn.edu)>.

<sup>3</sup> See <[transfer.umd.edu](http://transfer.umd.edu)>.

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# Graduate Enrollment Considerations: Informing Practice and Research

There has been a substantial increase in the number of graduate students enrolling at higher education institutions in the United States (McFarland, *et al.* 2017). For practitioners and researchers serving in roles that support graduate student success, it is important to have an understanding of current enrollment data and trends as well as the factors that influence the decision to enroll. This article includes a review of the literature related to graduate college choice and enrollment as well as present gaps in knowledge and understanding. By better understanding the current landscape of graduate enrollment—including the factors prospective students take into account when considering and seeking admission into graduate programs—professionals will be better able to assist prospective students and their institutions.

## Enrollment Patterns

**T**he National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) monitors data related to national enrollment, attainment, and composition. Between 2008 and 2021, the number of master's degrees awarded is expected to increase 32 percent (Hussar and Bailey 2011; NCES 2011). In that same timeframe, the projected increase in the number of doctoral degrees awarded is even greater: more than 50 percent overall and a notable 70 percent for women (NCES 2011).

More than 773,000 master's degrees were forecast to be awarded in the 2015 academic year (Snyder, de Brey and Dillow 2016), more than double the number awarded each year prior to 1989 (when fewer than 300,000 master's degrees were awarded in the United States annually) (Snyder 1993). Not only is the total number of students enrolling in graduate programs increasing significantly, but so is the number of students from diverse backgrounds enrolling in these programs. Latinx and Asian Pacific Islanders are the two groups with the highest percentage increase in graduate populations (Aud, Fox and Kewal Ramani 2010). Data indicate that first-generation students are enrolling more frequently in graduate programs than they did in the past but at lower rates than students who are not first generation (Cataldi, Bennett and Chen 2018; Lauff and Ingels 2015).

## College Decisions and Choice

Despite recent rapid growth, a number of aspects of graduate student enrollment have yet to be examined in the literature. One is the college selection and choice process. In contrast to considerable research in recent decades on the undergraduate college choice process, little has been written about the topic as it relates to graduate students (Conrad, Duren and Haworth 1998; English and Umbach 2016).

English and Umbach (2016) authored the only rigorous study of graduate school choice. Despite the recent year of publication, the data set was significantly older, calling currency into question. Examination of the limited research reveals the possibility of similarities between prospective graduate and undergraduate students in that cost, academic reputation, student academic ability, and location influence the final decision to enroll at a specific institution (Kallio 1995; Olson 1992).

The limited research on graduate student college choice does not fully explain whether prospective graduate students consider the same factors as undergraduate students (English and Umbach 2016). There has been some examination of the process from the vantage point of students of color, and the literature suggests that the pipeline to graduate school is affected by students' background characteristics (Kranzow and Hyland 2011; Morelon-Quainoo, *et al.* 2009). However, whether considering the body of college choice research from a broad, generalized angle or a narrower population-specific perspective, there is scant research on how best to support prospective graduate students.

## Confounding Population Data

Not only is the literature related to graduate choice limited, but research comparing choice decisions between levels of graduate study (master's compared to doctoral level) is also not adequate (English and Umbach 2016). Participants in the majority of research examining graduate student choice are almost exclusively doctoral students (Olson 1992; Poock and Love 2001). While this is helpful for better understanding doctoral students, the author and others (English and Umbach 2016) posit that combining master's and doctoral students confounds the data and, thus, understanding of each degree-seeking process. This is particularly salient given that the majority of graduate students seek master's degrees (Okahana and Zhou 2017).

## The College Choice Process for Graduate Students

Various factors have been suggested as important in terms of their impact on the college choice process. While a thorough and complete overview of each individual element is beyond the scope of this article, selected considerations pertinent to the work of admissions and campus registrars are included in this review of the literature. These factors include financial considerations, gender, life role, generation status, location of program and elements related to program structures (time to degree, admissions policies, etc.), and program quality. Research findings on these topics are discussed below.

### Financial Considerations

Not surprisingly, students consider degree cost and financial support (Kallio 1995; Winn, Leach, Erwin and Benedict 2014). Students with more substantial financial concerns or greater need may select a more affordable school over a program perceived to be of higher quality (Lei and Chuang 2010). In a study specifically examining the choices of Latinx students, Ramirez (2013) found that students will select one program over another for reasons related to cost and financial aid packages. Students with less need may not put as much importance on the cost of a program in which they are interested, but most students do consider the financial differences of comparable programs.

Financial considerations include not only current costs and available aid but also the amount of debt the

student carries from earning an undergraduate degree. Findings on the impact of undergraduate student debt on the decision to enroll in graduate school vary: In some cases, debt is identified as a deterrent to graduate enrollment (Malcom and Dowd 2012). In other cases, it does not impact decisions about graduate school: Ekstrom, *et al.* (1991), English and Umbach (2016), and Weiler (1991) found little relationship between debt load and aspirations and enrollment in graduate school. Still others examine the impact of debt on future graduate enrollment and note that student loan debt could actually have a positive impact on graduate school choices by increasing the likelihood of enrollment in doctoral studies rather than other post-baccalaureate options (Fox 1992; Xu 2016).

Conversely, Malcom and Dowd (2012) found that undergraduate debt adversely impacts graduate school enrollment for students of all backgrounds with undergraduate degrees in STEM fields. A study published by The Consortium on Financing Higher Education (CFHE) (1983) also noted a negative relationship between borrowing and graduate school enrollment. Specifically, it suggested that approximately 17 percent of students opt not to attend graduate school for reasons related to debt incurred during their undergraduate education (CFHE 1983).

If it is accurate that students' undergraduate debt decreases the likelihood of graduate enrollment, then it is particularly troubling for students from underrepresented backgrounds given the uneven distribution of debt across racial lines (Huelsman 2015; Scott-Clayton and Li 2016). Legislators, activists, and educators must continue to work to redress the imbalance in education across racial and ethnic lines. Those with more education earn more and have lower unemployment rates (Chen 2017), so it is imperative that higher education administrators better understand the relationship between debt and graduate school enrollment decisions (Millett 2003). Policy makers and higher education leaders are calling for future research to explore the relationships among historically underrepresented students, student loans, and student debt (Perna, Kvaal and Ruiz 2017).

### Gender

Some authors have identified gender as a factor that has both a direct and an indirect impact on the graduate school choice process (Hearn 1987; Malaney 1987; Xu

2016). Other research has not confirmed this finding (English and Umbach 2016, Kallio 1995), suggesting that gender may be less important than some scholars have suggested in terms of its influence on whether to enroll in graduate school. It may be that both are accurate: that for some areas of study (such as some STEM fields) and/or for some types of degrees (Perna 2004), gender is a factor, but that for others it is less so. Further research is needed to answer remaining questions about the role of gender in students' consideration of a graduate program (Perna 2004).

As noted above, much research is focused on doctoral students, and NCES (2011) has identified significant increases in the number of women enrolling in doctoral programs. By 2021, women are projected to earn 60 percent of all conferred master's degrees (NCES 2011). Women are gaining access to doctoral and master's degree programs, but questions remain as to how gender impacts the timing of enrollment in graduate school, enrollment itself, and program choice (if at all). It is also unclear how the intersectionality of gender, race, and ethnicity influences graduate enrollment.

## Life Role

The life stage of a prospective graduate student introduces new variables that may not have been present for undergraduate students. For example, having a spouse or full-time employer may impact students' graduate school enrollment choices. Jisha and Pitts (2004) found that life roles had little impact on decisions about graduate school; yet the larger body of literature suggests that life role and stage are significant relative to graduate school enrollment.

NCES notes that married and older individuals enroll in graduate school at lower rates (Nevill and Chen 2007), and Xu's (2016) research found that married women in STEM fields are less likely than non-married women to apply to graduate programs. These studies and others (Kallio 1995; Lunceford 2011) indicate that family considerations and life roles may indeed play a part in the decision to enroll in graduate school. Consideration of the impact of one's choices on others might also be a factor in whether to attend graduate school and which programs to pursue.

It is possible that family and life stage played *such* a significant role that some data sets exclude those for whom life roles were paramount in their decision process. Their omission may explain why some studies do

not demonstrate life stage to be significant. In other words, life stage may be very significant to those who do not attend graduate school but less so to those who do decide to attend.

## Generation

As might be expected given the limited research on graduate choice, research on first-generation graduate student college choice is sparse (Peaker and Shives 2013; Tate, *et al.* 2015). Compared to their continuing generation peers (*i.e.* those who have parents or guardians who did complete college), it is more likely that first-generation undergraduate students come from underrepresented backgrounds (Postsecondary National Policy Institute 2016). It would be surprising if the same were not also true of graduate students. Research indicates that students whose parents did not earn a bachelor's degree attend graduate school at lower rates than do those whose parents did earn a bachelor's degree (Redford and Mulvaney Hoyer 2017; Cataldi, Bennett and Chen 2018).

Even a decade ago, very few studies included generation status as a variable (Nevill and Chen 2007), making it difficult to draw conclusions. A recent study by Xu (2016) found that first-generation status was a key characteristic in the decision to attend a graduate STEM program; this was significantly more influential for first-generation students who were women. It is unknown whether this is true in other areas of study. Perhaps first-generation students consider similar factors as continuing generation students do with regard to their enrollment in graduate school; research remains to be done.

There is evidence to suggest that first-generation students weigh many of the same elements as continuing generation students when selecting a graduate program—*e.g.*, program quality, faculty, institutional reputation, cost, financial costs/benefits and aid, and location (Jisha and Pitts 2004; Morelon-Quainoo, *et al.* 2009; Pooch 1999). But there is also research identifying the importance of additional considerations related to diversity and climate for students from non-traditional backgrounds (Xu 2016). Quality of interactions with faculty and a sense of belonging impact student decisions in significant ways (Holloway-Friesen, *in press*).

As for first-generation students at the undergraduate level, a lack of information related to graduate education is a significant factor for first-generation students

(Lunceford 2011). Some critical information relates to funding, financial aid, and student debt. Morelon-Quainoo, *et al.* (2009) examined program cost in relation to available aid and noted its role in determining not only where but whether to attend graduate school. Lunceford (2011) notes the importance of mentors to guide students through the process he depicts as “seemingly convoluted...with early deadlines” (16). Much remains unclear about the degree to which an individual’s generation status impacts graduate school considerations, but there is significant literature pointing to the importance of better understanding and supporting first-generation students in their pursuit of graduate degrees.

### **Institutional Policies, Structures, and Practices**

Institutional policies and practices appear to influence how potential students think about a program and perhaps graduate school in general. Kallio (1995), Winn, *et al.* (2014), and Jisha and Pitts (2004) all conducted research with enrolled graduate students and found that aspects of programs such as time to degree, course delivery structure (in person, online, hybrid), and scheduling of classes were influential in students’ decisions of where to attend. Many students identified factors related to convenience (*e.g.*, close to home, easy to get to, ease of registration and getting needed courses) as influential in their graduate school considerations (Winn, *et al.* 2014). These elements appear to be more or less important to master’s compared to doctoral students, but there is a dearth of research disaggregating pertinent data.

Kranzow and Hyland (2011) identified a number of structural factors that are particularly salient in the graduate school considerations of students of color and first-generation students. These include traditional course meeting times and the requirement of standardized admissions tests for entrance. The presence or absence of elements such as these have the potential to influence the degree to which students feel the campus climate is welcoming to them. This sense of “welcoming” can impact their decision to attend one program over another (Kranzow and Hyland 2011; Ramirez 2013).

### **Program Quality and Location**

Program quality and location may seem to be quite different characteristics, but they are discussed together here because of the way in which they interact. Students consider program quality and reputation when deter-

mining which programs to attend (Jisha and Pitts 2004; Winn, *et al.* 2014). They also often consider where a program is located: A program close to home may not be the same as the program best suited to professional goals, so the importance of location is unclear.

Location appears very important to some prospective graduate students but not at all important to others. Some prioritize proximity to where they currently live (Kallio 1995, Malaney 1987, Winn, *et al.* 2014) whereas others look first and foremost for programs suited to their professional goals (Jisha and Pitts 2004, Malaney 1987). Malaney (1987) noted that location was more important to women and program quality to men, but women give significant consideration to program as well (Pooock and Love 2001). Often, first-generation students are reluctant to move away from home (Lunceford 2011), and those with families may not want to move them. It may be that generation, gender, and/or life roles influence how important location is to students seeking graduate enrollment.

## **Moving Forward**

While a great deal remains unclear about the factors involved in graduate student college choice, this article presents information about graduate admissions and choice processes of which those in higher education should be aware. As institutions serve increasing numbers of graduate students, it will be important to learn and understand more about prospective students’ considerations relative to their selection of graduate programs.

Areas for further research include the impact of various aspects of financial aid and student debt on graduate school choice and a clearer understanding of how life roles may impact the decisions of students with competing life demands. It will be particularly important to better understand graduate populations by distinguishing students pursuing master’s degrees from those pursuing doctoral degrees. In addition, further research on first-generation students and the impact of generational status on graduate school decisions is needed, including further examination of the impact of campus structures, financial aid policies, and debt (Perna, *et al.* 2017). As higher education professionals better understand the needs and preferences of students pursuing graduate degrees, they will be better equipped to recruit, support, and retain those students.



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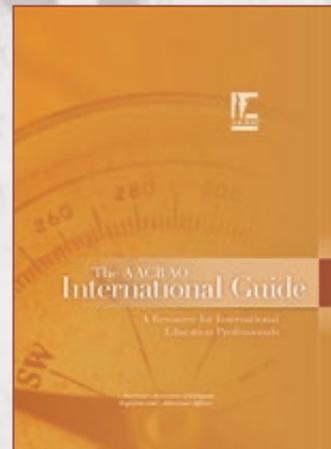
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**Jeannine Kranzow** is an Associate Professor in the College Counseling and Student Development program at Azusa Pacific University. She has published on topics of student transition and the impact of various curricular and co-curricular structures on student learning and critical thinking. She has served on the editorial board of the *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition* and the *College Student Affairs Journal*. She has administrative experience in academic advising, career services, and women's affairs. She holds an undergraduate degree from Pepperdine University, a master's in counseling and guidance from California Lutheran University, and a Ph.D. in higher education from Indiana University, Bloomington.

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# Looking Back, Looking Ahead: How Working on a Team Helped Us Each to Grow

A Conversation with Connie F. Cooke, Director,  
Financial Aid, SUNY Buffalo State

and

Sharon F. Cramer, SUNY Distinguished Service  
Professor, Emerita, SUNY Buffalo State

**C&U:** When and how did you start working together?

**Sharon:** Twenty years ago! That was when we began our life-changing experience of trying to implement a new student information system, as part of a full-time team.

**Connie:** None of us on the team really knew each other; we all were very proficient but operated independently in silos.

**C&U:** What exactly was the implementation project on which you worked?

**Sharon:** At that time, SUNY Buffalo State used a home-grown system for all enrollment management functions. The back-office staff had access to a computerized system, and faculty could view their advisees' audit sheets online; however, students used only manual walk up/call up procedures to meet all their enrollment management needs. SUNY did not have one standard student system that was deployed across the entire system. Therefore, SUNY Buffalo State (and approximately 20 other campuses throughout the United States) decided to try the Oracle Student System (OSS), which was in development. Following best practices, a team of experienced enrollment management professionals was set up; their positions were back filled, so that the team members could focus 100 percent on the project.

The SABRE Project (Student Admissions, Billing, Registration and Enrollment Management) was in place from August 1999 through December 2004, with a full-time team of ten, several part-time staff from IT and Institutional Research, as well as Ora-

cle consultants. Buffalo State was the first campus to go live with the online OSS Registration System, in April 2004. Within the year, we also included faculty permission, waitlist, reserved seating, and online grading (including "last date of attendance" aid reporting). Some of the OSS functionality was more robust than the Banner student system, which replaced the OSS. Banner was implemented during 2007–08. Banner has become the most prevalent product used in SUNY, now at 53 out of the 64 campuses. The OSS was never completed by Oracle.

**Sharon:** I was asked to serve as Executive Director for the SABRE Project team. Vice President Stan Kardonsky, the Executive Sponsor of the project, knew that I had no first-hand knowledge of implementation projects, but he was confident that his invitation had gone to the right person. When I asked him why, he explained that the reputation I had earned on campus, as a faculty member (and a senator within our governance body) who was a trustworthy, clear communicator, would enable the project to have credibility with many on campus. (What he didn't tell me was that I would have to earn the respect of the enrollment management and IT staff members, all of whom questioned my ability to lead the project.)

After doing some preliminary research, including meeting with counterpart faculty implementation leaders at other campuses, I, naively, agreed to the position. Since I had been a department chair, an academic advisor, and chaired various committees on our campus and within the College Senate, I thought

I would figure things out. As a young full professor, I had figured other things out, so, I thought, this couldn't be that different, right??

Once our project was underway, I realized how little I knew, and how steep the learning curve was going to be. As a faculty member, I viewed things through one lens, and the enrollment management specialists had an altogether different lens. Over the course of our years together, we learned to see things from a shared perspective.

**C&U:** Would you have been surprised, back then, if someone told you that some of you would become friends?

**Sharon:** Absolutely! At the first, very formal, meeting, the Vice President gave us our charge, and we looked around the room at many unfamiliar faces. As most of us had few “work” friends, I think we would have thought you were joking about future friendships. But, there's something about going through battle together (which is really what a system implementation is) that forges unique, strong bonds.

**Connie:** Although about half of the original team members have retired, others now work together on other

implementations. Often, team members spontaneously reflect upon the things we did, or learned, during our implementation years.

Some members of the team (like the two of us) have stayed in touch. We usually get together once a semester to catch up.

**Sharon:** But, during the first few years, I would never have imagined Connie and I would become friends. Connie was the senior financial aid member of the team. When the team was first established, her skepticism as to the likelihood of the project's success was evident in many ways. Her suspicions regarding the functionality of the slowly evolving OSS system were rooted in her awareness of the complexity of the business rules to ensure aid compliance. I found myself becoming very self-protective in the face of her many questions.

**C&U:** What happened that made you overcome your own defensiveness, and come to appreciate her observations?

**Sharon:** During the first year, our team was involved in project mapping—looking at what we needed

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(Current Project Maps, 128 of which were designed), and Future Project Maps (more than 150), what we would like to see. For the first few years, there was very little actual product testing (because there was, as of yet, no product to test). Connie's astute observations, and her exquisitely short, pointed questions, unearthed problems with many of the assumptions upon which our project models were based. The further down the road we went—with some outstanding Oracle consultants, and others who Connie recognized immediately as frauds—the more invaluable her contributions became. Eventually, her leadership in investigating the product we were given helped us to make the progress we did. She understood what was required for us to conduct end-to-end testing, in the “sandbox” established by IT, and how to escalate, and eventually resolve, many problems. Without her, we would never have achieved our goals.

**Sharon:** When we worked together on the SABRE project, we were eventually able to create a sense of shared purpose, and a meaningful team. Connie, describe how our team served as a valuable model for you to use as an administrator in developing teams of your own.

**Connie:** The SABRE project served as an amazing opportunity to foster growth and professional development for me, and others in enrollment management. Before the project assignment, most of us had limited opportunities to heavily interact with other functional employees on campus.

The project, for me, was an extraordinary educational springboard: not only was I afforded the opportunity to work with new people, but I also learned about how our counterparts at different types of institutions conducted business. Collectively, the SABRE team found ourselves dealing with a plethora of different kinds of people, with their own worldviews, purpose, and goals.

I believe that serving on the SABRE team was very instrumental in expanding my career opportunities. I certainly welcome the opportunity to share some of the invaluable lessons I learned, the ones I feel resulted in successful completion of project objectives.

◆ *Touchpoints:* Realize and accept the fact that your responsibilities are impacted by other campus constituencies. Learn how to effectively network and understand how your decisions can positively or negatively impact other stakeholders.

◆ *Collaboration/Shared Goals:* Allow the following truths to direct your actions: many hands make light work; we are better together; and success is impeded or aborted when we eat and devour one another. Be mindful that we are serving in the same army (despite how it looks and feels at times, others with different worldviews are not your enemy).

◆ *Accountability:* Be cognizant of the fact that your actions can help, delay, or destroy shared responsibilities. Make sure you are an active participant rather than a spectator; and own your mistakes as well as your victories gracefully. One of my most helpful ground rules states: I'm okay, you're okay, but together we are terrific!

◆ *Leadership:* Sharon was a total surprise; she is a visionary and possesses managerial courage to effectively address all situations. I had never worked with anyone quite like her. She and Vice President Kardonsky were so crucial to our success. Be advised that without a competent, experienced, and forward-thinking leader, teams will not be productive! An institutional fit (with combined executive support) is necessary for the leader to successfully carry out the charge and to accomplish the set goals by the published deadline date.

**C&U:** Sharon, Connie said some nice things about you. What have you come to really appreciate about Connie?

**Sharon:** As the team's experience of developing cohesion and agility in a world new to all of us grew, I gained increasing respect for Connie's quiet, confident reservoir of knowledge. She is a modest person, who is never self-promoting. She is constantly attuned to detect the false or grandiose, which makes her able to work with all authentic, well-intentioned students, staff, and faculty. Those who need assistance receive it from her, and her generosity of time and spirit is utterly remarkable. She does not suffer fools, or frauds, though, and has never learned to “go along to get along.” This has meant that her path through the maze of academia has not been easy. She is willing to document, document, document, to show what she knows to be right and true. As a result, students have been able to count on her to help them in ways too numerous to mention.

A person with Connie's wisdom and knowledge sees through the game-playing that often goes on as

a prelude to advancement, or project support. Over the 20 years I have known her, I have been increasingly impressed by her determination to do right by students. Achievement of that goal has required sacrifice of sleep, leisure time, and her own health. She is unwavering in her commitment to excellence on behalf of students.

**C&U:** Sharon, you and Connie have stayed in touch as she has progressed through several positions that had increasing levels of responsibility. In some ways, she sees you as a mentor. How was mentoring a part of your plan for the SABRE project?

**Sharon:** Honestly, I had no such plan. As an academic, I had always been given assistance by my colleagues, and had given it to others. I always considered myself to be a mentor.<sup>1</sup> I was glad to be able to be a mentor to several members of the team, and I am very pleased to know that our time together was enriching for them.

**Sharon:** When we began the SABRE project, none of us knew much about each other's areas. Connie, you often told us that every other enrollment management unit was almost free-standing, but everything fed into financial aid. Can you help us understand what you meant?

**Connie:** The Financial Aid Office (FAO) is very unique. There is no set governance structure for oversight of this office. I have seen the FAO report to Finance & Management, Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and the CIO. Regardless of the reporting structure, what must be fully understood by all constituencies is that campus-wide support is required for the accurate and timely enforcement of aid regulations.

The FAO provides continuous help to students during their entire academic career. Whether that means every semester for four to six years or even after they separate from the college. The FAO is viewed by students and parents as the 'gateway or hub' of the institution. Routinely, students (and/or parents) at all academic levels contact the FAO to request assistance for any kind of problem they are facing (academic, registration, advising, orientation, housing, food service, etc.). Under our administration, the overall responsibility and commitment to students extend well beyond just generating an aid package.

We willingly serve as the lifeline and conduit for the lion-share of students.

In other words, our job is never done. Aid professionals are good listeners: we must be both empathic, and task-oriented. We get the job done with a high-standard of excellence as we provide continued access to higher education. Aid professionals reside and work in the trenches with students. Therefore, we can make data-driven decisions; but, more importantly, we also implement data-informed decisions based upon first-hand knowledge.

Certainly, all offices on campus and within enrollment management play a pivotal role in student success; the FAO recognizes and celebrates their noteworthy contributions as well. Nonetheless, the FAO responsibility to multiple entities can be very daunting and overwhelming. Failure to adhere to ever-changing regulatory requirements could result in audit findings, reaccreditation challenges, and suspension of continued participation in the Department of Education's programs. Coupled with this weighty regulatory oversight, aid professionals are dealing with very real student and family issues (homelessness, food shortages, foster care, abandonment, abuse, etc.,) and continuous changes in federal, state, and institutional policies. In addition, today's college student appears to be more demanding, less respectful, and clearly entitled. It takes a unique skill-set to work as aid professionals now, as it can be viewed as a thankless job on so many levels.

Despite all of the challenges, aid professionals retain an all-encompassing desire to help students achieve their educational goals. This is why I remain in this complicated (yet gratifying) career path.

**Sharon:** As a financial aid director, you interact with all other enrollment management staff and administrators. Explain what you think would be an optimal type of working relationship with each unit (admissions, registrar, student accounts) at different points in time—during recruitment, before acceptance, after acceptance, during the first semester).

**Connie:** During my tenure as an aid professional serving in various capacities (senior counselor, associate director, director) for a private nursing school and for the largest comprehensive college and the largest university center within the SUNY system, I passionately recommend a collaborative working relationship within the enrollment management (EM) offices

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<sup>1</sup> See Cramer (2013; 2016).

(admissions, financial aid, registrar). Collaboration amongst these three crucial student service offices is necessary for overall institutional sustainability. Additionally, the bursar's office must have buy-in to support EM initiatives to ensure student success.

The golden rule for higher education today is simple: students and parents must feel that the institution genuinely cares about their academic success as they as they enter, progress, and exit the higher education experience.

It is my conviction that the current entering student population do not care what you know until they know how much you care about them as a person (and not just an enrollment target number). Therefore, college recruitment efforts must include high-touch, personal interactions with prospective students (and parents) to remain competitive as we contend with a declining pool of high school graduates.

**Sharon:** One of the biggest challenges you must face is talking with a student who is no longer eligible for financial aid. Tell us about what some of the most frequent reasons are for ineligibility, and what others (in enrollment management) can do to prevent that from occurring.

**Connie:** The lion's share of all enrolled students in higher education receive some type of financial aid assistance. Direct Loans is the largest aid funding source as evidenced by the fact that student loan debt has become the nation's second largest debt (after mortgage debt). Therefore, a student's time-to-graduation rate is a significant enrollment factor as it has a direct correlation to affordability and total loan indebtedness. Furthermore, several aid sources have aggregate limits with regards to award amounts and the number of semesters of eligibility.

Unfortunately, without federal aid, many students cannot persist to graduation. As a result, both students and colleges alike must be fully cognizant of the fact that aid eligibility is not an entitlement. Rather, it is earned (and retained) by good academic success (acceptable grades and successful course completion). One of the key reasons for aid ineligibility at most colleges is the students' inability to meet federal Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) standards.

What can be done to remedy this issue of critical importance that directly impacts both graduation and retention rates? I suggest the following action items: 1) Students must have accountability for their

academic success. That is, they must meet the minimum cumulative GPA requirement for graduation each semester and earn a passing grade for all attempted courses. Additionally, undergraduate students should strive to complete 30 credit hours of required courses each academic year to stay on track for on-time degree completion. 2) Colleges must invest in the students they enroll by providing relevant and detailed course completion roadmaps, sufficient academic support, and quality advising to help ensure that students retain aid eligibility.

**Sharon:** Connie, your office lights are often on late at night, as well as early in the morning. I receive e-mails from you at all hours, day and night. Describe a typical day for you, including the kinds of interruptions you get. Contrast the parts of your schedule you keep in place with those that are non-negotiable.

**Connie:** Financial aid operations are fluid. Each day is just like a box of assorted chocolates—you never know what you will get. Therefore, aid professionals must be flexible, possess tenacity, and have a high-level of dedication over and beyond the normal workday. It is not uncommon to receive an escalated, time-sensitive inquiry from the president's office, the Department of Education, a student, parent, faculty member, etc., all on the same day without advance notice.

As a proven aid administrator, a win-win strategy that I deploy is to 'plan the work and then work the plan.' However, unexpected interruptions throughout the day will occur. In my years of experience, I can confidently and frankly say, this should be expected. Thus, aid directors must work many non-standard hours to meet operational and compliance deadline dates accordingly. Moreover, aid professionals must be servant-leaders and readily be willing to give of their time, talents, and treasures.

An easy, non-negotiable strategy is to utilize to-do lists since aid processing consists of so many moving parts coupled with personnel oversight (which in and of itself is very challenging), budget, compliance, and operational demands. Aid professionals cannot run the risk of letting any of the regulatory requirements fall to the ground as we are subject to aid audits on a routine basis.

Additionally, I would strongly recommend a work climate in the financial aid office that is predicated upon high-touch (open door policy to assist students and parents) and high-tech (IT support to imple-

ment complex and often time-sensitive aid regulations). We used this model on the SABRE team, when we provided to everyone on campus different types of “just in time” training—via many different delivery systems—as well as post go-live support. Finally, given today’s enrollment landscape, colleges should deploy proven financial leveraging strategies as another viable option to attract and retain students.

**Sharon:** Before SABRE, at one time, you worked in a “one stop shop,” where staff members were supposed to be cross trained in all enrollment management functions. Did that work out?

**Connie:** In theory, I believe the “one stop shop” model has merit. However, in practice, it is very problematic—especially for aid professionals. Every college that participates in the federal (Title IV) aid programs must have a designated individual responsible for oversight and compliance. Additionally, pursuant to Administrative Capability regulations (668.16), the financial aid office (FAO) must be staffed with an adequate number of aid professionals who possess a strong working knowledge of regulatory requirements.

The “one stop shop” model consists of generalists and specialists with varying degrees of aid knowledge. As a result, students are bounced around and given different and sometimes conflicting information. Additionally, the model lacked accountability and administrative oversight for campus-wide aid compliance as multiple directors had equal (but often conflicting) decision-making authority. It is my firm belief that the stand-alone financial aid office model with campus-wide, top-down support is the best aid processing and compliance model for all stakeholders. Finally, colleges must understand that the enforcement of financial aid regulatory requirements are an institutional, campus-wide responsibility (not just the FAO’s charge).

**C&U:** Sharon, Connie has remained a financial aid professional throughout her career. You have moved on to serve as a campus and SUNY governance leader. In what ways did your experiences with the SABRE project help you in your career? What didn’t you know when you started, that you figured out by the time the full-time project ended?

**Sharon:** Well, interesting that you ask. You’ve heard people say, “What I didn’t know could fill a book!” In my case, I actually did fill a book! In 2005, AACRAO published my third book, *Student Information Systems: A*

*Guide to Implementation Success*. The book contains two research studies, along with discussions of the key topics I wish I’d known at the start of our project. These included collaborations,<sup>2</sup> leadership, change,<sup>3</sup> and establishing campus buy-in and teams that work. As you can see, I had experience, and scholarship, on several of these topics in advance of the SABRE project, but I still had a lot to learn.

I would say that I have become even more proficient in dealing with ambiguity, conflict management, time management, problem solving, and building effective teams while effectively managing vision and purpose. Needless to say, my self-knowledge grew exponentially.

**C&U:** Of all you both learned about a system implementation, what do you each think was really the most important?

**Sharon and Connie:** (together, laughing) That’s easy—effective communication (a two-way exchange of information).

**Sharon:** We first had to learn to speak the same language among the team. I remember a discussion of “waivers.” It was a heated and confusing discussion, until we finally realized that some of us were talking about academic waivers, and others about financial or registration waivers. We laughed, but it became clear to me that the challenge for members of our team was for us to become bi-lingual. When we were able to fluently speak each other’s languages, we were beginning to find ways to work successfully together. We enforced the ‘one voice’—‘one echo’ concept by creating elevator stories that resulted in heightened integrity and trust from campus constituencies, and they greatly diminished implementation misperceptions.

**Connie:** One of the strategies we used was to create a student (we picked a gender-neutral name, Jamie) who we used for all our training materials—for students, staff, and faculty. We crafted materials (taking full advantage of our marketing department specialists) that used a “frequently asked questions” approach for different topics. Instead of creating one huge reference guide, we put together separate materials on important topics, and targeted them at individuals

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<sup>2</sup> See Cramer (1998; 2006).  
<sup>3</sup> See Stivers and Cramer (2009).

in different roles on campus. Twenty years later, the formats/templates we designed are still in use.

**Sharon:** We found that not only did we have to learn to have a common vocabulary within the team, we had to prepare the entire campus for the changes ahead. We used a grant for a three-part model for planning the transition from the old way (our home-grown system) to the new (the OSS), in which 235 people participated:

- ◆ Transition workshops (six half-day sessions)
  - for clerical staff members (for CSEA staff, paid for through a CSEA grant)
  - Faculty/professional staff (paid for through a different union grant)
- ◆ A full day program for campus administrators, IT implementation leads, enrollment management directors, governance leaders, academic department chairs.

**Connie:** Our strategic goal was to prepare the campus for new ways of working (from paper to online processing), and different ways of thinking (change management). Jobs that many people had been doing automatically for years, with no need to concentrate, would now take longer, and require careful attention.

**Sharon:** Our communication strategies were the results of suggestions from several key groups we developed for our project—in addition to our Steering Committee, we had a Policy Advisory Committee, Transition Leadership Network<sup>4</sup> and Voices of Experience<sup>5</sup> panels.

Multiple meetings, communication vehicles, hotline telephone number, and dedicated e-mail address combined with training to yield a campus that was prepared for the transition. My favorite session in advance of online grading was, “If Hank can do it, anybody can.” We selected a senior professor who was widely known as a Luddite. We invited him to stand up in front of a room full of people, to give him instructions for the first time during that session, and

to have him assign grades to students in an imaginary class. He was a good sport, made a few mistakes, but eventually was able to finish his grading.

**C&U:** Sharon, you mentioned that you thought being involved in campus governance help the SABRE project to be successful. Please explain.

**Sharon:** Because I was a senator at the time the project started (and was re-elected during the time I was leading the SABRE Project), I was able to do/facilitate the following:

- ◆ Provide formal updates
- ◆ Respond to informal questions, prior to/following a Senate meeting, or during the regularly scheduled “constituent questions” that were part of monthly Senate meetings
- ◆ Product demonstrations (notably, online registration and online grading);
- ◆ Dispelling rumors
- ◆ Responding the relevant campus initiatives discussed in the Senate (*e.g.*, issues related to academic advisement)
- ◆ Sharing of budget information

I believe that governance, with which I have been involved for 27 years,<sup>6</sup> is the linchpin for implementations. When used on a tire, the linchpin keeps the wheel from falling off. For implementations, the governance body serves to make sure that individuals (senators, administrators, students, observers) are involved in the evolution of the implementation from the start. During the period leading up to our first online grading, I reassured members of the Senate that we would not “go live” until we were 100 percent confident that we had a completely reliable product. Shortly thereafter, I was stopped by one of our more cantankerous faculty members, who looked me in the eye and said, “I believe you.” Without governance being directly connected to the implementation, I do not believe her trust could have been won.

My “Final Report” to the Senate at the conclusion of the project included the following lessons learned:

- ◆ Continue to incorporate technology updates into the Senate agendas, by inviting commentary/written reports as needed
- ◆ Continue to raise questions and concerns about the SABRE system

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<sup>4</sup> This was a group of people we selected, based on applications, who represented different campus buildings and roles. We met with them before, during and after the major initiatives (*e.g.*, registration and grading) and took their advice. We asked them what to continue, what to start, what to stop). Many of the secretaries in the group had never been invited to give their opinions, had never been listened to. I saw one of them recently—fifteen years after these meetings—and she remarked fondly about how being a member of the group was a memorable experience.

<sup>5</sup> We invited local and distant academic colleagues who had been involved with implementations to be candid with us about their experiences, and give us suggestions for how to circumvent difficulties.

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<sup>6</sup> See Cramer and Knuepfer (In Press); Cramer (2017a; 2017b).

- ◆ Keep the attitude of giving those evolving the SABRE system “the benefit of the doubt” when changes are about to take place
- ◆ Honor the faultfinders

“The last five years have been an education for me personally. I have learned that there is much to be gained from people who find fault. I have also learned, as Roger Fisher taught me when I served in the Senate in 1996, to separate the way someone says something from what they are saying, so that we can all ‘get to yes’ together. The challenges the faultfinders have placed before me, and the SABRE team, have made us strive toward excellence.”

**C&U:** We understand a 20-year reunion is being planned for the team for this summer. What will be part of the get-together?

**Sharon:** We are sure to have a “remember when” jar of funny memories.

We had several babies born to team members (and one grand baby) during the project—we will want to see pictures!

Over these decades, we have experienced deaths—one team member, several spouses, a family member—so we will take some time to remember them.

**Connie:** We will celebrate each other and take pride in serving as integral members of the SABRE team. Finally, we will acknowledge the noteworthy contributions of our talented, competent, and organic leader, Dr. Sharon Cramer, as she indeed was the wind beneath our wings.

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### About the Authors

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**Connie Cooke** holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Canisius College and a Master of Science in Student Personnel Administration from SUNY Buffalo State College. Cooke has more than 28 years of professional and supervisory experience working in the financial aid industry. She currently serves as the Director of Financial Aid at Buffalo State College. Cooke is a proven servant leader, and she is recognized for her integrity, strong work-ethic, and advocacy efforts to assist students. Recently, Cooke was selected as a 2019 recipient of the President’s Award for Excellence in Service to the College. vCooke has a strong commitment to family and her faith. She is fully cognizant of the fact that it is God and the unconditional love from her family that made it possible for her to attain educational, professional, and community achievements.

**Sharon F. Cramer, Ph.D.**, a SUNY Distinguished Service Professor Emerita, was a faculty member at SUNY Buffalo State, from 1985–2011. During her career, she served as an academic leader, in roles that included department chair (1995–1999), executive director of a Student Information System team (SABRE) (1999–2004), chair of the College Senate (2007–2010), and chair of the Governance Committee of the SUNY University Faculty Senate (2007–2010). She was an officer, on the Board of Directors, of four professional and governance organizations, and received the highest award from each of them. She served as Parliamentarian for the SUNY University Faculty Senate (UFS) 2011–2019, and was recognized for her contributions to the UFS with the Chugh Award in 2011, and the “Senator Emerita” award in 2015.

Dr. Cramer has given more than 120 presentations and keynotes in 23 states and two provinces in Canada. She completed her Ph.D. studies at New York University, earned an M.A.T. degree from Harvard University, and a B.A. from Tufts University. Her publication record includes three academic books, editing two volumes, and co-editing a third, on shared governance (published by SUNY Press in 2017); 26 scholarly articles; 32 reflective essays published in the Buffalo News; and nine chapters in academic publications. Her sustained academic scholarship led to receipt of the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017 for career longevity and unwavering excellence in chosen field, from the Marquis Who’s Who Publication Board (given to fewer than 5% of those listed in their Who’s Who publications). She is listed in Who’s Who in America (2006–present), Who’s Who in American Education (2006–present), and Who’s Who in American Women (2008–present).

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## Three Years and Counting: Lessons from a Newbie to a Newbie

*By Joseph Wolk*

Transitioning to a new role can be challenging whether at one's current institution or at a new one. Often, the resources that are meant to help with the transition are written by those who have been in the field for many years and who are far removed from the excitement, trepidation, and, at times, uncertainty that may attend a new role. As a "new-ish" registrar approaching my third year in the role, this article is written *by* the newbie *for* the newbie. Many of the challenges I describe are situations you are currently confronting (or have recently confronted). They range from shifting mindset to the importance of strategic relationships, from managing expectations/effective change management to early wins and building on momentum. Finally, I discuss learning from failure and, perhaps one of the most important topics in the high-pressure role we hold, self-care. Whether this serves as a blueprint for how you approach your new role or as a grain of salt in your recipe of success, I hope you find this useful, relatable, and relevant.

### Shifting Mindset

As registrar, one is expected to be the hub of knowledge, having all the answers and just waiting for the question to be asked. Yet being new to a role, one should feel empowered to first gain the institutional knowledge needed to be successful. This can be challenging, especially if you were a "funky tech" for a number of years (as I was), continually on the go, having a report to

write, a problem to fix, or a student to see. It can be a struggle to make the transition from active firefighter to station chief. From day one, the registrar role will challenge you in different ways. While time may have been consumed previously by constant business, the role of registrar places different demands on one's time.

Whether it be endless meetings, big-picture planning, or having to make the final decision, this is all an adjustment. Shifting mindsets proved extremely challenging for me and took some time to get used to. In those early weeks, I questioned my ability to rise to the occasion, feeling (as most new leaders do) that the "knowledge mountain" ahead of me was insurmountable. One of the greatest challenges can be to move past "I should know this" to swallow one's pride and tap in to the resources available in the office and throughout the institution. This is especially true if you are working at a new institution with unfamiliar policies, procedures, and politics. Once we give ourselves the freedom to learn, a major barrier to success—ego—breaks down. As the "newbie" on campus, take the slack given as you get your bearings, learn what areas you need to enhance (your knowledge or skills), and expand those capacities. Knowing and tapping in to my strengths (strong interpersonal skills and being process minded and highly collaborative) allowed me to harness natural abilities while building up my institutional wiki. Take time to identify your strengths, and leverage them as you familiarize yourself with the new landscape.

## Strategic Relationships/ Partnerships

As you get your bearings, learn who the institutional players are; begin with your team. Investing time up front with staff members helps lay a strong foundation by affirming your willingness to listen; establishes open lines of communication; and, most important, builds comfort and trust. For me, this meant spending the first three weeks meeting with each team member, learning who they were as employees, identifying what they believed to be their strengths, and hearing what they believed worked well in the office and what they believed could be improved. Most important, I asked them their expectations of me as registrar, set my own expectations, and asked them to share any professional goals they had while affirming my commitment to helping them work to achieve them, whether those goals were at the institution or beyond.

These conversations require a significant investment of time, but some of the cues you can pick up—for example, regarding work and communication styles—can prevent missteps in the future. After focusing solely on your internal team, meet with each of the academic deans. These meetings will help you understand historical relationships and gain awareness of institutional politics as well as hear what the deans' hopes and aspirations are. This will also give you a sense of what opportunities they believe are important to explore. These “listening tours” will open lines of communication early and will help break down the “invisible wall” between registrar and academic areas so you can begin forming strategic relationships and partnerships.

The final communication channel to focus on is with your boss. This critical interaction will allow you to establish expectations, set goals, and understand your boss's view of your role at the institution. It should also serve as an opportunity for you to establish expectations regarding what support you need in order to be successful and “educate up” about what exactly a registrar and registrar's office do. The greater your boss's understanding of the work you do, the more effective ally and advocate your boss can be. That unwritten contract not only helps establish boundaries but also supports expectations and adds an important “breadcrumb” as you map your path forward.

## Managing Expectations/ Change Management

Much of your first few months should be spent listening, observing, and resisting the urge to try to change things that seem new and foreign. By taking time to listen, you may learn the history behind processes and policies that will help clarify “why we do it that way.” It is essential as a new leader to understand the history and functional processes before attempting to make any major changes. Having ideas, thoughts, or changes to suggest is normal, but appreciating the context of process and having a level of knowledge and respect for existing practices is critical.

If you want to evaluate a specific process, take the time to hear first-hand from the person who is responsible for it. This will provide invaluable insight (such as how long a process has been structured a certain way) and will allow the team member to feel engaged in the conversation about any changes you may propose. Having a strategic partner makes the first process change that much easier. If, months into your role and after your various meetings, you find that you aren't sure about which direction to go, review notes from your listening tours. What are the pain points for staff? Providing a solution to their concern will help secure some early wins. This, in turn, will allow two important things to happen: it will resolve an issue brought to your attention, and it will reaffirm your commitment to open communication and feedback. Be sure, however, that any change is implemented for a *strategic* reason; never implement change for change's sake.

## Getting Some Early Wins

How long one should wait before making any major changes will differ for each leader. I found it helpful to establish a timeline: I gave myself six full months to learn on the job before proposing any major changes. What the appropriate timeline is will vary by institution, culture, office, etc. Proceed cautiously; an early misstep can prove challenging to overcome. As you plan to make that first change, I hope you will find that the time you invested in getting to know your staff, institutional players, policies, and practices provides the foundation necessary to implement your initiative successfully.

A few small early wins will help build confidence and momentum. For me these were revamping forms to remove unnecessary steps as well as submitting and having my upcoming year project requests (document imaging and electronic transcripts) approved. The form revision that positively impacted the work of our team provided an immediate win, and the projects provided two important stops on the GPS for the upcoming year.

## Building on Momentum

Use information from your listening tours, personal goals, and institutional priorities to set realistic goals and expectations. As difficult as it may be, understanding when and how to say no is a vital skill to learn early. Otherwise, priorities can quickly shift from yours to others'. You will find that as you begin this process, themes will emerge that will help shape the direction in which you want to go. Find a sounding board—a former coworker, a registrar listserv, a regional colleague, or a trusted campus partner. It's invaluable to have someone of whom to ask, "Am I crazy for trying to do this or for saying no to this request?"

This will be extremely helpful when you need to craft a mission, vision, departmental values, and strategic plan. By knowing the direction in which projects are going, you can more effectively articulate the vision to your team. If you can connect the projects being undertaken to the work staff members do and explain how implementation will positively impact their day-to-day tasks, it will generate a bit of excitement and help with buy-in. Every team member's learning style will be different, so knowing ahead of time and not adopting a one-size-fits-all approach can prevent a common misstep. Creating a "transparent" environment will foster intentional and honest dialogue.

## Learning from Failure

As registrars, we strive for perfection because so much of our job is dependent on accuracy. But it's those moments of imperfection and how we respond to them that teach us the most. For me, this "moment" was a registration crash on senior priority day. In the moment, it was one of the scariest events in my career. Yet that experience reminded me of the importance of clear communication, contingency planning, and leading

through chaos. In fact, the experience helped clarify that a false expectation had arisen because we had enjoyed eight years of successful priority registration without issue. Aside from the system/vendor issue that caused the problem, we were able to collaborate cross-institutionally to develop and implement a contingency plan that clearly identified decision-making paths, established an integrated communication plan, and prepared proactive measures to mitigate such a problem in the future. Should such a challenge present itself, trust your instincts, learn from it, plan for the future, and do your best to support those around you in the midst of it.

## Self-Care

While the work we do is essential to the institutions we support, we also must make sure that we take care of ourselves. You know what works best for you, but be sure to find time for yourself. Whether it is coffee with a colleague or attending a lunch-and-learn event—whatever it is, commit to it, for your sake. Make an additional commitment to your professional growth and development. Attending the 2018 AACRAO annual meeting made it possible for me to connect with colleagues from across the country and to learn some best practices—and even to share some I've learned along the way. Such opportunities can refresh and reenergize you. If attending a national conference isn't in your budget, connect with your regional registrar organization instead.

While I chose to attend nearly two and a half years after becoming registrar, the Registrar 101 workshop proved tremendously valuable for me to connect with other "new-ish" registrars, to hear some of the challenges they had faced, and to offer lessons I had learned. Even though it would have been extremely helpful to attend earlier in my tenure as registrar, it served an equally important role by providing the opportunity to expand my professional network, to make intentional lasting connections, to hear what was new and exciting in the field, as well as to share insights I had learned. Too often we forget that such opportunities enable us not only to help ourselves but also to set an example for others.

While it is important to promote opportunities for professional development, the value of work/life balance is equally important. We work extremely hard

throughout the year; to avoid burnout, we must take care of ourselves and those around us. I try to do this in a few ways: by being flexible about scheduling as family matters arise, by encouraging team members to take the vacation time they have; and by promoting “disconnecting” when we leave the office. This important boundary is something I tried to set when I began serving as registrar. I let my provost know up front that family is an important part of my life, and spending intentional time with them helps ensure that I am focused and refreshed when I am on campus. You know best what recharges you: Be mindful of it and commit to it, not only for the benefit of yourself and your family, but also for that of your team and institution.

Your first year as registrar will be invaluable: You will increase your capacity to lead, learn the value of strategic partnerships and relationships across campus, and enjoy successes as well as failures. Most important, you will develop an even greater appreciation of the work that

registrars do. To all new and aspiring registrars, I welcome you and hope that what I have written will answer some of the many questions you have. Know that you are not in this alone: Your support network is immeasurable. We are only a phone call, e-mail, or text away.

I challenge you to invest your time in listening; to capitalize on opportunities for collaboration; to attend that conference or workshop; and, most important, rather than embody someone else’s style, to know what your strengths are—what has brought you to where you are—and to run with it. That is when we truly define ourselves as leaders. Remember: No one wakes up and says, “When I am older, I am going to be a registrar.” Whether your path has led you step by step to where you are or you are stepping unexpectedly into uncharted territory, no book will have all the answers you seek. You will learn along the way, but most of what you need to succeed is within you. It is the steps along the way that have prepared you to succeed where you are today.

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### *About the Author*

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**Joseph Wolk** is the Registrar at Bridgewater State University in Bridgewater, MA and has more than ten years of progressive experience in the Registrar field. He holds a Masters of Education in Administration of Higher Education from Suffolk University. Wolk has presented numerous times at the NEACRAO regional conference, most recently receiving the Best of State and Regional award for his 2018 session, *Crash Into Me: Lesson on Leading Through Chaos, Planning for the Unexpected, and Shifting from Survive to Thrive*. He also had the opportunity to represent NEACRAO and present this session at the 2019 AACRAO Annual Meeting.

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## TES-ting the Waters of Transfer Technology

By Amber Andrade

Working in the higher education spectrum, one could assume that transfer students are more knowledgeable than new students. However, the transfer population often has unique concerns, including fretfulness about the idea of attending a new university and, most importantly, how their coursework will transfer over (Montgomery 2015).

The rapidly changing higher education landscape offers transfer students more choices for achieving their educational goals. In order to be competitive in this environment, four-year institutions must be prepared to respond to the needs of transfer students (Montgomery 2015).

According to *The Transfer Handbook Promoting Student Success* (Montgomery 2015), universities must continue to both provide transfer students with information about the transfer process—beginning at the recruitment stage—and offer resources that ensure successful assimilation into and matriculation from the university.

In the Online and Professional Studies Division (OPS) of California Baptist University, one of our goals is to be a transfer-friendly institution. Over the past few years, we've taken strides toward using technology to make the process of transferring courses as easy and consistent as possible. Two web-based tools have proven to be very useful for researching transfer credit, tracking evaluations, managing equivalencies, and, most importantly, serving students to the best of our capability. This article provides some tips for using CollegeSource's Transfer Evaluation System.

### Transfer Evaluation System

In fall 2014 we began using a CollegeSource product called the Transfer Evaluation System, or "TES". TES is a course-description database. The database contains complete course details, including course code, title, description, and number of credits. TES also includes a suite of tools aimed to streamline processes, including the administration and maintenance of course equivalencies.

At the beginning, we were not utilizing all the tools TES has to offer. We primarily used TES for course descriptions. That was helpful, because who has hours to look up course catalogs? But looking up transfer courses is only the first step in transfer evaluation; articulating those courses to our own courses is also a huge task, and it's where human and system errors can create real frustration. Who has time to create spreadsheets to record how we articulated every course? Could we rely on our brilliant minds to record the thousands of courses that pass our desks, or trust our SIS to record every course articulation correctly? As it turned out, there was a robust online tool easily available that could solve these problems, and we weren't using it. Not because we chose to ignore it—we simply didn't know it existed.

### Equivalency Manager

We discovered that TES has a feature for building and storing transfer equivalencies. It's a simple process: you select an incoming course, identify the equivalent

course, add details such as effective dates, public/private notes, and whether or not it is visible or hidden, and then save the equivalency right in TES. And voila, just like that, we had an equivalency management table identifying how we articulate courses. This enabled us to streamline our articulation process, improve consistency in how we articulate courses, and saved a ton of time! We now have the option of pushing through a transcript review in just minutes.

At first, we had around five equivalencies, and our goal was to increase that number quickly. From fall 2014 through summer 2017, we built more than 25,000 equivalencies in TES, with plans of displaying the equivalencies on our website. We managed to do this with two staff, including myself. The design of TES is intuitive, so just an hour a day can go a long way. My transcript analyst and I had a tight action plan. First, we watched every webinar and tutorial video out there, utilized the resources available through ColleagueSource, and picked their specialist's brains. We started adding equivalencies with our feeder schools, and as new courses came in, we added those equivalencies

accordingly. We also took advantage of a tool in TES called the Equivalency Explorer. Here we could review equivalencies created by other institutions involving our courses. We didn't always articulate the courses the same way, but it was another way to add to our equivalency count. From summer 2017 to fall 2017, our count grew to more than 76,000.

### Group Reports

Another great feature of TES is its capability to use stored equivalencies to create Group Reports. These reports can be used for Articulation Agreements, Transfer Pathways, etc., and can be displayed in your Public View. We are currently in the process of creating Transfer Pathways now, which are basically roadmaps for students transferring to a four-year institution. We plan to create pathways for our GE, lower-division major courses, and ADT's (Associate's Degrees for Transfer).

These two tools, which we previously didn't know existed, far surpass what we were initially able to do with TES. We are no longer just looking up course content, but are streamlining our articulation process and creat-

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| <p><b>SEM AND INSTITUTIONAL SUCCESS</b></p> <p>Proposes an innovative student-centric SEM planning model aimed at helping institutions improve enrollment and financial outcomes while advancing student access and success.</p> | <p><b>MANAGING FOR OUTCOMES</b></p> <p>Transforms process-oriented managers into successful outcomes-oriented leaders.</p> | <p><b>SEM: TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION</b></p> <p>Provides a roadmap for the required paradigm shift, building on the solid foundation of prior SEM practice and offering insights to new approaches that lead to sustainable SEM efforts.</p> | <p><b>SEM CORE CONCEPTS</b></p> <p>Defines SEM and discusses the evolution of SEM, the essential SEM concepts, and building a road map for transforming an institution into a SEM organization.</p> | <p><b>SEM HANDBOOK</b></p> <p>The comprehensive text on the policies, strategies, and practices that shape postsecondary enrollments.</p> | <p><b>SEM AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE</b></p> <p>Identifies the vital and unique enrollment issues confronting two-year colleges and suggests effective strategies for resolving them.</p> | <p><b>SEM IN CANADA</b></p> <p>Describes how Canadian colleges and universities are using SEM to improve student and institutional outcomes.</p> |
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ing roadmaps for students. TES is clearly providing the tools for us, but how could we showcase this information as a recruitment tool for prospective students?

## Transferology

In spring 2016, I attended a session on Transferology, a companion product of TES. Transferology is a nationwide network designed to help students explore their college transfer options. It makes the equivalencies created in TES easily accessible to students, thereby assisting students, parents, and college advisors in making educated decisions when transferring credit. Students can enter the courses they've taken and see how they will transfer to various schools. By streamlining and highlighting the transfer process, Transferology also provides opportunities for marketing our school and programs to potential students.

We launched Transferology in fall 2017. All of those equivalencies we worked so hard for paid off as they showcased just how transfer-friendly we are.

Transferology Lab is an extension of Transferology designed to support the needs of staff at colleges and universities that are part of the network. In the Lab, users review and manage student interest, access ad-

vising resources like equivalency lookups, and optimize their institution's transfer-friendliness by fine-tuning equivalency and profile data. Administrators can also use the Lab to create, update, or deactivate Lab user accounts. Users who have both Transferology and TES accounts use the same login credentials for both programs. Transferology is the students' experience, and the Lab provides us the opportunity to showcase everything we have to offer.

## Conclusion

Today, technology is used as a solution for four primary functions in dealing with transfer. First, it is used to provide information to students. Second, institutions use technology to recruit students. Third, using technology reduces staffing costs by reducing the need for manual processing. Fourth, technology meets the needs of transfer student populations (Montgomery 2015). By storing equivalencies in TES and sharing them through Transferology, we've been able to maintain efficiency and consistency in articulating courses and easily provide students information on how their courses will transfer. Together, these tools have revolutionized the way we serve our students.

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### *About the Author*

**Amber Andrade** has earned her B.A. and M.B.A. at California Baptist University, where she currently works as the Assistant Registrar for the university's Online Division. She has worked in higher education for more than ten years and provides leadership and direction in transcript and records.

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# Diploma Mills and Counterfeit Operations

By Allen Ezell

*Editor's Note: This is the first of three articles on academic fraud. This article describes the history and growth of diploma mills and counterfeit operations. The second article will focus on Axact, the world's largest diploma mill (a true criminal enterprise). The third will detail how to identify diploma mills.*

Academic document fraud is a global problem. Academic fraud in the United States affects education and business communities here and abroad. Similarly, fraudulent activities outside the United States affect U.S. academic institutions and business communities. Diplomas and transcripts sold abroad, purportedly in the names of U.S. institutions, undermine the legitimacy and reputation of all U.S. colleges and universities. Fraudulent documents have lifecycles of fifteen to twenty years, especially in light of the curriculum vitae and resumes they support.

Both here and abroad, one goal is the same, despite differences in landscapes, languages, and laws: protect higher education institutions' integrity as well as that of their diplomas and transcripts. Law enforcement's shared goal is to apprehend, prosecute, and convict fraudsters and put them out of business. Then, their focus is to identify the "graduates."

## Background of the Diploma

Centuries ago, kings utilized parchment for official documents and proclamations and to certify events or

as a charter, grant, or land transfer. Colleges and universities used it to certify a student's completion of a course of study or program (Ezell and Bear 2005).

The College de Sorbonne, founded in 1257 by Robert de Sorbonne, was one of the first significant colleges of the medieval University of Paris. By the 14th century, the best library in Europe was at the University of Paris. Only those individuals who had earned a doctoral diploma were admitted to the library. The universities at Oxford and Cambridge did not have good libraries, though they did award doctorates. People soon learned that a forged or fake Oxford or Cambridge doctorate could be used to gain admission to the Sorbonne library; as a result, fake Oxford and Cambridge diplomas proliferated. This marked the beginning of the counterfeiting of university diplomas (Ezell and Bear 2005).

## Fraudulent Diplomas: Colonial Era and Thereafter

Fraudulent diplomas date at least to colonial times. In his annual reports of 1876 through 1881, John Eaton, a U.S. Commissioner of Education, indicated that the sale of degrees had become commonplace as early as 1730.

By the 1880s, there were many diploma mills in the United States, but as public awareness increased, states revoked the business charters of many. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, fraudulent medical schools sold fake medical doctor credentials. No federal laws precluded this conduct; everything was left to individual states.

Phony doctors avoided the law by traveling to nearby states. In 1924, the U.S. Senate held public hearings entitled “Abuses in Medical Education, etc.” (Cope-land 1924). Although no new laws resulted from these hearings, the existing mail fraud statute was amended to prohibit any degree from being issued solely on the basis of completed correspondence courses. The continued growth of diploma mills suggests this was not enforced. Fraudulent correspondence schools continued to be a national problem through World War II, servicemembers’ return home, and passage of the GI Bill.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the number of fraudulent schools continued to increase, to more than 100. Diploma mills and fraudulent correspondence schools flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. Initially, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service investigated; this publicity, coupled with prosecution of the schools in U.S. District Court, reduced the numbers. But the fraud proved too lucrative to stop. When postal inspectors stopped investigating, the number of diploma mills increased significantly, to approximately 400 to 500 by the end of this period. In early 1980, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began investigating academic fraud.

## Operation DIPSCAM (Diploma Scam)

### **Southeastern University, Greenville, South Carolina**

In 1980, a source advised me (a special agent of the FBI, Charlotte, NC) that the president of Southeastern University, in Greenville, South Carolina, was selling diplomas and transcripts. The source later introduced me by telephone (recorded conversation) to the school’s president, Alfred Jarrette, and I negotiated to buy my bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees (all back-dated and with no academic work completed). I sent the president \$3,000 by mail; in turn, he sent me diplomas and transcripts. I had not completed any of the courses reflected on the transcripts.

Thereafter, a cooperating senior vice president of nearby Bank of North Carolina in Charlotte sent a letter to Jarrette indicating that I had applied for a position and requested verification of my academic credentials from SEU, which Jarrette verified by return mail. Jarrette then invited me to visit his school. When I visited, he showed me their filing cabinet containing

eleven years of “graduate” files, including my own, and recruited me to raise funds for his “university” (and to keep one-third for myself).

I returned to Charlotte and shared all I had learned with the assistant U.S. attorney (AUSA). AUSA wanted a third agent to attempt to purchase a diploma from Southeastern University Theological Seminary (SEUTS), another school Jarrette was operating (in the Virgin Islands), to demonstrate that it, too, was fraudulent. The third agent negotiated for the purchase of his master’s degree in divinity for \$5,000. Jarrette was shocked when we arrived at SEU (in fact located in his home) at the scheduled time and date—this time as FBI agents with a federal search warrant. We interviewed Jarrette, executed the search warrant, and took all documents relating to his “university” and “seminary.” The next day we learned that Jarrette had committed suicide. Over an eleven-year period, he had sold 620 fraudulent academic documents to 171 federal, state, and country employees. We then started tracking down many of the “graduates.”

This single investigation led the FBI into an eleven-year effort to eliminate diploma mills in the United States. During DIPSCAM, the Charlotte FBI office opened more than 75 cases on suspected fraudulent schools in the United States and abroad. DIPSCAM identified 40 degrees that had been purchased, convicted 21 individuals, and dismantled 40 schools. The names of 12,000 “graduates” were added to the DIPSCAM database. Schools ranged from sole proprietorships to more complex operations run by six to seven family members. Some rented their accreditation whereas others ran their own accreditation mills using foreign addresses. Some operated in plain sight while others operated under the guise of a religious organization.

## What is a Diploma Mill?

The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) (2008) defines a diploma mill as follows:

*(A) (i) offers, for a fee, degrees, diplomas, or certificates that may be used to represent to the general public that the individuals possessing such a degree, diploma, or certificate had completed a program of postsecondary education or training; and (ii) requires such individual to complete little or no education or coursework to obtain such degree, diploma, or certificate; and (B) lacks*

*accreditation by an accrediting agency or association that is recognized as an accrediting agency or association of institutions of higher education (as such term is defined in section 102) by—(i) the Secretary pursuant to subpart 2 of part H of title IV; or (ii) a federal agency, state government, or other organization or association that recognizes accrediting agencies or associations.*

Diploma mills are supported by accreditation, facilities, faculty, and student body. Because accreditation gives schools legitimacy, it is probably the most important “pillar.” Today, diploma mills create their own accreditation organizations in order to accredit themselves. No physical addresses are given, only Web addresses. Occasionally, the accreditation mill lists the institutions it purports to accredit.

It may be more likely for fraudulent academic credentials to exist in the United States than in other countries because no specific federal criminal statutes outlaw diploma mills, accreditation mills, counterfeit diploma operations, or rogue credential evaluation companies. In 2013–14, the “Diploma and Accreditation Integrity Protection Act” (113th Congress) died in committee. Rep. Timothy Bishop (D-New York) introduced several other bills (in 2010, 2011 and 2013) that proposed federal legislation against diploma mill fraudsters, but they died in committee, thus were never enacted (HR 2234 2013).

Congress has been reactive rather than proactive with regard to diploma mills, accreditation mills, and counterfeit operations. Public hearings were held in 1924, 1984, 1985, and 2004 after considerable publicity about phony physicians and tax dollars being used to reimburse federal employees for their fraudulent academic credentials. Since 1924, no criminal legislation has emerged from any of these hearings. Perhaps even more surprising is that the officials of Union University and Lexington University, which awarded diplomas and transcripts to committee investigators posing as Congressman Claude Pepper and, later, Senator Susan Collins, were not prosecuted.

## The Scope

This worldwide, multi-billion-dollar industry is growing annually. There is no one source that maintains records on the numbers of these criminal entities. As an expert in the field for nearly 40 years, I believe there

are at least 5,000 diploma mills are in operation today, 1,500 accreditation mills, and more than 500 counterfeit diploma and transcript websites. There are even diploma mill review sites that feature reviews (typically submitted by a competitor) as means of generating more business.

Fifty states (and the District of Columbia) have statutes regarding colleges and universities, with some having statutes regarding diploma mills, accreditation mills, and counterfeiters. Beyond varying state statutes are different ideas regarding enforcement, which varies by jurisdiction. The following states have the most diploma mills: California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, and Mississippi (Ridenbaugh Press 2008). As one state cracks down on diploma mills, operators move to another.

## The Internet: The Fraudster’s Dream (A Game Changer)

The Internet as we know it became available in mid 1995 and is described as the “virtual world.” Virtual means “almost, or nearly as described, but not completely;” in computing, it means “not physically existing as such” (Lexico 2019). “Virtual” thus describes thousands of fake schools that exist only on a server (probably with a disguised registration) and that feature a slick-looking web page filled with fantastic photos (stolen from other sites) of smiling students and faculty and magnificent buildings. Content about course offerings, admission requirements, and alumni round out their websites.

Fraudsters quickly saw the potential of the Internet to host content about their schools and to sell their wares worldwide at low cost. Gone are the advertisements in newspapers and magazines, flyers and other direct mail (as is boiler room phone solicitation). Gone too are the tabloids and magazine advertisements. In their place are “pop-ups” and “banner” advertisements, unsolicited e-mails (spam), and more. Post office boxes have been replaced by e-mail and online banking. Technology enables one’s neighbor to operate diploma mills ostensibly from Buffalo, Seattle, Key West, Boise, Hong Kong, and Cambodia.

According to Liedke (2019), 4.1 billion people use the Internet, which comprises more than 1.94 billion active websites using 1,508 domain extensions with 342 million registered domain names. China, India, and the United States rank ahead of all other countries in terms

of numbers of Internet users. Internet-influenced retail sales totaled \$2.84 trillion in 2018. Axact.com states that the “Axact Education Unit caters to the \$461 billion industry.”

## Examples of Fraudulent Schools

### Inside Prisons

With assistance from a person on the “outside,” James V. Kirk, while serving a sentence for his nefarious activities at LaSalle University (which grossed \$35 million and more than 12,000 graduates), created Edison University. It had a Honolulu mail drop address and was later renamed Addison University and then Acton University. Kirk created the World Christian Church and used this to separate his schools’ activities from state regulations and statutes. After the IRS questioned his religious exemptions, he constructed a chapel on campus and hired a minister—and then fired the minister. Printed on the back of student transcripts was a statement indicating that all graduates automatically become members of the Worldwide Christian Church. Kirk also established his own accrediting entity at a Washington, D.C., address. Kirk was arrested by the FBI, indicted by a federal grand jury, and forfeited a \$1.5 million river mansion, several luxury automobiles, and \$12.5 million in cash to the government. (Kent College, a sister school of LaSalle, indicates accreditation by the Council on Post Secondary Christian Education).

While a federal inmate (his third conviction for fraud), former Louisiana Senate President (and disbarred lawyer) Michael H. O’Keefe, Sr., became associated with Columbus University in New Orleans (now in Picayune, Mississippi) and reportedly ran the institution from “a distance” (*i.e.* his prison cell). Columbus offered law degrees for \$3,000 to \$4,000 and was eventually raided by the FBI.

Kenneth J. Shong, a Racine, Wisconsin, inmate who created Carlingford University (in England) while in custody later sold his “distance learning programs” to fellow inmates via their relatives. After two years, prison authorities learned of the scam, and just before Shong was to be released, he and another person were charged.

### Hiding Under the Umbrella of the Church (A Common Tactic)

Like LaSalle, many fraudulent schools hide behind the guise of a church. Hamilton University; Richardson University; and American State University, Honolulu (Hawaii) and Evanston (Wyoming) existed under the FION (Faith in the Order of Nature) Fellowship. They even constructed chapels. (Of course, with closed grounds and no students, there were neither worshipers nor church services.) The operator, Rudy Marn, was later arrested and convicted on tax fraud charges related to his schools.

The University of Berkley (UB), founded in Berkley, Michigan, and operating on the Internet today, has no physical address listed on its website<sup>1</sup> but may be operating from Ohio. The site does not show pictures of a school, and the only contact telephone number is a Chicago listing. UB claims to be “the educational arm of the Universal Pantheistic and Theosophical Society,” thus claiming religious school exemption. Degrees cost \$2,515 to \$3,505 with savings if prepaid; UB also offers an “expedited program.”

### “Operation Gold Seal”

Randolph Addison Davis Technical University (RADtu) is the non-existent virtual university established by the U.S. Secret Service during its investigation of St. Regis University (SRU) (Liberia and Mead, Washington). With RADtu as the cover story, agents purchased accreditation from the mill operators and then purchased several diplomas from one of their 120 fake schools, Robertstown University, in the name of several 9/11 terrorists. This case is unique because mill operators bribed numerous individuals in Nigeria to serve as faculty (and issued them monthly payments) to perpetuate the fraud; they also bribed the Deputy Chief of Mission in the Liberian Embassy to verify their legitimacy.

The USSS undercover operation found that SRU had 9,612 customers in 131 countries and had sold 10,815 diplomas grossing more than \$7,369,907 through 120 websites. SRU also had a fake medical school and offered 22 medical majors on its diplomas. SRU fraudsters also had an agreement with credential evaluator Career Consulting International (Sunrise, Florida) to “review” SRU transcripts. CCI would be paid for each transcript for which it declared the credits equivalent

<sup>1</sup> See <[berkley-u.edu](http://berkley-u.edu)>.



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to those of accredited U.S. institutions and which could thereby be used for H-1B visas. SRU also manufactured and sold counterfeit diplomas for 77 legitimate, accredited U.S. institutions. USSS arrested eight individuals in this case; all were convicted.

### Hiding Among Current Events

Brexit University (an Axact school) was created after the United Kingdom disclosed its plan to exit the European Union.

Homeland Security College<sup>2</sup> was registered in April 2003 in New York, though the site states that it was “established in October 2001 to provide a single source for high-level education and training in the field of counter-terrorism.” Some experts they have recruited “are recently retired former or present FBI agents...” HSU plans to build twelve campuses yet says they will be opening “60 campuses in the USA” and are “seeking 362 highly qualified professionals for each campus.”

<sup>2</sup> See <[homeland-security-college.org](http://homeland-security-college.org)>.

(The Ph.D., founder, president, and CEO of HSU was recently arrested for impersonating a federal agent.)

### Others

Lexington University is ostensibly located in Middletown, New York, though no address is listed on its website. This mill was operated by a disbarred attorney and sold a bachelor’s degree in biology and a master’s degree in medical technology, with honors, for \$1,500. These fraudulent diplomas and transcripts were displayed by Senator Collins at Senate hearings in May 2004 under the title “Bogus Degrees and Unmet Expectations: Are Taxpayer Dollars Subsidizing Diploma Mills?” Lexington claimed accreditation by the Higher Education Services Association (which also accredits Ellington and Stanton Universities). In conjunction with work by Government Accounting Office investigators, these hearings exposed 463 high-level federal employees with dubious degrees, including 143 who requested and received \$169,000 of federal funds as education reimbursement.

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## Managing Academic Space: A Guide for Higher Education Institutions

Space use and management is an integral part of operating a college or university. From scheduling classes to events, understanding how to effectively manage space can result in increased productivity, cost savings, and overall efficiency. Part case study and part how-to guide, *Managing Academic Space* uses the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) as a case study of how to significantly increase efficiency of space use.

*“For those integrally involved in managing space as well as those new to the increasingly important issue of utilization and scheduling, studying this Guide is time well-spent. Exploring the eight chapters and related information will provide leaders with insights on issues of space management currently utilized at their institution and their impact on students, faculty, and the community, as well as a wealth of new considerations — woven together in a publication that you will want to read, share with others, and implement.”*

David M. Sauter, University Registrar, Miami University - Ohio

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Concordia College and University Delaware (CCUD) was founded in 1999, incorporated in Delaware, and shows an office in Wilmington. It offers a “\$149 nationally accredited online degree program.” Accreditation is through the “United States National Academic Higher Education Agency in Washington, D.C., established in 1974.” CCUD awarded a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice to “Rocko,” the police dog at the Fostoria, Illinois, Police Department—ironically the same degree claimed by the chief of police. CCUD is still operating today.

Westmore College displays on its home page a picture of the skyline of the Parliament Building in London. All diplomas and transcripts come with an automatic 3.0 GPA; according to the college’s price schedule, customers who want a higher GPA may pay \$10 per point.

Al-Khalifa American University provides no address on its website but instead displays a picture of a magnificent multi-floor marble library building, the Butler Library of Columbia University. This library has appeared on numerous Axact fake school websites.

Almeda University was offered for sale in November 2006 with an “asking price” of \$2.3 to \$3.0 million. Almeda indicated that its gross revenue was \$3.2 million, with a cash flow of more than \$1.8 million (seller financing available). Almeda stated that its reason for selling was due to bad publicity after two cops were arrested with fake degrees from Almeda (NBC 2006). Almeda University later became part of Axact in Pakistan.

America’s General Delivery University (GDU) offers downloadable, instant, free diplomas.<sup>3</sup>

## Fake Degrees Open Opportunity for Potential Harm

Recent examples demonstrate how recipients of fake diplomas can cause significant harm to the public. For example, Gerald Morton Shirtoff assumed the identity of a legitimate London civil engineer and his academic credentials and then added a few. He obtained a job as construction manager on a seven-story building to be constructed in Christchurch, New Zealand. He visited the construction site only about once a month. As a result of the 2011 earthquake, the building collapsed, killing 115 people—including children in the child care facility on the ground floor. This exposed the Shirtoff

fraud. He was prosecuted, but this did not bring any of the victims back to life.

Anders Breivik, a Norwegian white nationalist, financed his extremist activities by selling fake diplomas to Americans and grossing about \$630,000. In July 2011, he detonated an industrial explosive in a van parked next to the prime minister’s office in Oslo, Norway, killing eight. He then went to the Workers’ Youth League summer camp, where he killed 69 and wounded 319. Breivik was apprehended, convicted, and given the maximum sentence.

Pedro de Mesones was a “degree broker” in Alexandria, Virginia. He sold fraudulent medical doctor credentials from two Caribbean medical schools, CETEC and CIFIS, to 165 people and grossed \$1.5 million. Thirteen of these “graduates” obtained their medical license, and six went on to do their residencies at U.S. hospitals. U.S. postal inspectors investigated. A registered nurse posed as a buyer, purchased her M.D. degree, traveled to Santo Domingo, and attended “graduation” ceremonies. de Mesones was arrested and prosecuted, testified about his activities before a congressional committee, and served his sentence in federal prison.

University Degree Program (UDP) operated from 1998 until 2003 and was the largest diploma mill at the time. It had 22 fake schools (using front addresses all over Europe) and various fake accreditors and was operated by two Americans who utilized two telephone sales centers (in Bucharest, Romania, and Jerusalem, Israel) 24/7 with 45 registrars per shift. UDP sold more than 250,000 diplomas and transcripts and grossed at least \$435 million. Its fake degrees represented 22 medical majors, including anesthesia, cardiology, cardiovascular surgery, dentistry, emergency medicine, endocrinology, gerontology, gynecology, neonatology, neurology, obstetrics, oncology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, pediatrics, pharmacology, psychology, radiology, rheumatology, and urology. Ponder for a moment: where are these “graduates” employed? U.S. federal law enforcement refused to investigate; the Federal Trade Commission investigated and charged the fraudsters civilly, fining them a mere \$57,000.

Recently there was a “get rich quick” swindle under the auspices of the now-closed Trump University (TU). (TU later became the Trump Entrepreneur Initiative.) TU was organized and operated as a real estate, entrepreneurship, asset and wealth creation, management, and sales training program—not as a university.

<sup>3</sup> See <[bandersnatch.com](http://bandersnatch.com)>.

The New York State attorney general stated that TU engaged in deception at every turn and called TU a fraud. TU was the subject of various civil lawsuits and finally settled two federal class action lawsuits and one with the State of New York. Ultimately, TU paid a \$25 million fine. No criminal investigation was initiated in New York.

## Conclusion

This article describes degree mills “hiding in plain sight” on the Internet, under the guise of a church, and operated from outside and inside prison. Fraudsters represent themselves as consultants, career consultants, consulting specialists, degree consulting services, credential evaluators, “academic research and referral center,” “academic referral service,” and more.

Anything and everything is for sale on the Internet today. Counterfeiters mask their true operations by claiming they are in the novelty or replacement degree business. There are hundreds of these sites. Sometimes a name says everything—for example, PhonyDiploma

and DiplomaMakers, ReplicaDiplomas, BestFake-Diploma, BestFakeDegrees, DiplomasUnlimited, NextDayDiplomas, NoveltyWorksDegrees, SameDay-Diplomas, and SuperiorFakeDegrees. Diploma makers are so brazen that they have even shown an interior picture of their printing plant with the caption “Production team at work in the evening so the company will run smoothly.”

We live in a “credential conscious” society, with more emphasis placed on someone’s academic credentials, rather than their knowledge and ability in a given field. Couple this with an employer’s failure to verify credentials, and the result is our having a proliferation of diploma mills and counterfeiters. With the worldwide reach of the Internet, this is truly everyone’s problem!

*Article two will explore Axact ([www.axact](http://www.axact)), which the press has described as the “largest diploma mill in the world.” Axact’s newest fake school, Hempster Shire University ([www.hsu.education](http://www.hsu.education)), was created in December 2018 and is calling itself the “world’s largest online university.”*

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### About the Author

**Allen Ezell**, Special Agent, FBI (retired), was in charge of the FBI’s Diploma Scam investigations (DIPSCAM) from 1980–1991. He continues academic fraud consulting today, and is a frequent AACRAO presenter and author.

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# Effects of Residency Determination Services on Applications from Students at Two Rural High Schools to the North Carolina Community College System

*By Andrew Johnson*

North Carolina has become the first state to require all students to prove their residency status through a third-party process when applying for college and financial assistance. NC Residency Determination Service (RDS) has taken the responsibilities from individual institutions to determine whether a student's residency status is in state or out of state (N.C. S.L. 2015-241). This article focuses specifically on the North Carolina Community College (NCCC) System and how the implementation of RDS has affected applications to the local community college from students attending two rural high schools.

## Background

Although all North Carolina higher education institutions require that RDS be completed, applications to member institutions of the NCCC System can only be submitted after completion of RDS. By contrast, the University of North Carolina (UNC) System allows applications to be submitted before applicants satisfy the RDS requirement. Private institutions in North Carolina also require students to complete the RDS in order to qualify for state-funded grants (N.C. S.L. 2015-241).

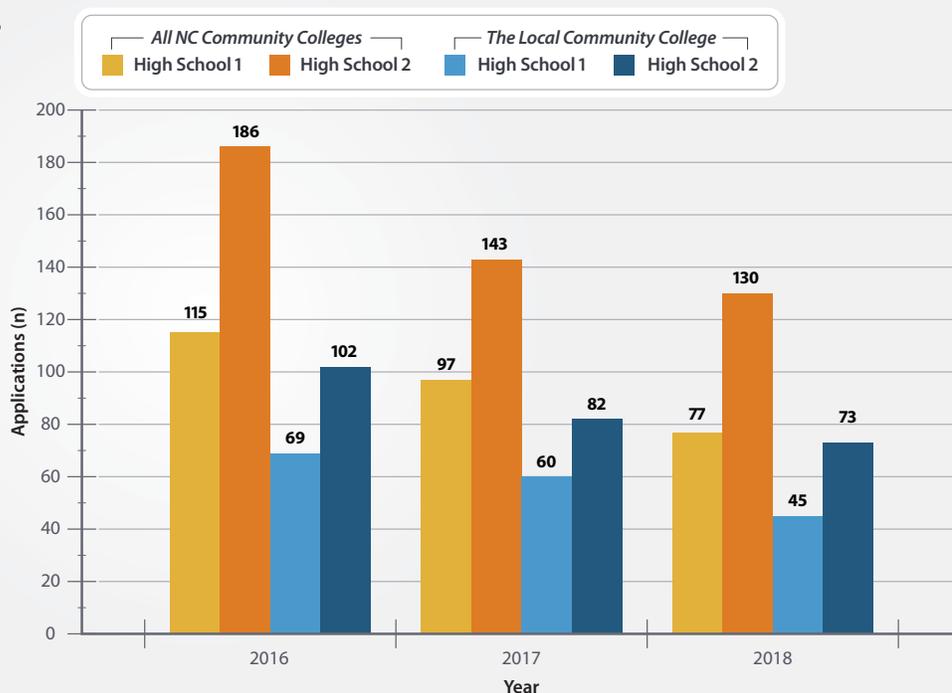
RDS was implemented system-wide for the NCCC System in the 2017-18 school year for fall 2018 enroll-

ment. That same year, the two county schools and the local community college featured in this report received an NCWorks grant allowing for a career coach in both county high schools. The purpose of the career coaches is to inform high school students about career opportunities after high school as well as to create career pathways that typically include higher education at either community colleges or four-year institutions (NC Community Colleges 2019a). Theoretically, the presence of career coaches would increase the number of applications from students at the two local high schools to the local community college. However, the data show that while the number of applications increased, RDS served as a barrier to some students' submission of their applications.

The Residency Determination Service requires multiple points of information from students and their parents or legal guardians, such as social security number, driver's license number, identifying the official car owner in the household, state tax information, and other state identification markers. Most students do not have access to this information during the school day. While some students are able to contact their parents to get it, others are not. Some students may complete the RDS requirement at home. Unfortunately for many students, however, western North Carolina, where this county is

Figure 1.

**NCCC  
Applications  
from Students  
Attending  
Two Rural  
High Schools,  
Submitted  
2016–2018**



located, has some of the worst Internet connectivity in the state (Trostle and Mitchell 2016). The lack of Internet is a barrier in and of itself: when students and their parents are home together, they are unable to complete the RDS requirement and to submit an application to any NCCC.

## Research

Data were requested and collected from the College Foundation of North Carolina (CFNC) and were narrowed to applications attempted or submitted during the school year. All NCCC applications are hosted exclusively through cfnc.org. There are five secondary education institutions in the selected rural county: Two high schools are the “standard” open enrollment for grades nine through twelve; there is one application-based “early college” and two secondary schools that are referral based. For the purpose of this investigation, data were collected only for the two standard open-enrollment schools. The referral-based institutions were not included because their enrollments are subject to the county high schools from which students are referred, with the result that the size of the graduating class can be inconsistent from year to year. Neither were early college graduates considered in the data collection:

One objective of early college is for high school seniors to earn credits toward—or even to be awarded—an associate’s degree, nullifying the need for many graduating seniors to continue their education at a community college (Public Schools of North Carolina n.d.).

Previously, applications could be submitted within the single cfnc.org application portal and within the same day. For example, CFNC hosts College Application Day across the state during the fall semester to enable high school seniors to apply to college during the school day with the assistance of school staff members; some colleges waive their application fees. On College Application Day in 2015 and 2016, 90.77 percent of seniors at the two local high schools who applied to a community college submitted their application that same day. In 2017, after implementation of the RDS requirement, the same-day submission rate for community college applications dropped to 52.4 percent.

Figure 1 shows the submitted application trend for both high schools over the past three years (2018 was the first college semester that required the RDS process). The blue bars represent applications from the high schools specifically to the local community college. Figure 2 shows the numbers of applications that remained in progress and were never submitted to the community college.

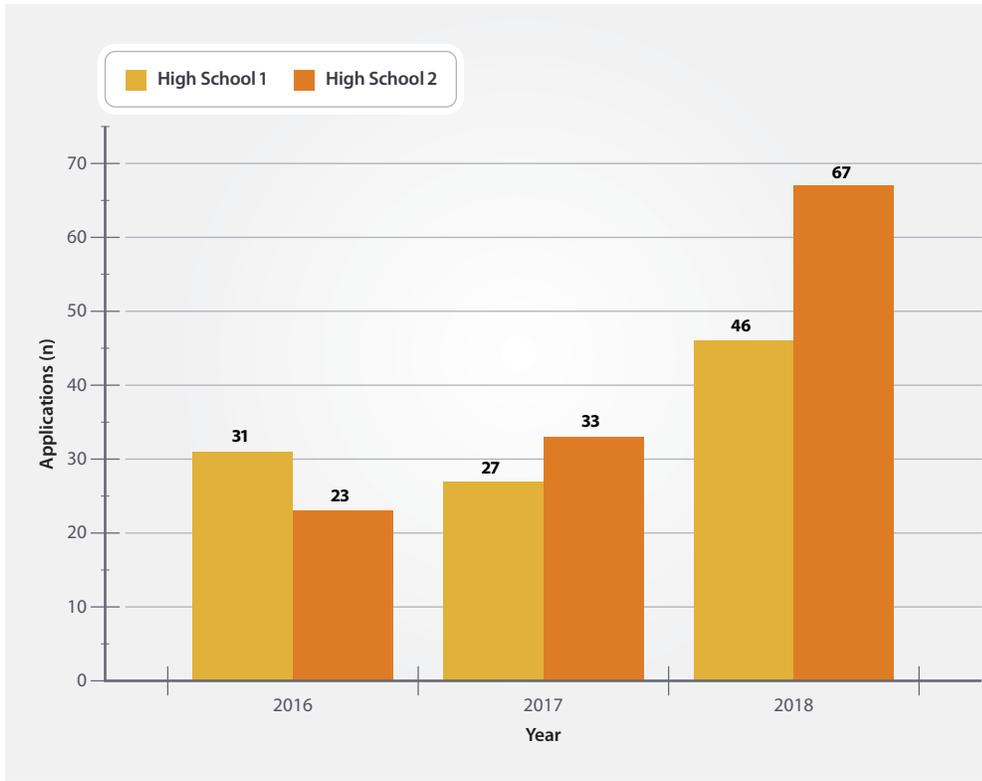


Figure 2.  
NCCC  
Applications  
from Students  
Attending  
Two Rural  
High Schools,  
In Progress  
2016–2018

Figure 1 indicates a continual decrease in the numbers of applications submitted to any NCCC. That reflects the overall trend of decreasing applications to all community colleges in western North Carolina (defined by the western and northwestern economic regions) (NC Community Colleges 2019b). Yet Figure 2 indicates an increase in the number of applications in progress—greater than 100 percent for one of the high schools.

Figure 1 shows that a majority of applications from students at both high schools are to the local community college. At high school 1, submitted applications to the local community college account for 60 percent, 61.8 percent, and 58.4 percent of all applications to NCCC for the years 2016, 2017, and 2018, respectively. At high school 2, they account for 54.8 percent, 57.3 percent, and 56.1 percent in the years 2016, 2017, and 2018, respectively. While the numbers of applications have decreased, the percentages of submitted applications to the local community college remained fairly stable, suggesting that students' intent to attend the local community college remained constant. This suggests that another variable could be a factor in the decrease in the numbers of applications submitted.

Figure 3 (on page 50) shows the total numbers of submitted versus in progress applications to the local community college from students at the two rural high

schools. Figure 4 (on page 50) shows the total numbers of applications regardless of their status.

Figure 3 could demonstrate the decreasing application trend in western North Carolina; however, taking into account the numbers of in progress applications to the local community college, there was actually an increase in the total number of applications. From 2017 to 2018, the number of in progress applications increased significantly—and at a higher rate than the decrease in the number of submitted applications.

The Residency Determination Service works in conjunction with the College Foundation of North Carolina. Because College Application Day is a statewide initiative of CFNC, data from 2016 through 2018 were compared to determine whether RDS has had an overall adverse effect on CFNC-sponsored initiatives. Figure 5 (on page 51) represents the numbers of college applications from students at both high schools on their respective College Application Days. Data from the high schools were reported separately to show that while each high school may differ in terms of the number of applications submitted, they presented similar trends.

One high school did show an increase in the number of applications submitted on College Application Day. However, there was also a significant increase in the number of applications in progress, which precluded

Figure 3.  
Submitted versus  
In-Progress  
Applications  
to the Local  
Community  
College from  
Students  
Attending  
Two Rural  
High Schools,  
2016–2018

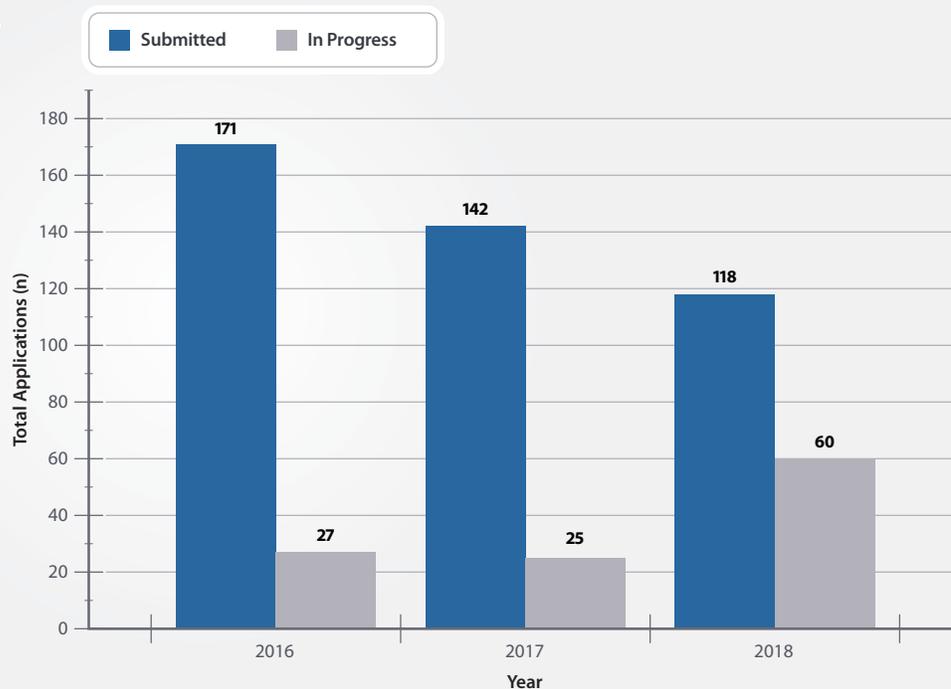
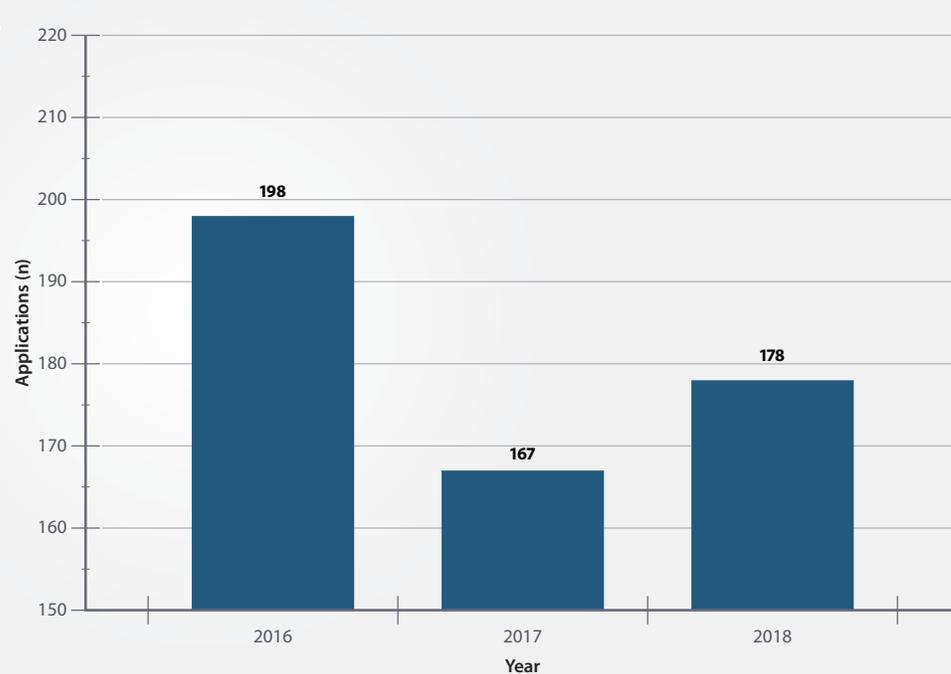


Figure 4.  
Total  
Applications  
to the Local  
Community  
College from  
Students  
Attending  
Two Rural  
High Schools,  
2016–2018



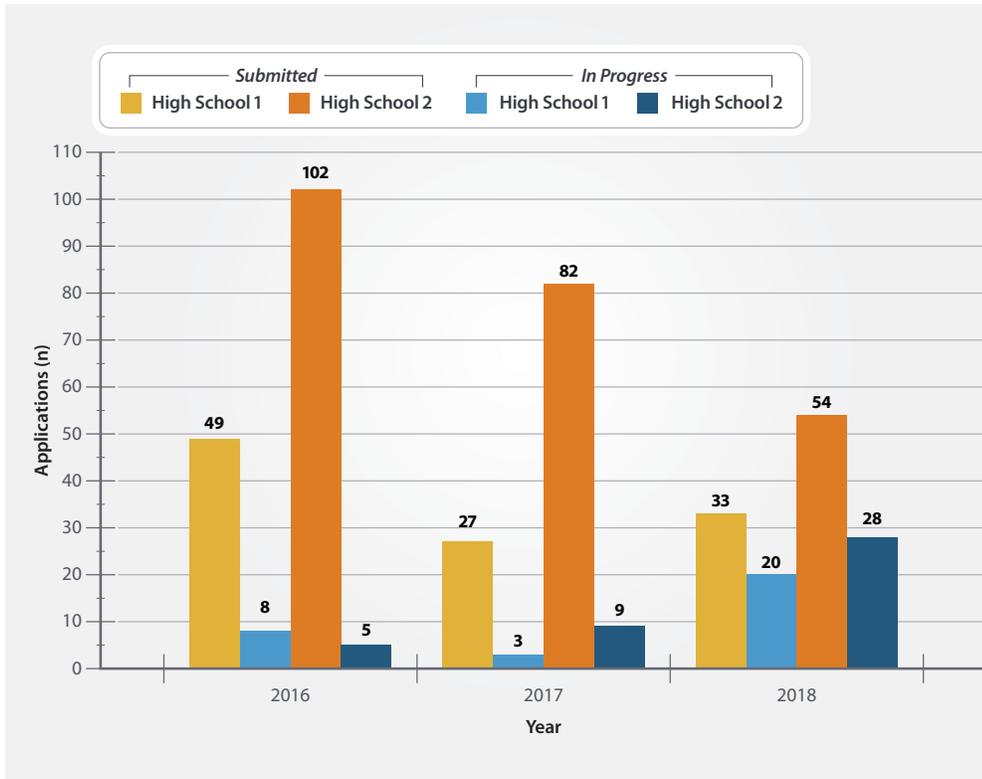


Figure 5.  
Applications to NCCC On College Application Day from Students Attending Two Rural High Schools, In Progress 2016–2018

an even more impactful event by limiting the number of applications submitted.

Figure 6 (on page 52) presents the overall numbers of applications by students at both high schools to any NCCC as well as the percentages of applications submitted within one week of College Application Day. Because North Carolina is the first state to require a system like RDS and because the system was implemented so recently, it is impossible to determine the timeframe within which successful applications were submitted. The data suggest that one week seemed to demarcate the most successful cluster of application submissions; beyond one week, no sustained patterns were evident. It seems reasonable to expect that within a week, students should have time to work with their parents and school resources to submit an application.

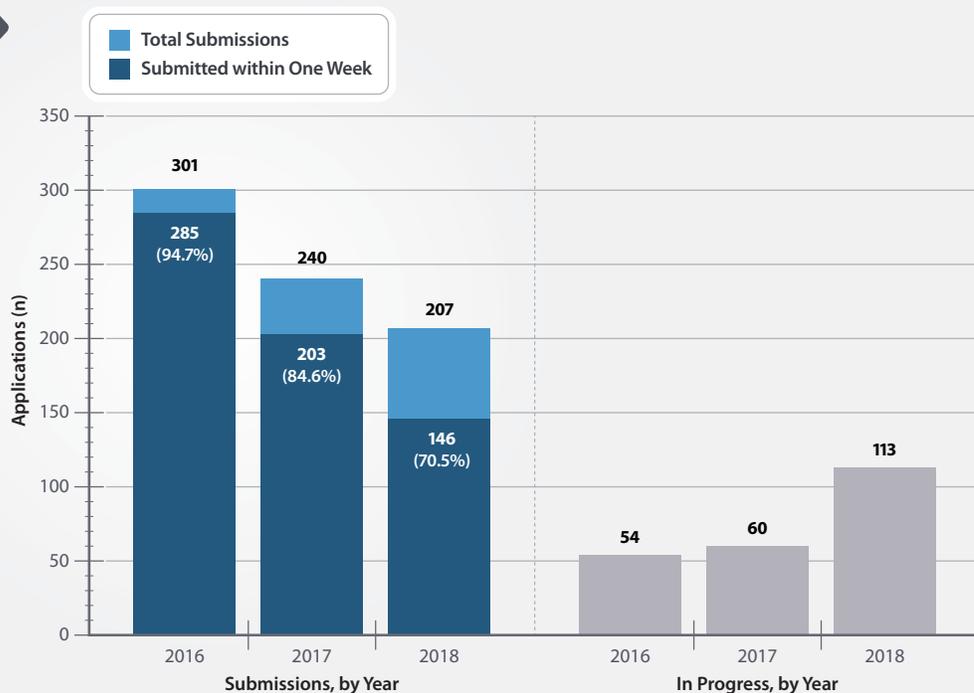
If 2018 data were to reflect the average of 21.45 percent of all applications in progress in 2016 and 2017, then they would show approximately 252 submitted applications and 68 in progress. That would counter the trend of decreasing enrollment at community colleges in western North Carolina. It is notable that the time students took to submit their applications also increased significantly in 2018.

## Limitations

It cannot be proven that career coaches were directly responsible for an increase in applications to NCCC by students at two rural high schools in western North Carolina. Of the twelve community colleges within western North Carolina, seven have the NCWorks grant for the career coach position (State Board of Community Colleges 2017). All twelve of the community colleges experienced a decrease in applications from 2014 to 2017 (NC Community Colleges 2019b). Data will need to be collected from those institutions to determine whether the trend is similar. The data that were collected do not include qualitative or anecdotal evidence that could demonstrate career coaches' impact on college applications or the effect of RDS on individual students.

It is also impossible to know what the data for 2018 would have been had there been no career coaches. Research to evaluate the career coach position and its impact on students who did submit applications as well as to investigate why some applications remained in progress should be conducted. Like the career coach position, the RDS requirement has only been active system-wide for one NCCC application season. North Carolina is also the only state with such a requirement,

Figure 6.  
NCCC  
Application  
Trends of  
Students  
Attending  
Two Rural  
High Schools,  
2016–2018



so no comparative data exist. Data will need to be analyzed over the next several years to identify application trends and patterns.

## Conclusion

Only two major changes at the two county schools would have had an effect on the number of students submitting applications to NCCC: the implementation of the RDS requirement and the additional resource of

the career coaches. Data show that this western North Carolina county experienced a decrease in the number of applications submitted to the local community college from 2016 and 2017 to 2018. Consequently, there was a decrease in the number of students from the local high schools who enrolled at NCCC institutions. A new challenge for North Carolina schools and career coaches will be to overcome the RDS requirement by helping students successfully apply to and enroll at local community colleges.

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## The Next Generation of One-Stop Student Service Centers, Part II

*By Francisco Maldonado Altieri*

*This article considers the use of information technology (IT) for quality service; the characteristics of today's students (Millennials and Zs); and what a satisfactory service for them should be.*

### The Use of IT for Quality Service

Consider first the use of IT to achieve and manage quality service. Experience has taught that at the core of a successful one-stop service are processes and IT. Analyzing, simplifying, and connecting the student service processes and merging or integrating IT tools is key.

In order for a service to be truly one stop, advisors have to be given the necessary tools to have all the information necessary to provide the service and resolve students' requests.

Our current student information system (SIS) was born of the need to develop and implement a one-stop service. Initially, the SIS was used only for the admission process. As the one-stop project emerged and our processes were analyzed, simplified, and connected, the IT team did a great job developing modules and applications so that all information could be housed in a single system. Later, information was migrated from the individual systems to this single database.

The database was improved over time; today, the SIS feeds the various systems that make up the institution's technological platform. Different integration methods allow each application to do what it should but with the same information to which everyone has access.

In this way, the SIS feeds the elements of the IT platform on a daily basis: the CRM, the LMS, the BI, the access control system, the web portal, the mobile application, etc. Students are always at the center, as is the uniformity of the information among all elements of the IT platform.

In what ways do this interaction and design enable the one-stop shop to provide better service?

The CRM's integration with the SIS enables:

- ◆ the recording of each student's visits through the check-in functionality in our office;
- ◆ the creation of service cases for adequate follow up, solution, and closing of each student's request, going through different flow rules with automatic notifications and even escalations to guarantee that the service is provided in a timely way and in the manner in which it should be; and
- ◆ the service evaluation by each person who visits and countless reports that each user can design and develop according to individual needs in order to be informed of what happens in the one-stop shop and, of course, to take the necessary actions to ensure that the level of service meets or exceeds expectations.

Use of the CRM in the one-stop shop supplies a lot of information for decision making regarding particular students and services. For example, the CRM provides analytics regarding demand for services; what hours are most popular for students to visit; wait time—on aver-

age and per person; service time—on average and per person; how many people are served each hour, day, week, month, year, etc. Most important, it records every service interaction, how many times each student visits the one-stop shop, for what specific services, and much more.

As a result, students sometimes can be served even before they request it, since we already know what, when, and how they typically request support.

Through the service cases, each student's request is registered so it can be followed up through its conclusion. First, the student's visit is recorded through the application to check in; then the service they requested is recorded through the "cases." This is particularly useful when a service request cannot be fulfilled immediately (in the same visit).

The service cases and various flow rules, the automatic notifications, and the standard times for solving each category of case enable follow-up on each request and help ensure that requests are fulfilled on time.

Getting to this place required thorough analysis of processes and procedures, step by step, to inform con-

figuration of the system—one more element that attests to the importance of process analysis and simplification in order to provide quality services.

The CRM also tracks the experiences that inform the issues students report, from treatment by advisors to the efficiency of service and the design and condition of the one-stop facilities. The system sends e-mails that invite students to evaluate the service they received through the one-stop shop and provides means of monitoring the results of those evaluations. The evaluation is not mandatory but is useful for understanding students' experiences of the one-stop shop—especially when their comments are particularly good or bad.

What is registered can be reported. Because a significant amount of information is recorded, the reports that could be generated are practically infinite. But beware: Measure only what matters. It can be dangerous to have an excess of reportable information given the risk of spending endless hours generating reports that are not important or useful. Maintain focus on what is really important: measuring for the purpose of improving.

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Among the most frequently used reports are the number of people served; waiting, serving, and resolution times; service cases by category—*e.g.*, executing department, program, student, day, hour, etc.; and the results of the service evaluation.

The importance of having an IT platform consistent with or oriented to service quality should be apparent. Without these tools, mistakes or omissions will be inevitable, especially with regard to follow-up and regardless of will-power and can-do attitude.

This is what a comprehensive, IT-driven and customer satisfaction-oriented service center should be.

## Characteristics of Millennials and Generation Z

The people most higher education institutions are serving today are Millennials and members of Generation Z. What characterizes these generations in comparison with previous generations of students? How can this information be used to understand their expectations regarding what constitutes satisfactory service?

Differences among generations extend far beyond year of birth to include such seemingly inconsequential things as social markers (*e.g.*, iconic toys, musical devices, and cars) and more important features such as leadership and learning styles and social influences, marketing, and communication.

Even though the differences between Generations Y and Z are subtle, knowing and comparing them promotes understanding that students today learn, communicate, and collaborate in different ways from their predecessors. Thus, they should not be served in the same way their predecessors were.

For example, Millennials and Zs are influenced more by their peers—individually and in groups, through forums, etc.—than by formal authority or “experts,” regardless of their knowledge and experience. (Soon the Alpha generation will arrive, which may be most influenced by robots.) Is your institution ready? Is work underway?

How do Millennials and Gen Zs communicate? How much time do they spend on their cell phones, the computer, and even television? Zs spend an average of 15.4 hours on their phones per week compared to Millennials’ 14.8 hours per week.

What do they do or see in this time? Most are on social media or engaging with web content, on-demand TV,

and video games. Most use desktop computers for work. Because older Millennials are now in their late 30s, they are likely to be employed in relatively stable occupations.

### Millennials

Millennials were born between the early 1980s and the mid 1990s, so many young adults are Millennials. This generation was severely impacted by the 2008 recession that caused record unemployment and ushered in a period of economic instability.

### Generation Z

There is a slight overlap between Millennials and Generation Z: Gen Z is commonly understood to have been born between the mid 1990s and the mid 2000s. They are primarily the children of Gen X parents (though some could have parents who are Millennials).

Because they grew up with the Internet, they tend to be knowledgeable about and comfortable with technology and social media. In fact, they are digital natives.

If Millennials don’t remember a world without computers, Generation Z cannot imagine a world without immediate access to the Internet from any device.

This generation is expert at gathering information. If Millennials could make their parents feel overwhelmed by their knowledge and expertise relative to social networks, then Generation Z is noteworthy given its use of all of these tools—and with even more fluidity. Many feel uncomfortable making phone calls; they prefer to solve problems or answer doubts on their own—including looking for solutions online.

Generation Z are digital natives; they eagerly adopt new technologies and are self-taught, creative, and collaborative—traits that distinguish them as consumers with different habits, aptitudes, and attitudes especially relative to so-called brands. They penalize companies that do not offer good service via mobile, that don’t respond via social networks, and that are slow to serve their chat (including if they don’t have chatbots).

Gen Z’s characteristics are forcing companies to adapt to a new reality: digitization requires maximum expression. The digital transformation of Gen Z’s communication is more than necessary; it is urgent. Gen Zs control their bank accounts and how they spend their money virtually. They are more open to new payment formats. They are a generation that uses virtual portfolios.

They have opened a door for different models of consumption. They are making more critical and dis-

criminary product choices than did previous generations. They seek memorable shopping experiences. Generation Z is accustomed to online consumption, buying more and more through digital channels and relying on all kinds of information and opinions to inform their own.

## The Next Generation of One-Stop Shops for Student Service

Given the characteristics of the current generations attending college, what should characterize the one-stop shop of the future?

First, they must be multichannel given that current generations are not accustomed to conducting business in person or over the phone. Services must be available where students are and via modes with which they are comfortable. In other words, the services must be mobile, interactive, and intuitive. Students must be able to obtain the services they require wherever they are (*i.e.*, mobile) and in as few clicks as possible (*i.e.*, intuitive).

Service should be provided in real time—that is, the answer or result must be delivered at the moment they are requested and not deferred until another time or via another channel.

Services for Millennials and Zs must also be personalized, not “standardized” or mass services and communications but rather tailor-made and social-network friendly. Even if a service is tailor-made, institutions and service departments should be integrated and “social network friendly.” The time has passed when customers sought service through the channels we defined. It is important to note that e-mail, however personalized, is not a means of communication that Millennials or Zs choose. Rather, the way to communicate with them is via social networks.

Services must also be simple, efficient, and effective—not only for Millennials and Zs but for everyone.

For these generations, in particular, this is no longer negotiable. While previous generations could understand and even accept the need to follow procedures such as office visits, collecting signatures, getting stamps, etc., current generations no longer comply with rigid and inflexible authorities and guidelines; instead, processes must be simple, efficient, and effective.

Today’s college-going generations do not like to read; doing so takes too much time. Consequently, communications must feature images and drawings—“infographics.” This reinforces the point of simplicity not only of the service, but also of the related message.

Services also must be creative, not because Millennials or Zs require it but because they are accustomed to so many constant external stimuli that any good impression quickly loses its effect. Only by being creative can we hold their attention and provide service that meets their standards.

We must guarantee the cyber security of one-stop services, not because Millennials and Zs ask for it but because of the realities of the world in which we live. Many services involve money (especially for payments), documents or academic records, personal data, etc., and are multichannel—mobile and in real time. They must be kept safe from a technological point of view. Students may not know it, but we have to guarantee their cyber security so as to protect them from data leaks, identity theft, hacking, etc.

In summary, the next generation of one-stop shops should evolve to become a “never-stop” shop. Three-quarters or more of services should be available virtually, not even requiring students to physically visit the shop; not more than 25 percent of services should be offered “traditionally,” requiring students’ physical presence and/or paperwork. Indeed, the one-stop shops of the near future should be “never-stop” shops.

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### About the Author

**Francisco Maldonado Altieri** is Registrar of Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla (UPAEP), México. He has an M.B.A. in marketing and 23 years’ experience in higher education, having served five years as counselor for entrepreneurial programs, one year in recruitment, eight as admission officer and in student services (one-stop shop), and nine as registrar and director of student services (one-stop shop). He has attended and presented at six AACRAO SEM Conferences and five AACRAO annual meetings. He was secretary of the board of ARSEE, México (2012–14), and is currently vice president of the ARSEE, México board and member of the board of directors of the Groningen Declaration Network (2018–20).

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## Critical Languages and College Choice

*By Hannah Schulz, Alexander Taylor, and Rodney Parks*

*Critical languages* refers to less commonly taught languages that the U.S. State Department has deemed necessary for U.S. national defense (Department of Defense 2000). In the current era of globalization and growing interconnectedness, the need for proficient speakers of critical languages has become increasingly urgent. While many foreign businesses, diplomats, and immigrants speak English as a second language, it is vital for the United States to increase its population of critical language speakers. Critical languages, determined by the U.S. Department of Defense, include but are not limited to Arabic, Chinese Mandarin, Dari, Farsi, Indonesian, Kurdish, Korean, Pashtu, Russian, Turkish, and Urdu (Defense Intelligence Agency 2010).

In 2006 the U.S. government announced its goal to broaden the base of Americans studying and mastering critical languages. This objective, titled the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI), was intended to develop foreign language skills and dramatically increase the number of U.S. citizens learning critical languages (U.S. State Department 2006). Other programs sprouted from this initiative, including STARTALK and the National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NLSI-Y), which are designed for secondary school students studying critical languages. Other programs, including the Youth Exchange and Study Abroad (YES-Abroad) program, take different approaches by promoting cultural exchange and critical language study through cultural immersion.

Beyond foreign policy, internationalization continues to increase as international students matriculate at U.S. higher education institutions (Institute of International Education 2018). Similarly, institutions continue to invest in high-impact practices such as study abroad opportunities (Helms, Brajkovic and Struthers 2017). A 2016 survey by the American Council of Education's Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement found that institutions continue to prioritize internationalization in order to better prepare students for a more globalized workplace and to support a more diverse student population. Despite strong messages in favor of internationalization, the number of students engaging in critical language learning opportunities remains disturbingly low. The Modern Language Association's report on foreign language enrollment in higher education found that between 2009 and 2016, there was a 15.3 percent decrease in enrollments in languages other than English (Looney and Lusin 2018). In fact, enrollment in critical languages such as Chinese, Arabic, and Russian decreased 13.1 percent, 5.9 percent, and 7.4 percent, respectively, during the same period (Looney and Lusin 2018).

While most of the research related to Department of Defense programs is not easily accessible by the public, there is also little research examining the admissions decisions of students who have studied a critical language. The current study seeks to examine whether critical language programs influence higher education

admissions decisions and whether institutions recognize the study and assessment of critical languages.

## Literature Review

The limited number of foreign language options available to students is one of the primary challenges to foreign language acquisition. This is reflected in the number of students taking SAT foreign language subject tests. In 2016 the SAT offered subject tests in nine languages. While subject tests of critical languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean were offered, 43.3 percent of those taken were of Spanish (College Board 2016). Comparably, 46 percent of high school foreign language programs were Spanish (American Councils for International Education 2017). As a result, 71 percent of high school students have taken coursework in or have experience with Spanish, but fewer than 5 percent of high school students have taken coursework in Chinese; the percentages are comparable for Japanese and Russian (College Board 2016).

This trend persists into postsecondary education. Goldberg, Looney, and Lusin (2015) estimated that 65 percent of all college students are enrolled in Spanish and French courses. Estimates also indicate that enrollment in all foreign languages decreased 6.7 percent between 2009 and 2013. While overall enrollment in foreign language courses has decreased, critical language enrollment has seen mixed results: Enrollments in Chinese and Korean courses have increased 2.0 percent and 44.7 percent, respectively, whereas enrollments in Japanese and Russian courses have decreased 7.8 and 17.9 percent, respectively.

The reason that enrollment in critical language courses is decreasing is unclear, but evidence suggests that institutions' choices to eliminate language programs and/or to limit options for advanced study may be responsible (Flaherty 2018). Donald L. Dyer, associate dean for faculty and academic affairs at the University of Mississippi, observed that many institutions tend to cut foreign language offerings when financial difficulties arise (Flaherty 2018). In addition, some institutions have combined multiple languages into a single department in order to save on administrative costs. At the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point, all foreign language majors were eliminated (University of Wisconsin Stevens Point 2018).

Other institutions have increased enrollment in critical language courses by utilizing U.S. Department of Defense grants that support their teaching. For example, North Georgia College & State University will have received approximately \$2.7 million in such grants by 2020; this has helped the university expand its summer language institutes and study abroad opportunities (Wyllie 2018). None of the languages offered at the university is experiencing a decrease in enrollment (Wyllie 2018).

Consistent standards for certification, the curriculum, and language proficiency assessment represent additional challenges to foreign language instruction. Many teachers of critical languages are native or heritage speakers who speak a dialect that differs from the identified standard for language teaching (Wang 2009). In addition, while these teachers may be proficient in a critical language, they may need help improving their English in order to teach effectively to a diverse student population (Wang 2009). The lack of teacher development programs for critical languages that follow a set of common standards has resulted in a deficit of qualified and certified teachers (Wang 2009).

A survey given to Arabic teacher trainees in the STARTALK program also clarified the challenges teachers face: Teachers' top three professional development needs related to differentiated instruction, implementation of a standards-based curriculum, and a learner-centered approach (Mana 2011). A study of methods in the STARTALK program found that assessment of oral skills was the most frequently reported assessment practice, suggesting that these programs need more resources for assessing literacy skills (Malone, Montee and DiSilvio 2010).

## Methodology

The data in this study derive from a 20-question survey sent to current and former critical language students in select programs. Survey data were collected for approximately ten days in fall 2016; 69 respondents completed the survey. A convenience sampling procedure was used to recruit survey participants. The survey was posted on an NSLI-Y alumni Facebook group because this was the most convenient way in which to solicit survey respondents. The NSLI-Y alumni group is a Facebook page that members must request to join; only students who have participated in an NSLI-Y program may join the

group. As a result, a significant majority of survey respondents (85.3%) reported that they accessed their first critical language program through NSLI-Y.

The survey utilized a Likert scale to measure the attitudes and opinions of students who had enrolled in a critical language program. Examples of survey questions include “My critical language program encouraged me to study other critical languages” and “My critical language program influenced my evaluation of colleges and universities.” The researchers asked these questions in order to obtain feedback on how critical language programs influenced students’ choice of institution at which to enroll as well as further studies in critical languages.

In addition, the survey included several questions regarding how the institution recognized critical language learning and how it continued to support students’ language study. Questions included “What methods are you using to continue studying your critical language?” and “What type of credit did your institution award for a critical language?”

**Table 1. Student Responses to the Continuing Study of Critical Languages**

|   | n         | %             |
|---|-----------|---------------|
| <b>Students Currently Studying a Critical Language</b>                  |           |               |
| Yes   | 45        | 70.31         |
| No  | 19        | 29.69         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>64</b> | <b>100.00</b> |
| <b>Methods for Continuing Study of Critical Language<sup>1</sup></b>    |           |               |
| Self-Study  | 26        | 32.91         |
| Through Another Critical Language Program                               | 9         | 11.39         |
| At the College or University I Attend or Attended (On Campus or Online) | 24        | 30.38         |
| At a Different College or University (On Campus or Online)              | 7         | 8.86          |
| Independent service provider (e.g., private tutoring)                   | 4         | 5.06          |
| Online (non-credit-bearing)   | 9         | 11.39         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>79</b> | <b>100.00</b> |

<sup>1</sup> Multiple selections were allowed for this question.

## Results

Table 1 presents the number of students currently studying a critical language and the methods students utilized for continuing study of a critical language. A significant majority of respondents (70.31%) reported that they were currently studying a critical language. The most frequently reported method for continuing to study a critical language was self-study (32.91%) or the college or university they attend (30.38%). Respon-

**Table 2. Influence of Critical Language Program on Student Preparedness for College, by Percentage**

| My critical language program...  | Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Neither Agree Nor Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Agree |
|--|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------|-------|
| encouraged me to study other critical languages.                         | 10.29    | 11.76             | 11.76                      | 19.12          | 47.06 |
| exposed me to different government career paths for proficient speakers. | 4.41     | 5.88              | 5.88                       | 29.41          | 54.41 |
| influenced my evaluation of colleges and universities.                   | 11.76    | 4.41              | 10.29                      | 20.59          | 52.94 |
| better prepared me for college life.                                     | 7.35     | 4.41              | 7.35                       | 11.76          | 69.12 |

**Table 3. Critical Language and Institutional Recognition of Learning**

|  | <b>n</b>  | <b>%</b> |
|--|-----------|----------|
| <b>Have you attended a college or university?</b>                            |           |          |
| Yes, I am currently attending.   | 28        | 63.63    |
| Yes, but I am not currently attending.                                       | 2         | 4.55     |
| Yes, I have graduated.   | 11        | 25.00    |
| No   | 4         | 9.09     |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>45</b> |          |
| <b>Did you receive college credit for your participation in the program?</b> |           |          |
| Yes  | 6         | 14.63    |
| No   | 35        | 85.37    |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>41</b> |          |
| <b>What type of credit did you receive?<sup>1</sup></b>                      |           |          |
| Elective credit  | 3         | 50.00    |
| Language credit  | 3         | 50.00    |
| Language placement (no credit)   | 4         | 66.66    |
| Institutional language proficiency requirement (no credit)                   | 2         | 33.33    |

<sup>1</sup> Reflects responses from six participants; multiple selections were allowed for this question.

dents also reported studying through another critical language program (11.39%) or through an online, non-credit-bearing program (11.39%).

Table 2 presents data on the influence of critical language programs on student preparedness for college. Results indicated that the critical language program did affect students' college preparedness. A majority of students (73.53%) reported that their critical language program influenced their evaluation of colleges and universities. Respondents also indicated that their language program better prepared them for college life (80.88%) and exposed them to different government career paths for proficient speakers (83.82%).

The 45 students who graduated from high school were asked if they attended a college or university (see Table 3). Forty-one of the 45 students who responded either had attended or were attending a postsecondary institution. Only 14.63 percent of respondents reported receiving college credit for their participation in the language program. Of the six students who received credit, three (50.00%) received elective credit, and three (50.00%) received language credit for their participation in the program. In addition, four (66.66%) received non-credit-bearing language placement.

## Discussion and Implications

The majority of respondents stated that they were extremely likely to continue studying their critical language. Similarly, most students reported that they were currently studying a critical language. Despite the positive motivations toward their continued language study, 37.5 percent of students were not studying a critical language through their college or university and had to utilize other methods to continue their study. Considering that the majority of foreign language coursework is in Spanish or French, it is not surprising that enrollment in critical language courses at institutions of higher education is low.

The disconnect is even greater when considering the influence of a high school critical language program on college preparedness. For example, 73.53 percent of respondents stated that their critical language program influenced their evaluation of colleges and universities. However, of the 41 respondents who attended a higher education institution, six (14.63%) reported that they did not receive any type of credit (for credit or non-credit) for their participation in the language program. While respondents indicated that their critical language influenced their admission decision, this may not be solely attributable to the institution's offering of critical language programs. Matriculation factors may be numerous and overlapping, including access to international affairs/business degree programs, study abroad opportunities, or other factors beyond the opportunity to study a critical language.

Despite strong evidence that institutions could improve their provision of access to and recognition of critical language studies, this research is restricted by several limitations. First, the respondents were a convenience sample recruited from a Facebook group open solely to NSLI-Y alumni. A random sample of students from a wider variety of critical language programs would have provided more robust data. In addition,



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the survey was administered after program participation had ended. Students' motivation for studying critical languages and the influence of critical languages on their academic goals were not analyzed prior to program participation.

In order for universities to help students gain proficiency in their target language, students need access to critical language programs on their campuses, and institutions need to award credit for students' language-learning accomplishments. Access to high-quality critical language coursework may enable institutions to

establish enrollment initiatives that support their institutional missions and recruitment initiatives. Creating summer language initiatives or scholarships similar to those at the University of North Georgia may create a recruitment pipeline for secondary or international students interested in continuing their critical language studies (Wyllie 2018). Many institutions champion their support of internationalization on their campuses, but it is important to continue to support diverse student populations by giving them access to critical language studies and recognizing their foreign language proficiency.

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## Graduating in Spite of Us? Identifying and Reducing Friction Points for Students

*By Tammy Aagard and Shelley Dodd*

*Years ago, we learned of a higher education institution with a wonderful reputation for excellence that had incredible silos and disparate processes that were not student friendly. These processes included requiring students to reapply and have their transfer credit reevaluated if they wanted to change majors that were in different colleges at the same university because the colleges utilized different student information systems. One individual said, “Our students graduate in spite of us.” While this may be an extreme example, are there other less extreme institutional processes and policies that our students must overcome in order to graduate?*

Reading *Friction: Passion Brands in the Age of Disruption* by Rosenblum and Berg (2017) served as a launching point for an examination of friction points introduced by higher education institutions and their effect on student persistence and graduation. Although the book focuses primarily on consumer brand loyalty and how great companies have reduced friction points with customers in order to increase sales, it is a natural extension to apply key elements of the physical law of friction to improving student service and success at higher education institutions. This article explores negative and positive friction; potential areas of friction for students; impacts of friction on certain populations of students; and the role of positive friction on students and employees.

### Background

In physics, friction is defined as a force that opposes motion between two surfaces touching each other. Friction is what allows a car or bike tire to grip the road and propel the rider and what prevents rocks from tumbling onto roadways. A certain amount of friction can be helpful and can propel us. Yet excessive friction can halt progress altogether. Do students at our institutions encounter so much friction that they give up?

Rosenblum and Berg (2017) define two types of friction: macro-friction and micro-friction (60–63). Macro-friction occurs at the category level, and micro-friction occurs at the brand level. The macro-friction currently introduced by or impacting higher education in general includes public opinion about the value of higher education; high tuition and fee costs and increased student loan debt; and transfer credit policies that prevent students from moving freely from institution to institution. Some of this macro-friction has roots in higher education industry decisions and policies whereas some has resulted from the actions of policy makers.

Micro-friction is at the brand level and is introduced by individual institutions. Some may include admissions policies, but for the sake of this analysis, micro-friction includes those institutional policies that slow progress toward graduation. These policies and practices include degree and major requirements that add

unnecessary time to graduation; unclear deadlines; and financial aid or payment issues.

## Friction and Higher Education

### Friction for Students

Friction for students takes many forms, including literal pieces of paper or electronic forms that must be completed by the student in order to register for classes, apply for graduation, petition a policy or deadline, or seek an opportunity for an internship or study abroad experience, to name a few. While many see these processes as necessary to maintain order and the integrity of the degree, are they artifacts of previous processes that have been codified and sometimes ossified in our offices? It is imperative that we consider the impact of these processes on students and the reality that not all students come to college with the same tools for dealing with these points of friction.

As we seek to increase access to our institutions, the friction points for students from diverse backgrounds

may differ from those for students whose parents successfully navigated the bureaucracy of higher education. In *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memory of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016), J. D. Vance puts a personal face on the challenges of navigating the hidden curriculum of higher education. Vance relates his personal experience with the complexity of the FAFSA. This friction point was too much for him to overcome, so he entered the military. It was with the help of a veterans support center after he returned home that he was able to overcome that friction point. Certain populations of students are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of complex and confusing institutional policies and processes. For example, first-generation students and students from underrepresented groups may not have access to guidance from trusted family members or friends who have been successful in higher education.

As institutions focus on student success, particular attention needs to be devoted to the complexity of certain processes. Some, like the FAFSA, are beyond our control, though we can provide support to students who are struggling with them. And there are ways to miti-

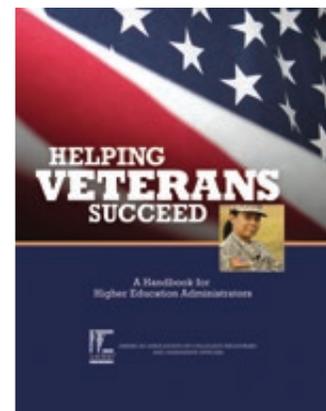
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gate certain complexities. For example, higher education is laden with industry-specific language and jargon. Technologies like ChatBots can help reduce communication friction points by providing opportunities for students to ask questions in non-threatening, safe, and smart ways. Too often, students feel embarrassed because they do not know the right questions to ask. They feel that everyone else knows the answers except them.

### **Identifying Friction Points**

As we look for ways to reduce friction points for students, it is helpful to audit our processes, policies, and communication methods. Good teachers regularly review those test and quiz questions that a majority of their students answered incorrectly. Was the question poorly written? Was the material not taught in a way that was understandable? The same methodology can be applied in our offices and at the institutional level. Conducting an audit to identify which policies are frequently appealed, which courses keep students from timely graduation, and which questions students ask repeatedly can help clarify friction points.

One example of a potential communication breakdown is the practice of inundating students with information at freshman or transfer orientation and expecting them to be fully “oriented” to the culture of our institutions, including understanding policies and procedures. A fresh look at the “drinking from a firehose” approach might help alleviate future friction points for students. Rosenblum and Berg (2017) suggest that simplifying our processes is key to reducing friction. “Simplify to amplify” they say (186). This simplification could include reviewing and perhaps eliminating processes, clarifying communications by removing jargon, and enabling knowledge bases to help with self-service answers. Amplification comes in the interactions we have with students. These could be reserved for more complicated situations that could not be resolved through a self-service model. We then could amplify student success and graduation by eliminating over-complicated processes.

In addition to policies and processes that cause friction, the physical location of offices and the number of offices with which a student may need to interact constitute a source of friction. Having to go from one office to another can cause a student to simply give up. One-stop service centers are seen as a way to prevent run-around for students, thereby reducing friction.

Students receive holistic answers to their questions and can tell their story to one person rather than receiving answers to only the portions of the questions that pertain to a specific office. In successful one-stop models, employees are trained to provide holistic guidance and are empowered to make decisions.

### **Friction and Technology**

The introduction of technology into enrollment services has gone a long way toward reducing friction for students and staff members. Rosenblum and Berg (2017) highlight the effect of technological advances on customers and successful institutions’ responses. Customers have become more impatient, and successful institutions have become more transparent (126). Higher education continues to feel pressure to provide 24x7 service and immediate responses to questions. Gone are the days of “ballroom registration” and paper admission applications. Students don’t want to wait to receive an admission letter in the mail but instead expect ready access at any time to admissions decisions, information about financial aid awards, results of petitions, and student account information on their personal devices.

What does our technology say about our institutions? Students will judge higher education institutions by their ability to conduct the business of being a student utilizing technology. For the current generation of digital natives, the distinction between face-to-face interactions and digital interactions has blurred. In *Gen Z @ Work: How the Next Generation Is Transforming the Workplace*, Stillman and Stillman (2017) highlight this phenomenon. This Gen X father and Gen Z son co-wrote the book, which highlights the different ways in which each generation sees and interacts with the world using technology. Gen Z works in a ‘phigital’ world—that is, seeing no difference between the physical and digital worlds.

### ***Integrating Technology Into the Business of Enrollment Services***

Today’s students expect their institutions to know about them. They expect each office to have knowledge of their previous interaction(s) with that office as well as every other office on campus. Their patience for processes that require walking around to collect signatures is waning. They expect an integrated experience with the institution. Students are also increasingly comfortable with technology as a means to guide them through a degree program and to notify them of deadlines. We

get reminders to bring an umbrella and to check in for a flight, as well as news and social media alerts. Students wonder why our institutions are not pushing alerts to them that do not require them to look at e-mail.

The intersection of the growth of artificial intelligence technology, the emphasis on student success, and the use of big data analysis on campus presents specific challenges for higher education institutions. The ability to reduce friction and guide students to specific pathways and outcomes will increase as these tools are refined and broadly implemented. The Internet of things and the placement of smart technologies like Alexa in residence halls pose ethical dilemmas for higher education administrators. What are the best and most appropriate uses of these tools, and when have we crawled over the creepy fence?

### **Friction That Propels and Refines**

There are different types of friction: friction that halts progress and friction that propels us forward. In considering friction in higher education, it is important to acknowledge that learning how to navigate the adult world is an integral part of the college experience, and not all learning occurs in the classroom. Learning how to navigate bureaucratic processes can help a student deal with other bureaucratic processes in the future—for example, with a government agency, in buying or building a home, etc. Higher education should not strive to remove all friction points; doing so would also remove the opportunity for students to learn to analyze a problem and advocate for its resolution. Parents who want to smooth or remove friction points altogether deny their students growth opportunities (but that is a topic for another article).

### **Friction and Employees**

It might seem strange to include employees in an article about friction points that impact student success and graduation. Yet students do not just interact with systems and policies; they also interact with people. Are employees helping to reduce friction points for students? Often, they enforce the policies established by others and try to balance them with their commitments to student success and excellent customer service. These priorities can be at cross purposes and can introduce friction for employees. As policies and processes are streamlined for students, friction for employees decreases. As technology tools are introduced and refined to facilitate self-service and in-

crease transparency, the importance of training staff to maximize their use of those tools increases, as well.

Empowering employees to make decisions also reduces friction. Empowerment requires training and trust. Employees who are uncomfortable with their power to make decisions have a tendency to build bureaucratic structures to protect them from making wrong decisions. Such structures add layers of approval and processes for students. Appropriate training, oversight, and empowerment can render these layers of approval unnecessary and reduce friction for students and employees.

### **Leadership and Friction**

Rosenblum and Berg (2017) state that you can't fight friction externally until you remove friction internally (153). Fighting friction requires leadership. Research conducted at the University of Chicago identified three keys to frictionless leadership: prioritizing, hiring, and building team relationships. Leaders tend to be best at building relationships (46%); only 24 percent succeed at prioritizing, and 14 percent succeed at hiring well. Only one percent succeed at all three (133). These areas have a direct impact on the friction that exists for employees and their ability to reduce friction for students. As leaders, are we hiring people we trust to give correct answers and make sound decisions; are we giving them information about institutional priorities; and are we maintaining relationships that foster frictionless environments?

### **Simplify to Amplify With Employees**

As with students, the concept of “simplify to amplify” applies to our work environments and our interactions with employees. Are there ways to simplify training materials in order to increase employees' knowledge? Can technologies be streamlined and access be simplified to increase employees' productivity and foster their confidence in their ability to answer questions? This could be accomplished through dashboard views of data or establishing work centers that would have useful information available to employees at a glance. These dashboards and work centers could be customized to match employee preferences. Amplification thus could be achieved in productivity and job satisfaction. This amplification would reduce friction for students.

### **Friction and Culture**

Another aspect of frictionless leadership centers in office culture. The culture should allow employees to ex-



## Strategic Enrollment Management Endorsement Program

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ercise initiative; guarantee safety in which to learn and possibly even make mistakes; and encourage employees to preserve their personal lives. A culture of punishment for mistakes can stifle ingenuity and independent decision making, thus causing paralyzing friction. Sharing stories of success and failure can help staff see beyond the occasional misstep. A Japanese proverb speaks to the importance of rising after each failure: “Fall down seven times, get up eight.” Fostering a culture of perseverance and grit is important and will have a direct impact on how staff interact with students.

Encourage employees to break away from work after hours. Model this, don’t just encourage it. At a recent AACRAO leadership meeting, Texas Ruegg, of Letourneau University, said that leaders send mixed messages when they tell staff to leave at five but continue to work until seven. Are we setting an expectation that our staff need to be available at all times by e-mailing them at all hours of the night? We may just be trying to clear things off our own plate, but leaders must consider the message that sends. Another leader recounted a time when she was in graduate school and a professor would drive

his car to the office, turn on the light, and then ride his bike home at the end of the day. This gave the impression that he was always working and set the expectation for the graduate students that they, too, should always be working. A culture of never-ending work increases friction as well as the risk of burnout and turnover.

## Summary

Identifying and reducing unnecessary points of friction for students can yield positive results. Students— especially those who are particularly vulnerable in the unfamiliar world of higher education—may just give up if they encounter too many friction points (*e.g.*, overly complicated processes, hidden curricula, and jargon). Decreasing friction in our work environments has a direct impact on interactions with students and can be accomplished by hiring the right people, training them well, and empowering them to make decisions. Finally, as leaders we need to create a culture that reduces friction for employees and the students we serve.

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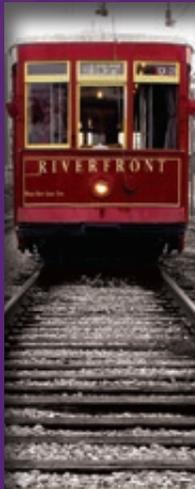
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