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Colleges and University

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This edition includes two feature articles. In “The Cambridge Program in the State of Washington: Students’ Characteristics, Courses Taken, and Progression to Postsecondary Education,” Carmen Vidal Rodeiro and Stuart Shaw report on a study of the 2014–2015 high school graduate cohort in the state of Washington who took at least one Cambridge course between grades nine and twelve. In another installment of our interview series, Stephen J. Handel, Executive Director of Higher Education Strategic Assessment Use and Opportunity at the College Board, interviews Janet Marling, Executive Director of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students.


In addition, there are three campus viewpoint articles: “What is in a (Course) Name?” by Stephanie Ntim, Alexander Taylor, Devon Cross, Rodney Parks, and Caroline Dean; “Leading through Andragogy,” by Joseph Mews; and “Considering Trade-offs: Evaluating Student Choice in Academics and Co-curricula,” by Alexander Taylor and Christina Doherty.

Finally, two book reviews are included in this issue. LesLee Clausen Eicher reviews The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable, by Patrick Lencioni, and Wes K. Waggoner reviews Our Higher Calling: Rebuilding the Partnership between America and its Colleges and Universities, by Holden Thorp and Buck Goldstein.

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 winter!
The Cambridge Program in the State of Washington: Students’ Characteristics, Courses Taken, and Progression to Postsecondary Education

Many U.S. students working toward a high school diploma can take Cambridge Assessment International Education courses. This article explores the characteristics and postsecondary enrolment patterns of a cohort of 2014–15 public high school graduates in the state of Washington who participated in a Cambridge program of learning. The outcomes of the analyses show how participation and performance in the program help students to achieve college/university success.
High school students in the United States often participate in acceleration programs to improve their readiness for postsecondary education. These programs vary from individual subject courses, such as Advanced Placement (AP), that can be added into a typical student’s course schedule, to more complete programs, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB). These programs develop breadth as well as depth and provide learners with a robust, rigorous, and challenging program of study, giving them the opportunity to earn both high school and university course credit.

Cambridge Assessment International Education (“Cambridge” hereafter) administers high school qualifications (e.g., International General Certificate of Secondary Education [IGCSEs] for fourteen- to sixteen-year-olds; Advanced Subsidiary [AS] and Advanced [A] level for sixteen- to nineteen-year-olds) as well as an acceleration program of study (AICE Diploma, which comprises AS and A levels) in the United States. The Cambridge program focuses on an international, pre-university curriculum and an examination system that emphasizes the value of broad and balanced study. It aims to encourage the skills of independent research and investigation, the use of initiative and creativity, and the application of knowledge and skills.

Traditionally, acceleration programs in the United States were confined to a small minority of students. In fact, some high schools only offered these programs to their best students. More recently, it has been argued that educational programs that prepare students for success in postsecondary education better than the traditional high school curriculum are needed (Adams 2012). As a result, participation in acceleration programs and in the Cambridge program, in particular, has increased.

In addition to the benefits outlined above, acceleration programs usually allow students to earn credit toward high school and college diplomas at the same time.

The Cambridge Program in the State of Washington

Students in the state of Washington working toward a high school diploma can take Cambridge courses. Currently, a few high schools in the state offer both PreAICE (Cambridge IGCSE) and AICE (AS and A level) courses. These schools offer the Cambridge program strictly to their honors students.

Students usually take a combination of Cambridge and local/state courses. PreAICE content is aligned with the state curriculum. As a result, schools might use the Cambridge program in grades nine and ten, but those students do not usually take the Cambridge examinations. If they do, IGCSE qualification grades can be used to predict how well the students will perform on a Cambridge exam and may inform whether a stu-
dent will continue to study that subject at the AS/A level. Students in grades eleven and twelve usually take AS and A level examinations, and many qualify for the AICE Diploma.

Credits earned by students who take AS/A level qualifications or a Cambridge AICE Diploma are recognized by many postsecondary institutions in the United States. In fact, more than 600 institutions across the United States formally recognize the Cambridge AICE Diploma and the AS/A level qualifications. Universities with formal recognition policies include all of the Ivy League institutions as well as other renowned universities across the country.¹

In 2019, the Washington State Senate provided parity for Cambridge International with other acceleration programs such as AP and IB. As a result, students who achieve a Cambridge AS or A level qualification will receive undergraduate college credit at any of the 36 public institutions of higher education in the state of Washington.

Aims of the Research

Cambridge Assessment seeks to promote educational excellence and high-quality learning. In order to achieve this, it is committed to ensuring that all its assessments are fair, have sound ethical underpinning, and operate according to the highest technical standards.²

The current research aims to ensure that the qualifications and assessments offered by Cambridge Assessment International Education worldwide—and in the United States, in particular—are fulfilling their intended purposes of helping students achieve college/university success.

The main research questions are:

◆ How does participation/performance in a Cambridge program of learning relate to and/or predict postsecondary participation?
◆ How does participation/performance in a Cambridge program of learning relate to and/or predict postsecondary performance?

Data and Methodology

Data

The data used in this research were provided by the Washington State Education Research and Data Centre (ERDC). They included detailed information on 296 students who had graduated from high school in 2014–15 in the state of Washington and had taken at least one Cambridge course in grades nine to twelve. In particular, data on Cambridge courses (IGCSEs and AS/A levels), uptake and performance, general performance in high school (e.g., reading and math proficiency, cumulative high school GPA), and demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, eligibility for free or reduced price school meals) were provided.

Information about the postsecondary journeys of the students in the dataset was also supplied and linked to the students’ high school data. The following information about postsecondary enrollment/performance was available:

◆ Enrollment in Postsecondary Education: Alongside an overall indicator of enrollment, information about the type of postsecondary institution attended by the students was supplied:
  ➜ Enrollment at two-year institutions versus four-year institutions;
  ➜ Enrollment at public versus private institutions; and
  ➜ Enrollment at in-state (Washington) versus out-of-state institutions.

◆ Remedial Enrollment in English and Math: Remediation data were available only for students enrolled at public institutions in the state of Washington.

◆ Postsecondary Performance: Postsecondary performance was available only for students enrolled at public institutions in the state of Washington. According to figures from ERDC (2012), the majority of Washington high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary education at in-state institutions. Among other indicators of performance, the cumulative GPA at public institutions in the state of Washington in 2015–16 (first-year GPA) was supplied.

Methods

The research utilized descriptive statistics and statistical tests to investigate the following:

◆ Types of Students Who Enrolled in Cambridge Courses.

In particular, tables and figures showing break-

¹ Examples of credit policies can be viewed in the Cambridge recognitions database at <recognition.cie.org.uk>.
² See the Cambridge Approach at <cambridgeassessment.org.uk/images/cambridge-approach-to-assessment.pdf> for more details.
downs by students’ characteristics such as gender, eligibility for free or reduced price meals, and high school GPA were produced. This helps clarify the composition of the Cambridge cohort and aids interpretation of enrollment rates at postsecondary institutions.

◆ **Types of Cambridge Courses and Subject Uptake.** In particular, the numbers of courses and subjects taken by Cambridge students, broken down by the type of qualification (PreAICE vs. AICE), were reported.

◆ **Performance in Cambridge Courses.** The average performance in Cambridge courses was calculated and presented overall and broken down by type of postsecondary institution attended. In addition, the relationship between performance in PreAICE courses and AICE courses was investigated using correlations.

◆ **Rates of Postsecondary Enrollment.** Immediate enrollment rates overall and broken down by the type of postsecondary institution attended were calculated. These rates were benchmarked against state and/or national published figures.

◆ **Enrollment in Remedial English and Math Courses.** The percentages of students enrolled in remedial education while at university, broken down by the type of postsecondary institution attended, were calculated. These rates were benchmarked against state published figures.

   A comparison between students who were enrolled in remedial work and those who were not was also carried out. \( \chi^2 \) tests (or Fisher’s Exact tests, as appropriate) and t-tests were carried out to determine the groups of students (based on their background characteristics and the types/numbers of Cambridge courses taken) who were more likely to be enrolled in remedial math or English at Washington public postsecondary institutions.

◆ **Postsecondary Performance.** Average cumulative GPA and credits earned at Washington state public institutions at the end of the academic year 2015–16, broken down by the type of postsecondary institutions, were calculated.

   The relationship between achievement in the Cambridge program and performance in postsecondary education was investigated via correlations. This can help establish the predictive validity of the Cambridge courses as preparation for postsecondary study.

### Results

#### Composition of the Cambridge Cohort

This section considers the characteristics of students (e.g., gender, free or reduced price meal status, high school GPA, achievement of reading and math proficiency) who enrolled in the Cambridge program. This can help clarify the composition of the Cambridge cohort and aid the interpretation of enrollment rates and performance at postsecondary institutions.

Figure 1 (on page 6) shows that there were slightly more female than male students (52 percent and 48 percent, respectively) taking at least one Cambridge qualification.

Figure 1 also shows that more than 60 percent of the Cambridge students were entitled to free or reduced price school meals. This figure is relatively high. In fact, according to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI n.d.), 45 percent of students in the state of Washington were entitled to free or reduced price school meals in 2014–15. However, this percentage varied per district. For example, in Federal Way district, the percentage of students entitled to free or reduced price school meals was 59 percent; in Lake Washington school district it was 13 percent; and in Bethel school district it was 46 percent.

Washington students are tested regularly by the state to assess their academic progress. State reading and math proficiency tests were taken by the research cohort in grade 10.

Table 1 (on page 6) shows that a higher percentage of Cambridge students demonstrated reading than math proficiency and that just over half (54%) demonstrated both reading and math proficiency. Compared to all students statewide, Cambridge students’ reading proficiency rates were higher: 83.6 percent of tenth-grade students in 2012–13 (year when the Cambridge students in this study were in tenth grade) met the standard, compared to 87.1 percent of Cambridge students (OSPI n.d.). Statewide figures for math were not available for 2012–13, so comparisons in this subject are not possible.

The cumulative high school GPA of Cambridge students in Washington state who graduated in 2014–15 was just below 3.0 (mean = 2.97; standard devia-
This is comparable to the national high school GPA, which, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, is just about 3.0.

Table 2 (on page 7) shows that half of the Cambridge students had a high school GPA greater than 3.0. In particular, almost a quarter of the Cambridge students had a GPA between 3.5 and 4.0 (which is expected for admission to top institutions), and 5 percent had a GPA of 3.9. There were, however, Cambridge students with low high school GPAs (e.g., 20 students had a GPA less than 2.0, and 67 students had a GPA less than 2.5).

### Cambridge Courses: Uptake and Performance

Students in the state of Washington may pursue a full AICE Diploma or take individual Cambridge AS and/or A levels to earn college credit. Students can also take IGCSE qualifications (PreAICE courses), typically in grades nine and ten, as preparation for AICE courses.

The 296 Cambridge students in the current study took a total of 1,556 PreAICE (IGCSE level) courses and 1,538 AICE (AS/A level) courses between 2013 and 2015 (when they were in grades ten to twelve). Students might have taken courses in 2012 (grade nine), but these were not included in the data provided by the Washington State ERDC.

Each PreAICE and AICE course is usually studied during a semester and thus is not equivalent to a full IGCSE or AS/A level. Rather, they are courses based on the Cambridge curriculum and qualifications and are intended to prepare students to take the IGCSE and AS/A level examinations (note that IGCSE exams might not be administered, despite the courses being taught; students might take the state exams instead).

Table 3 (on page 8) shows that 17 percent of the students took only PreAICE courses and that almost 75 percent took PreAICE courses followed by AICE.
courses. A small percentage of students (8%) took AICE courses only.

Table 3 shows that data on the specific Cambridge courses were only available for a subset of 235 Cambridge students (out of the 296 students who graduated in 2014–15). Data for the remaining students (N=61) were not available because those students took the Cambridge courses prior to 2013 (probably in 2012, when they were in ninth grade).

Table 4 (on page 8) shows the number of PreAICE and AICE courses Cambridge students took between 2013 and 2015. Note, again, that each of the courses was one semester in duration and therefore is not equivalent to a full IGCSE or AS/A level. Almost a quarter of PreAICE students took three or four courses, and 17 percent took eleven or twelve courses. Approximately 14 percent of AICE students took one or two courses, a further 16 percent took three or four courses, and another 15 percent took five or six courses.

There are more than 50 Cambridge International AS and A level subjects and more than 70 Cambridge International IGCSE subjects from which to choose. The range of subjects taken by students in the state of Washington was, however, much smaller.

Tables 5 (on page 8) and 6 (on page 9) show the PreAICE and AICE subjects taken by Cambridge students in the state of Washington. The Cambridge program in this state seems to focus on core subjects—primarily science, English, and humanities. English literature and history were the most popular subjects at

Table 2. Cumulative GPA of Cambridge Students at the Time of High School Graduation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School GPA</th>
<th>≥ 3.0</th>
<th></th>
<th>≥ 3.5</th>
<th></th>
<th>≥ 3.9</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>94.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
both the PreAICE and AICE levels. Also included in the Cambridge program were STEM subjects (i.e. chemistry, physics, biology, and mathematics) and languages.

Approximately 37 percent of students taking AICE courses took U.S. studies.

The courses students in the state of Washington take as preparation for the Cambridge examinations are graded on a scale from A (top) to C (bottom). Failed courses are graded F. In order to determine the average grade achieved by each student in Cambridge courses, grades were converted to points as follows: A = 4; B = 3; C = 2; F = 0. (This equivalence is similar to the conversion of grades into points for the calculation of the high school GPA.) No credit in a course was treated as failed in this research.

The following analyses focus on the 175 Cambridge students who studied for PreAICE and AICE courses (see Table 3) and investigate the validity of the PreAICE Cambridge courses as predictors of AICE performance. The correlation between the average performance in PreAICE courses and performance in AICE courses was calculated. The higher the correlation coefficient, the more beneficial it would be to use performance on PreAICE courses to predict performance in AICE courses. Figure 3 (on page 10) shows that the correlation between average performance in PreAICE and AICE courses was 0.632.

Table 7 (on page 9) shows polychoric correlations between grades in four subject areas. (The most common type of correlation is the Pearson correlation coefficient, which is appropriate when both the variables are continuous. However, when both of the variables are ordinal but imply an underlying continuous trait, as in grades on examinations, other correlation techniques can be used. The polychoric correlation provides estimates of the correlation between underlying normally distributed variables. As such, it tends to give higher estimates of the correlation coefficient for ordinal variables than the Pearson method. In this research, polychoric correlation coefficients are reported for the PreAICE to AICE analyses.) Note that the number of students taking the subject at both PreAICE and AICE varied substantially, and for the subjects not included in the tables, the number of candidates was very small. All coefficients were positive and quite high, indicating that candidates with higher grades in PreAICE courses tended to receive higher grades in AICE courses.

Given the reasonably small sample sizes, the results here are very similar to those reported by Gill and Crawford (2017), who looked at correlations between IGCSE and international AS level grades in a range of

<p>| Table 3. Students Taking PreAICE and AICE Courses |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cambridge Courses Taken</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PreAICE Only</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AICE Only</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreAICE and AICE</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Table 4. Number of PreAICE and AICE Courses Taken by Cambridge Students, 2013 to 2015 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Courses</th>
<th>PreAICE</th>
<th></th>
<th>AICE</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9–10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–12</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 or more</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Table 5. PreAICE Subjects Taken by Students Following the Cambridge Program, 2014–15 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PreAICE Subjects</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Literature</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World History</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
subjects. For example, the correlations between performance in PreAICE and AICE courses were only slightly lower than those reported by Gill and Crawford (2017) in English literature (0.59 vs. 0.61) and slightly higher in mathematics (0.84 vs. 0.75). However, the within subject correlations in Table 7 are higher in all subjects when compared to within subject correlations between GCSEs and AS/A levels in the United Kingdom (see, for example, Sutch 2013).

Postsecondary Enrollment

The immediate postsecondary enrollment rate for Cambridge students who graduated from high school in 2014–15 in the state of Washington was 57.4 percent (170 of the 296 students in this study enrolled in postsecondary education in 2015–16). (The immediate enrollment rate is the percentage of high school graduates who enroll at two- or four-year colleges and universities in the fall immediately following their completion of high school.) Note that these students did not necessarily obtain an AICE Diploma (for students with an AICE Diploma, graduation rates were around 75 percent according to Vidal Rodeiro, Crawford and Shaw (2017); rather, they might have only taken PreAICE courses or just one or two AS/A levels. This enrollment rate is lower than the national rate of immediate postsecondary enrollment, which, according to McFarland, et al. (2018), was 69 percent in 2015. The rate is also slightly lower than that in the state of Washington3 (63 percent in 2015), although, given the available sample sizes, the scale of this difference is not particularly surprising. In particular, even based upon simple random sampling, a 95 percent confidence interval for the postsecondary enrollment rate for Cambridge students would be from 51.8 percent to 63.0 percent.

If the immediate enrollment rate is broken down by type of postsecondary institution attended, the differences between that for Cambridge students and the national rate were greater at four-year than at two-year institutions. The enrollment rate at four-year institutions for Cambridge students, though lower than the national rate, was slightly higher than that for students in the state of Washington. However, the difference is not statistically significant, as a 95 percent confidence interval for the postsecondary enrollment rate for Cambridge students at four-year institutions would be from 30.6 percent to 41.6 percent.

Figure 5 (on page 11) shows the types of institutions at which high school graduates with Cambridge qualifications started their postsecondary education. The majority of the students enrolled at a public institution (88%), and more than half (63%) started their postsecondary studies at a four-year institution.

Survey research suggests that of those who go on to university, approximately 72 percent attend in-state universities. This study found a slightly higher figure for Cambridge students in Washington state (see Figure

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3 Washington state immediate college enrollment rates are for the class of 2015 and are available at <erdc.wa.gov/data-dashboards/high-school-graduate-outcomes>.

---

### Table 6. AICE Subjects Taken by Students Following the Cambridge Program, 2014–15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AICE Subjects</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Language/Literature</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. History</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Literature</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Studies</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculus/Mechanics</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### Table 7. Correlations Between PreAICE and AICE Courses, by Subject

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Students (n)</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Literature</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History (PreAICE World History and AICE U.S. History)</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics (PreAICE Mathematics and AICE Calculus/Mechanics)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with approximately 84 percent starting their postsecondary education in 2015–16 at universities in the state of Washington.

For students in the state of Washington, more detailed data on their postsecondary journeys were avail-
able. Therefore, the following analyses focus only on students who enrolled at in-state institutions (N=144).

Figure 6 (on page 12) shows the types of postsecondary institutions in the state of Washington where Cambridge students started their studies. Note that the two-year institutions include both private and public in order to protect subgroups with very low numbers of students (see Seastrom 2010 for details). Just over half of the students (51%) enrolled at four-year public institutions, 5 percent enrolled at four-year private institutions, and the remainder (44%) enrolled at two-year institutions.

There were, however, 48 students at two-year public institutions (that is, 81 percent of the students at these institutions) who were enrolled as transfer (to four-year) students. This reflects national data that indicate that 81 percent of students enrolling at community college indicate that they want to earn a bachelor’s (or higher) degree (Horn and Skomsvold 2011, Jenkins and Fink 2016).

### Remedial Enrollment

Remedial education in the United States is designed to help students achieve expected competencies in core academic skills such as literacy (English) and numeracy (Math). Many students in the United States leave high school not ready for college and require remediation in English, math, or both. This has implications for postsecondary success as remediation is costly, delays time to degree completion, and decreases the likelihood of graduation (Attewell, et al. 2006, Bettinger and Long 2004, Camara 2013). The likelihood of remedial placement varies among states because of high school preparation, student demographics, and state policies for assessing and placing students in remedial courses.

Table 8 (on page 12) shows the numbers of Cambridge students who enrolled in remedial math or English courses in the state of Washington.

Jimenez and Thompson (2016) reported that 30 percent of students starting postsecondary education in Washington had to take one or more remedial courses. Table 8 shows that the percentages of Cambridge students who required remediation in English or math were less than the comparable averages for all students in the state of Washington (remember that the sample size available for analysis is fairly small.)

ERDC data facilitated examination of some demographic characteristics of those Cambridge students who were enrolled in remedial work. This analysis focused on Cambridge students who enrolled at in-state postsecondary institutions (N=144).
Table 9 (on page 13) shows the percentages of Cambridge students who enrolled in remediation (either in math or English) by different background characteristics. \( \chi^2 \) tests (or Fisher’s exact tests in the cases where counts were small) were used to compare the demographic characteristics of students enrolled and not enrolled in remedial courses. They showed that there was no evidence of a relationship between remediation and gender, remediation and eligibility for free or reduced price school meals, and remediation and proficiency in reading or math.

Similarly, Tables 10 and 11 (on page 13) show the percentages of students who took PreAICE or AICE courses in English or mathematics and enrolled in remedial work in English or math, respectively. There was no evidence of a relationship between remediation and the uptake of English or mathematics Cambridge courses.

There was, however, a statistically significant difference (p-values < 0.05) between the students who needed remedial work and those who did not in their performance on Cambridge courses (better performance, on average, by those without remedial work: 3.08 vs. 2.58) and in the number of Cambridge credits earned (higher number of credits, on average, by those without remedial work: 7.84 vs. 5.36).

Table 8. Enrollment in Remedial Math or English Courses: Cambridge Students at Public Institutions in Washington

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remedial Course</th>
<th>All Institutions</th>
<th>Four-Year Institutions</th>
<th>Two-Year Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not reported in order to protect subgroups with very low numbers of students (see Seastrom 2010 for details).
Postsecondary Performance

Figure 7 (on page 16) shows the cumulative college GPA, at the end of 2015–16, for Cambridge students who enrolled at public institutions in the state of Washington. On average, the cumulative GPA was slightly higher at four-year institutions (2.63) than at two-year institutions (2.47). As a comparison, the average cumulative GPA for first-year students enrolled at Washington State University at the end of the spring 2016 semester was 2.80. (WSU 2020).

Relationship Between Performance in Cambridge Courses and Postsecondary Performance

This section focuses on those Cambridge students who studied for an AICE course. On average, these students achieved 2.6 points in their Cambridge courses. Table 12 (on page 15) shows that this average was higher among students who enrolled at a four-year postsecondary institution (2.9 = grade B) and lower among those not enrolled at all (2.0 = grade C).

In order to evaluate the validity of the Cambridge courses as predictors of postsecondary performance, Pearson correlations between average performance in AICE courses and number of AICE courses (measured by credits earned) with the cumulative GPA at two- and four-year institutions were calculated. Large correlation coefficients would indicate high predictive value of the AICE courses.

Table 9. Cambridge Students Requiring Remediation (English or Math), by Background Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ Background</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>0.5766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free / Reduced-Price Meal Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Proficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Proficiency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages are shown in Table 9 instead of presenting 2x2 tables with counts in order to follow data disclosure guidelines (some of the cells had very low frequencies).

Table 10. Cambridge Students Requiring Remediation in English, by Uptake of Cambridge Courses in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cambridge Course</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PreAICE English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.5675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AICE English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11. Cambridge Students Requiring Remediation in Math, by Uptake of Cambridge Courses in Mathematics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cambridge Course</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PreAICE Mathematics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>0.1055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AICE Mathematics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>0.5169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The report cited shows average GPA by student level according to credit load, where 0–29 credits are freshmen, so students who enrolled with AP credit, Cambridge credit, etc. are often academic sophomores or juniors, especially by the end of the first term.

Table 9.

* Percentages are shown in Table 9 instead of presenting 2x2 tables with counts in order to follow data disclosure guidelines (some of the cells had very low frequencies).

The higher the correlation coefficient, the more beneficial it would be to use performance in AICE courses to predict performance in college. In both cases, the correlation coefficients are just below 0.50, which is higher.
than correlations found, for example, between AP tests and college GPA (Bridgeman and Lewis 1994), between some sections of the SAT and first-year GPA (Shaw, et al. 2016), or between a range of different test scores and various measures of student success at college (Kuncel and Hezlett 2007).

Table 13 also shows that the correlation between performance in AICE courses with college GPA is much greater than the correlation between credit in AICE courses (proxy for number of courses) and college GPA. High school GPA appears a better (or as good) predictor of postsecondary performance at two-year (four-year) institutions than performance in Cambridge courses. Note, however, that these Cambridge courses are not AS/A level qualifications but courses taken at school in preparation for the AS/A levels and graded by teachers. Also note that the sample sizes in this analysis are relatively small for investigations into predictive validity.

Conclusions

Studies that specifically track Cambridge high school graduates in the United States through their postsecondary journeys are not very common (see, for example, Vidal Rodeiro, Crawford, and Shaw (2017) for a summary of the most recent research on the value of the Cambridge program for higher education study). One of the main reasons for the lack of studies may be the difficulty in accessing appropriate data, as highlighted in recent work by Shaw and Vidal Rodeiro (2019) looking at the availability and content of sources of secondary and postsecondary education data in the United States.

This research explored the characteristics and the postsecondary enrollment patterns of a cohort of 2014–15 public high school graduates in Washington who took at least one Cambridge course between grades nine and twelve. No study had yet examined the postsecondary enrollments of students taking Cambridge qualifications in the state of Washington.

Key findings of the current research are as follows:

◆ A relatively high percentage of Cambridge students were entitled to free or reduced price meals (60 percent of Cambridge students vs. 45 percent of all graduates in the state of Washington); this might suggest that the Cambridge program helps the widening participation agenda.

◆ The percentages of Cambridge students demonstrating reading proficiency in tenth grade compared to within-state students was slightly higher (87 percent vs. 84 percent).
The cumulative high school GPA of Cambridge students was just below 3.0. This is comparable to the national high school cumulative GPA. Almost a quarter of students had a GPA between 3.5 and 4, which is desirable for enrollment in competitive universities in the United States.

The immediate enrollment rate for Cambridge students who graduated from high school in 2014–15 was 57 percent. This rate is slightly lower than the national rate (69 percent) and the rate in the state of Washington (63 percent).

However, the enrollment rate at four-year institutions for Cambridge students, though still lower than the national rate, was slightly higher than the rate for students in the state of Washington (36.1 percent vs. 35.0 percent).

The percentages of Cambridge students who required remediation in English or math were much less than the average in the state of Washington. There was not, however, any evidence of a relationship between the uptake of Cambridge courses in English (mathematics) and enrolling in remedial work in English (math).

At the end of academic year 2015–16, the cumulative GPA for Cambridge students who enrolled at public institutions in the state of Washington was slightly greater at four-year than at two-year institutions and around 2.60 in both cases.

PreAICE (IGCSE) courses were found to be good predictors of performance on AICE (AS/A level) courses. In particular, the correlation between PreAICE and AICE courses was 0.63, which indicates good predictive validity. Furthermore, within subject correlations (for example, between PreAICE English literature and AICE English literature) were positive and very high, indicating that candidates with good grades in PreAICE courses tended to receive good grades in AICE courses. Schools could therefore use PreAICE grades to inform how well students are likely to do on a Cambridge style exam and whether a student should continue to study that subject at the AICE level.

AICE courses are good predictors of first-year GPA. In particular, the correlation between performance in AICE courses and first-year GPA at four-year institutions was 0.47, which is higher than correlations found, for example, between AP tests and college GPA or between a range of different test scores and various measures of student success at college.
Currently, few high schools in the state of Washington teach Cambridge courses and offer Cambridge qualifications to their students. However, other schools are starting to offer the Cambridge Lower Secondary Checkpoint Assessments to some of their eighth grade students. These could increase the uptake in PreAICE and AICE courses in the future.

Although this research has offered some insights about the progression to and success in postsecondary education of students following a Cambridge program, it has also pointed to areas requiring future work. For example:

- The follow-up period for this study was just one year, which is too short to assess the role of the Cambridge program on degree completion (i.e. Figure 8. Cumulative GPA of Cambridge Students at Public Institutions in the State of Washington).
graduation). In the future, with a longer follow-up period, it might be possible to examine dropout rates (for example, from first year to second year) or graduation.

- If data on major (e.g., STEM, language, humanities, etc.) were available, it would be possible to assess the role of specific Cambridge courses on postsecondary performance in the same area of study.

- Some factors that influence students’ enrollment in postsecondary education were not available in the data provided by ERDC. For example, further detail on the types and subjects of courses completed, SAT/ACT scores and students’ background characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, income status) would better inform understanding of the enrollment patterns of Cambridge students and the progress of Cambridge students of different backgrounds.

- If data on other dual enrollment programs were available, it would be possible to investigate whether participation in a Cambridge program of learning leads to higher student achievement (as indicated by postsecondary participation/performance) than non-participation or participating in other acceleration programs.

References


ERDC. See Education Research and Data Center.


OSPI. See Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.


WSU. See Washington State University.

About the Authors

Carmen Vidal Rodeiro is a Senior Research Officer at Cambridge Assessment. Her main areas of interest include subject provision and uptake in schools and colleges, comparability of standards in high-stakes examinations, progression routes and predictors of university participation and success both in the UK and internationally. She has a Ph.D. in statistics from the University of Aberdeen.

Stuart Shaw is the Principal Research Officer for Cambridge Assessment International Education. Before leading a research team in the area of mainstream international examinations, Stuart worked on a range of Cambridge English products with specific skill responsibilities for Writing. He is particularly interested in demonstrating how Cambridge Assessment seeks to meet the demands of validity in their tests.
Transfer Transformation: An Interview with Janet Marling

Janet Marling is the Executive Director of the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS), which is housed at the University of North Georgia. NISTS was established in 2002 at the University of North Texas and later moved to its present location in 2012. During this time, NISTS has grown into one of the largest national organizations focused on the unique needs of transfer students. In this interview, conducted by Stephen J. Handel, Executive Director of Higher Education at The College Board and a member of the NISTS Advisory Board, Marling talks about the challenges that transfer students face, the aims of her organization to help address those challenges, and the ways in which the transfer pathway—in all of its various manifestations—will increasingly serve the needs of students, especially those from underrepresented groups, seeking postsecondary degrees and training.
Handel: How does one decide to work with transfer students? It is not exactly a traditional higher education career path.

Marling: I always say that transfer found me!

Handel: But you are a higher education veteran, right?

Marling: Correct; I have always worked in higher education. My master’s degree is in counseling psychology. I put my degree to work immediately in a college counseling center, which segued into student affairs. From there, my journey took me into orientation programs, new student and mentoring programs, and higher education leadership where I did a three-and-a-half-year stint as the vice president for student affairs at the University of North Georgia. Along the way, I was introduced to the challenges inherent to transfer and was hooked.

Handel: Both of us have spent a good part of our careers on transfer. But isn’t our work in a kind of backwater? To many people, it seems narrow, almost boutique-like. A specialization only, not in the mainstream of higher education. Why are we talking about transfer today?

Marling: I think there are two very important reasons why we’re talking about transfer. I think we can all agree that there is an equity gap in higher education, specifically, around race and income. Community colleges and other open-access, public institutions are often the most welcoming places for students who might not otherwise have access to higher education. If institutions are authentically interested in diversity, they need to take a close look at the students who are attending these institutions and who wish to transfer and earn, not just the baccalaureate degrees, but graduate degrees and professional degrees.

The second reason is student mobility. Students are moving between institutions, whether or not we’re acknowledging it. The National Student Clearinghouse data indicate that perhaps half of all students in postsecondary education are either coming or going during their time in college. This is likely news to many higher education professionals.

Handel: To use the much-hated consumer metaphor, students are really voting with their feet, right?

Marling: They are. They have choices, and we’re seeing them exercise those choices. For those institutions that are dependent on high school graduates whose numbers are predicted to decline in the coming years, they need to be very mindful of how they are recruiting students and how they are serving them.

Handel: Your own college experience is not as a transfer student, correct? I think this is an important point for our readers to know because it speaks to your special commitment to this topic.

Marling: I was one of those rare students who sat down at orientation and mapped out my four-year college experience and achieved it in those four years. Admittedly, I had a little incentive. My parents gave me the privilege of four years of college paid for by them. But not a day more! I knew that I could not afford an extra semester.

Handel: Despite your more traditional college experience, I understand that some members of your ex-
tended family have had experience with the transfer process.

Marling: In reality, transfer had been around me all the time. My mother did not go to college, but she went to business school. She would have achieved what we would now consider an A.A. in business. My father pursued the traditional college route, getting his Ph.D. in chemistry immediately after undergrad. Then my older brother, who started college about ten years ahead of me was a transfer student on steroids!

Handel: How so?

Marling: He started his career at my dad’s alma mater, a small liberal arts college in rural Nebraska. It probably was not the best fit for him, but it was the thing to do as my father’s successor. Within three semesters he realized it was not for him. He took a gigantic left turn and went out to sunny Southern California to live the glamorous life and to continue, honestly, his track career. He was a pole vaulter and managed to acquire a track scholarship at a community college, competing and going to school. During that time, he also started his own business to be able to afford school and the cost of living. After two years of fun in the sun, he needed to go somewhere else to finish his bachelor’s degree.

Handel: Do you mean pole vaulting wasn’t like a long-term career?

Marling: It wasn’t probably going to catapult him in any direction except over that bar. He recalibrated and returned to our home state of Oklahoma. Three institutions, three states, and seven years later, he had two degrees. I see him as very resourceful, diligent, and committed. His trajectory was anything but traditional, but not unlike the pathway of so many transfer students.

Today, knowing what I know as a transfer professional, he would have benefitted enormously from attending a community college directly from high school. But that option—transfer—wasn’t something my parents were familiar with. The pathway from a two-year to a four-year was simply not a college option that was seriously considered.

Handel: It sounds like he may not have known what he wanted to do when he started college. A situation many students find themselves at seventeen or eighteen year’s old.

Marling: He didn’t. I think it was a lost opportunity for him and resulted in a much longer college career than perhaps he had anticipated. He did, however, meet my sister-in-law at his final destination, so the extended journey was worth it in the end! I’d also like to mention that three of my nieces have since become proud community college graduates.

Handel: So, even within your own family, you had some experiences to draw on as models for your professional experience. What were you thinking about when you were moving into the transfer area, perhaps when you were counseling transfer students?

Marling: When I was the director of New Student and Mentoring Programs at the University of North Texas, in Denton, one of the areas for which I was responsible was transfer orientation. We were bringing in a significant number of students: 7,000 per year.

Handel: Even today, that is a large class for transfer students, right?

Marling: Absolutely. And more than 54 percent of our student body at any given time had transferred into our institution. This was early in 2002. At that time, it was very unusual, and we weren’t sure how best to serve them. We soon realized there was not a lot of literature out there about these students or that their needs might be different than those of first-year students. Dr. Bonita Jacobs, our vice president for student affairs at the time (now president of University of North Georgia), and I attended conferences in search of information, but there were always limited offerings, usually with a tremendous amount of interest.

Marling: Bonita and I agreed that if we needed more information about this growing student constituency, surely there were others who needed it as well. So we decided to convene a national meeting in 2003 that drew 300 people from 30 different institutions across the United States and Canada. We knew we were on to something!

Handel: Even at that time people were hungry for more information about transfer? Although college-going in America for the B.A. degree was seen as a four-year institution option, more and more we’re seeing that men and women entering college were taking different pathways.

Marling: That’s right. And you couldn’t ignore that fact if you were going to be an institution interested in diversity and in accommodating students from all backgrounds.

Our organization really started with this in mind. Initially, a large part of our work was to serve the
needs of four-year institutions. That’s where the greatest need for information, data, and research was required. At the University of North Texas, we wanted to become a better “receiving institution.” Two-year institutions already possessed at least a tradition of serving transfer students. But many four-year institutions floundered, unsure about how best to accommodate increasing numbers of community college students who wished to transfer to their institutions.

**Handel:** Beyond that initial conference, what motivated Bonita and you to focus on the research aspect of this phenomenon?

**Marling:** The research component was really important because many of us were situated from a student affairs background. Our experience was programmatic, but that was not sufficient. We needed to understand why some programs worked well and others did not; and we needed to connect with faculty who had the expertise to help us study this area in depth. For example, what motivates the college choices of transfer students versus those of first-year students? How does the transition process differ for students with college experience but who are now encountering things unique to their new environments? Even with our best intentions to serve all students who came through our doors, it was critical for us to understand the unique needs and challenges of these students using data and research to inform our practices.

**Handel:** How does NISTS advocate for transfer-student-focused research?

**Marling:** We try to do this in a couple of ways. First, we provide a forum for researchers from around the country to present their work to other researchers and practitioners. There are many talented academics doing wonderful research on this topic, but it sometimes does not receive the attention it deserves. Second, we have developed some formal mechanisms to provide young researchers with an opportunity to showcase or publish their work. Every other year, we present the Barbra Townsend Dissertation Award to the best dissertation on the topic of transfer. We also provide research funds through our NISTS Research Grant Program. In addition, we recently partnered with the University of North Georgia Press to publish two volumes of research by newly-minted Ph.D. students and practitioners, which Eileen Strempel (UCLA) and you were kind enough to edit (*Transition and Transformation*, University of North Georgia Press, 2016, 2018). Finally, we conduct and disseminate original research as well.

**Handel:** NISTS also grapples with the public policy aspect of this work, correct?

**Marling:** Yes. We started this work while housed in Texas. The Texas Legislature at that time was especially interested in transfer and the ways in which institutions could be supported or incentivized to admit and graduate more transfer students.

**Handel:** So, the NISTS canvas is a broad one: education, research, advocacy, and public policy?

**Marling:** This is one the unique aspects of our organization; we have the opportunity to study transfer from a variety of perspectives. We are the only national organization exclusively devoted to transfer across the higher education landscape. That gives us the opportunity to really delve deeply into the intricacies of this complex issue. Of course, other organizations, higher education institutions, and philanthropic organizations contribute to a rich—and growing—discussion about the importance of transfer. For example, AACRAO, The College Board, and NACAC, to name just a few, have been involved in transfer from their functional perspectives and have made important contributions to the field. We just feel fortunate to be able to examine the totality of transfer, interacting with colleagues from around the country.

**Handel:** That’s really an important point because when you host the NISTS conference, you’re engaging with people both from two-year and four-year institutions, right? If four-year institutions are going to be an important part of the transfer equation they need to come to the party, correct?

**Marling:** They do, and they don’t need to wait to be invited, either.

**Handel:** I’d be interested in hearing your thoughts about the central issues facing transfer and transfer students at this time. From the research, we know transfer has always been a highly valued goal for most students who enter community colleges for the first time. However, most students never transfer and earn a baccalaureate degree.

**Marling:** There are far too many students who do not transfer, and there are many possible reasons. First, the process is too complex. Many transfer students come to college not having learned how to tap into their personal agency. They may be first generation college students, students from low-income back-
grounds, or students of color. They have a tremendous amount of community cultural wealth, but are not sure how to translate that into college success. They may have little understanding of how the transfer process works and find it much more complex than the first time they applied to college.

Handel: Why is the transfer process so complex?

Marling: Every institution has a different set of “rules”—policies and processes, a unique vernacular. Institutions are designed for their own convenience, rather than that of the student. If you are a community college student who wishes to transfer, you may need to prepare yourself academically for three or more four-year institutions to ensure your admission.

Handel: Is that because a student who’s at a community college has no way of knowing if the receiving institution will admit her?

Marling: That’s right. To compound the problem, when students start at a community college, they may be encouraged to complete general education courses, without an emphasis on taking courses that will apply to a specific major at their next destination. The problem, then, is that students are preparing broadly while four-year institutions are looking for something very specific in terms of major preparation. This disconnect often results in credits that may transfer, but not apply to a degree program. More on that later.

But the admissions and articulation processes are not the only complex aspects of transfer. Financial aid is another hurdle. How does a student think about financial aid across two or more institutions? Do transfer students appreciate that they can maximize their financial aid at the community college? And if they do, what are their options? Are the scholarship dollars available of any consequence?

Finally, I would say that transfer students may find themselves overwhelmed when they think about moving on to what is often-times a larger, more competitive college or university. I think many students have trouble seeing themselves in that environment, let alone succeeding there. They are excited to be continuing their education, but wonder how will they fit in and be academically successful at another institution. This is where a student’s self-efficacy can hinder their transition.

Handel: How do we help students overcome that lack of self-efficacy or agency?

Marling: My colleagues and I emphasize the importance of “transfer champions” and break them into three categories: Agents are individuals with credibility and expertise who can say to students: “You know what? I see you achieving in higher education and this is why.” Or “Have you ever considered being a physics major? Have you ever considered owning your own business? Here’s what it might take to do that.” They help students think more broadly about their potential, not simply in educational terms, but how it may apply to their professional lives. Transfer connectors are champions who go a step further to ensure students are linked with the right individuals and/or services to execute their goals. Finally, advocates are individuals who constantly speak to the importance of transfer and help ensure these students are at the heart of every critical conversation or decision making process.

Handel: Are these “transfer champions” primarily in community colleges? Or should there be transfer champions in four-year institutions as well?

Marling: Four-year professionals are a critical part of this work. Of course, four-year institution leaders must be extremely clear about students’ authentic options if they wish to transfer to their institution. That’s a given. But we find that it’s the personal interaction that is most effective—especially for students who might not otherwise be confident in their ability to transfer. Every interaction with a transfer student is an opportunity to propel that student toward her goals. Missing the mark in that exchange, perhaps viewing it as transactional, can be the catalyst for derailment. It’s truly that one-on-one interaction that’s so important. Not just advisers and other staff, but faculty too.

Handel: Something that you just said there, which is very important, is the critical role that faculty play. Part of your advocacy is to not only honor our counselors and advisors, but to also unleash the power of faculty members as transfer champions.

Marling: Absolutely! I think community college faculty members are very aware of the important role they play in helping students advance academically. But many do not understand the intricacies of the transfer process; that’s never been their job. Yet they see these students on a far more regular basis than advisors. Anything that advisors and transfer center professionals can do to empower faculty to talk
with students about the mechanics of transfer, even within the context of what they’re learning academically, can be very helpful to students.

Handel: Let’s talk about credit transfer between and among postsecondary education institutions. This is a perennial issue; it never goes away. And it causes real problems for many students who wish to transfer.

Marling: Very true. It is often argued that one of the great strengths of American higher education is the diversity and independence of its colleges and universities. Of course, that is true, but it also makes it difficult for students to understand how their credits may or may not count at their receiving institution. Each college controls its own curriculum. To match courses from one place to another is an extremely difficult process even when institutions have the best of intentions in mind.

Handel: It seems that every legislative hearing in almost every state inevitably has the student who says, “I had to take a lot more courses or I had to repeat courses.” Legislators are constantly on the backs of community colleges or four-year institutions saying, “Why can’t you folks get your act together?” But the solution is harder than they think, isn’t it?

Marling: It often is. Legislators have the best of intentions, but some of the solutions are worse than the problem. I know that some of our AACRAO members unfortunately find themselves caught in the middle of these debates since they are the ones who must record the credits but do not have the authority to change credit-transfer policies. That’s in the hands of faculty or senior leaders.

Handel: Any suggestions here?

Marling: It is not simple because each institution has their own approach to articulation. Each faculty member has his or her own perspective on their curriculum and that of other institutions. A solution requires changing a mindset of many four-year faculty members as to the quality of education that students receive at the community college. This requires conversations among disciplinary faculty via departments at two- and four-year institutions; conversations about learning objectives so that students are prepared well for the upper-division; and conversa-

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tions about the kinds of textbooks and other learning materials that are required. Sometimes this discussion is not challenging at all; just sharing information may be all that is required. I know of instances in which adjunct faculty members are teaching the same course at two- and four-year institutions, using the same textbook, and yet the course is not transferable. It’s the same faculty member; it’s the same material. What’s happening here, and why are the students caught in the middle?

Handel: You raise several important points. First, communication among institutions is key. Sometimes that is difficult in itself, but not insurmountable if we authentically care about students. The other nugget is that articulation agreements are, finally, about preparing students well, helping them gain the academic foundation that will serve them well after they transfer. Policymakers are anxious to invoke common course numbering schemes on public colleges and universities. I understand their frustration, but it has always struck me as a papering-over what ought to be something that is far more thoughtful and substantive. Articulation isn’t bean-counting; it’s about preparing students well for transfer.

Marling: And there is another element that is important. All of us who work with transfer students need to become very sensitive listeners. A student may ask: “Will you accept my credits?” And we are likely to respond with: “Of course, we’re very willing to do that.” That’s accurate; we probably will take those courses for elective credit. But what the student really should be asking is, “How will those credits be applied to my major?” That may be a more difficult question, but it is a critically important one for transfer students. I really want to encourage professionals to think twice about their answers to these kinds of questions, because they—literally—have a life-changing impact on students’ ability to complete a degree.

Handel: In other words, we need to ask the question the student may not know to ask?

Marling: Right. We have to ask that second and third question. We have to make sure we’re hearing what the students are asking us by seeking clarification and confirmation. We should probe more deeply: “Well, what do you want to do with that major?” And the student may say, “I want to be a business major,” but they’ve only completed applied business courses for two years, and those credits may not transfer to the institution they would like to attend. We just have to have an in-depth conversation. Too often, our interactions with students are transactional and don’t get to that level of understanding. Again, for students, it can be a momentum moment or a setback.

Handel: That’s difficult for any student, but especially for students from backgrounds where they may not know the right questions to ask.

Marling: And from backgrounds where you don’t question authority. For these students, what an advisor says goes because they are the ones who have the knowledge.

Handel: If we agree that transfer works best when institutions are talking to one another, what does that conversation cover? What does that partnership include?

Marling: First is communication, followed by commitment. Too often, we have partnerships in name only. The partnership is programmatically-based, without a sufficient foundation of support or resources. There may be an articulation agreement between two institutions, signed by high-level officials at both places. But where and how does that agreement live? Who is taking responsibility for it at either institution? Who is charged with helping students understand that an articulation agreement is available and what it means for students?

Handel: Why isn’t an articulation agreement alone sufficient proof of institutional commitment?

Marling: It’s not enough because it’s not the president’s concern to know how that agreement has been implemented, how it is serving students on a day-to-day basis. They may very well believe that it’s in the best interest of their students and it’s being taken care of beautifully. But, as we know, sometimes that secondary conversation is not happening.

Handel: This is an important point for our readers. AACRAO members include registrars, admissions professionals, and student affairs’ leaders, among others, and they are the ones who are often asked to translate these policies in ways that make sense to students.

Marling: Their role is critical and essential. All of us have to ensure that we’re very clear in our communication with students. We are the information brokers. A such, we must translate the words of arcane higher education policy into something that can be broadly understood by students who, not surprisingly, don’t speak our language.
Handel: You’ve also talked about the importance of orientation programs. But sometimes we fail to offer this important program to transfer students. Why is that? Do we assume that since transfer students are older, more mature, with some experience with college, that they do not need this kind of assistance?

Marling: Right. These students may be experts at where they’ve come from, which we should celebrate, and now they are in a new institution with a different language and different expectations. If you went to a new community that had no signage, what would that be like for you? You’d muddle along, of course, and eventually figure it out, but how much would be lost in the process?

Handel: Where is transfer today compared to where it was when you began NISTS?

Marling: When I got into this work I thought it would take about ten years; in about a decade, we would have grappled with this issue, we would have had some good solutions, we would have piloted those solutions, and then I would move on to some other pressing higher education issue!

Handel: And?

Marling: It hasn’t happened because there is still so much that needs to be accomplished. In the field, we get frustrated that we haven’t seen the advances we wanted to see more quickly. Still, I do believe that transfer has improved and that it is getting the attention it deserves in many quarters, including the media.

Handel: Attention in the media, why?

Marling: A couple of reasons. I think one is the credit issue. As we discussed earlier, lawmakers are frustrated with the (lack of) progress we are making in helping students transfer credit from one institution to another. In some places they are linking public funding to advances in this area. That tends to get higher education leaders’ attention.

Then there is the broader discussion about the value of higher education. There is a serious questioning of the value of going to college. What is a college degree worth? How can I earn a degree affordably? What can I reasonably expect to do with this degree?

There’s also a lot of conversation about the adult learner, many who have some college credit, but no credential or degree. Getting those students back into higher education and allowing them to finish with a degree that makes sense to them is challenging. We have to find a pathway for these transfer students, as well.

Handel: The current presidential administration is emphasizing vocational degrees, workforce certificates, and expansion of apprenticeships—all designed to focus attention more toward the labor market value of higher education degrees. Do you think that’s a problem for transfer, or do you think that’s a natural ally of transfer?

Marling: It’s not necessarily a problem; it is a reality. It’s easier to talk about the practicalities of getting vocational awards that allow students to transition to the world of work more quickly. The outcomes of those credentials for students are more readily apparent. When you think about a four-year degree, however, the timeline to the work-world is understandably longer and, in the eyes of some individuals, less certain vocationally.

From a transfer perspective, this means we have to be more inclusive in our conversation about the value of the transfer pathway and the baccalaureate degree. We have to say, “You might not wish to transfer now to earn a four-year degree, but you may be transferring in the future, so you need a plan for that.” And we need to ensure they know that we are an economy that rewards life-long learners. Although you may have earned an industry-certificate today, your earning power may not increase substantially without additional credentials.

Handel: So, rather than discouraging young people entering college and earning a vocationally-oriented award—if that is what they wish to do—we talk to them about setting themselves up for postsecondary achievement later?

Marling: Students at the community college need to be given all options. Another two years and a baccalaureate degree may result in a better paying job, but we have to be respectful to students who don’t have that flexibility right now.

Handel: “Free community college” has galvanized the interest of some politicians and policymakers. What’s your perspective on these initiatives as they relate to transfer?

Marling: On the one hand, more students who are encouraged to attend a community college means that we potentially have more students to accommodate via transfer. It’s a little early to know if that’s actu-
ally happening now. One of the criticisms of these proposals is that they may help students who do not need the support financially, while edging out students who do. Will these programs support students who would have likely been able to support themselves in college, anyway? Also, these programs only cover tuition, which is not the only cost associated with college. The full-cost of college may still prove to be a barrier to access.

**Handel:** That’s a good point. For students from low-income backgrounds, where is the social or supplemental scaffolding that will allow them to earn a degree?

**Marling:** Right. If tuition is covered, students have funds that can be devoted to other college expenses. It is not the cure all that I think it is being presented as by some advocates. But, again, the jury is still out, and it may prove to be a worthwhile effort in expanding higher education access and completion. What I am excited about, however, is that a good deal of the national debate is focusing on postsecondary education, that lawmakers and others are thinking creatively about how to help more individuals earn college credential and degrees. So even if I am unsure about the current proposals being discussed, I am pleased that it is on the radar of our political leaders.

**Handel:** Demographer Nathan Grawe, in his 2017 book *Demographics and The Demand for Higher Education,* predicts a significant decrease in the number of high school graduates in the coming years, which will put pressure on all colleges and institutions to meet their enrollment targets. Do you think this is going to hurt or help transfer?

**Marling:** I think the impact is being felt today. Community college transfer students are beginning to get interest from institutions that have not traditionally reached out to students attending two-year institutions. The schools need those students to meet their enrollment targets. If they are strategic, they will continue to recruit and serve these students well in the future. It is gratifying to see more institutions welcome transfer students to their campuses, but as we discussed earlier, it can be a problem if the institution has not traditionally focused on how to serve transfers beyond matriculation.

**Handel:** Your home institution, the University of North Georgia, is the outgrowth of consolidating a two- and a four-year institution, which makes it easier for students to make the internal transition from the lower-division to the upper-division. And when you were with the University of North Texas, in Denton, the surrounding region had several very strong community college systems. In my state, California, we have, at last count, 114 community colleges. If a student is from an urban or suburban area, there is a great deal of choice. But for rural students, the choice is more limited. Does that make it harder on students to transfer?

**Marling:** It does for multiple reasons. It can be more challenging for rural students to see themselves moving to another geographic region. In these areas, it’s very community focused, very family focused. Sometimes it is hard to envision what life might look like after completing a two-year degree or certificate at a community college. Higher education institutions that attempt to recruit these students as transfers can face a great deal of skepticism. It is harder to galvanize a community around transfer as a good option in many rural areas. Additionally, for rural students, attending a four-year institution often requires geographic relocation, which can be socially and financially stressful.

**Handel:** You see the same issue oftentimes with tribal community colleges and tribal four-year institutions, as well.

**Marling:** Yes, most definitely.

**Handel:** The notion of local community is really important even if the argument to leave the region to get a sustaining degree, perhaps, is very strong. That can be a tough choice.

**Marling:** Yes. The value statement for transfer has to be strong, perhaps focusing on the ways in which an individual may serve the community when she returns after completing her degree.

**Handel:** It’s not even making the case for transfer; it’s just making the case for college.

**Marling:** For higher education in all its forms, you’re exactly right.

**Handel:** What’s next for the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students? What issues are you working on today?

**Marling:** We are working to get valuable resources in the hands of our practitioners of all kinds: admissions staff, registrars, orientation coordinators—people who work with transfer students every day, but may not know it. This includes information for staff
AACRAO Consulting provides you with expert advice and proven solutions to your toughest enrollment challenges.
at all levels, from front-line professionals to higher education executives, as well as faculty.

What essential transfer data, knowledge, and skills do they need to effectively support transfers? How can we get that information in their hands in a compelling and relevant way? How can we translate great research that’s happening into something practical for these professionals? As well intended as we all are, not many of us are out there reading journals. Once we do, we read it and shelve it. We don’t have a translator to talk through what this seminal work might mean for you as a professional working with transfer students. There’s some great research out there right now. Our job is to make it accessible. We are very excited about this project. Enhancing the opportunities for professionals to get their hands on those resources. That’s really important to us. From a very practical perspective, look for that on our website on the next few months (nists.org).

Handel: Other initiatives?

Marling: Another project we’re excited about is reimagining the transfer student experience. I think this is where AACRAO members can play such an important role.

Handel: Describe what you mean by “reimagining” the transfer student experience?

Marling: There are moments in students’ trajectories when how we connect with and serve them can lead them to engage with the institution or simply drift away. We need to identify those institutional touch points—and the professionals who populate those touch points. Practitioners are encouraged not only to work within their functional areas, but to think deeply about how their spheres of expertise bump up against other spheres of influence within the institution. While their expertise remains in their functional areas, it is imperative that they are able to imagine the entire ecosystem the students must navigate.

This increased level of empathy for how students experience the entire system allows for much more solid referrals that increase the chances of students getting the support they need. We’re exploring both the two-year and four-year students experience from various theoretical lenses and are excited to spend time writing about and testing some of our ideas.

Handel: It sounds like a great project. Any parting words for our readers?

Marling: I completely value the role that AACRAO membership plays in the transfer process and just challenge everybody to look at the ways in which they are serving as transfer champions for their institutions.

Handel: A great way to end. Thanks for your advice and counsel.

About the Author

Stephen J. Handel is Executive Director of Higher Education Strategic Assessment Use and Opportunity at the College Board. Prior to this position, he served as the chief admissions officer for the University of California System and was the inaugural director of the National Center for Community College Initiatives at the College Board. He has written widely on the topic of transfer and higher education admissions and enrollment issues. He can be contacted at shandel@collegeboard.org.
College and university admissions officers are the gatekeepers who decide which individuals may join the “country club” of higher education. As such, the decisions you make have a significant impact on the lives of individuals, especially those who are willing to travel across the globe and risk living in an unfamiliar country in order to receive a postsecondary education. Making decisions about international students and their credentials is much more complicated than evaluating the applications of U.S. students. Part of this complicated process involves decisions regarding English language proficiency and cut-off scores for exams such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL®) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examination.

Admissions officers are not expected to be language experts, and they often differ in their understanding of the meaning of the test scores (Ginther and Elder 2014). Yet according to the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) (2014), “Those responsible for educational testing programs should take appropriate steps to verify that the individuals who interpret the test results to make decisions within the school context are qualified to do so or are assisted by and consult with persons who are so qualified” (199). In addition, AERA, APA, and NCME state that those individuals in a position of interpreting test scores should be knowledgeable about the tests’ validity and reliability and “be able to articulate a logical explanation of the relationships among the tests used, the purposes served by the tests, and the interpretations of the test scores for the intended uses” (199). Given the number of high-stakes tests on which U.S. colleges and universities have to base decisions, it is highly unlikely that all of the admissions officers at any institution of higher education would be able to meet those standards. The phrase “or are assisted by and consult with persons who are so qualified” was probably intended to lighten that heavy burden of responsibility, but how many admissions officers actually take the time to find qualified people on their campuses who are knowledgeable about each of the tests used by their institutions? In the case of my university, it would appear that the decision makers in the admissions office simply followed the examples of their peer institutions, assuming that someone had done the work of assessing each test’s validity and reliability as well as justifying the interpretations of the test scores.

Indeed, Ginther and Elder (2014), who surveyed gatekeepers at Purdue University and the University of Melbourne, found that admissions officers at both the U.S. and the Australian universities were unfamiliar with the English-language proficiency exams on which they based decisions. O’Loughlin’s (2008) research at an Australian university also found “serious flaws” in the decision-making process about the IELTS, which originated in Australia. Clearly, from this research, we cannot generalize to all Anglophone colleges and universities; yet there is empirical evidence that decisions
about international students whose native language is not English may not be as accurate as they should be.

According to the mission statement of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) (2017), members “shall conduct themselves with integrity, fairness, honesty, and respect for others.” If AACRAO members are making uninformed decisions about the English-language abilities of international applicants, they are not acting in accordance with the guiding principles of integrity and fairness. Best practices in academic and enrollment services would dictate that decision makers be familiar with the examinations they use and regularly examine the procedures they follow.

In the spirit of fairness and what is best for the students as well as institutions, this article describes the format of the IELTS, introduces some psycholinguistic terms, and evaluates the IELTS vis-à-vis six criteria for language-proficiency exams. Finally, a case study is shared from my university, i.e. a situation in which uninformed admissions decisions were made about students’ English abilities as assessed by the IELTS and what was done to correct the situation. Perhaps our mistake can serve as a lesson for other higher education institutions.

IELTS

Compared to the TOEFL®, which has a long history, the IELTS is relatively new. Like the TOEFL®, it tests skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In the speaking section, however, instead of recording test takers’ responses, the students speak directly with their examiner. The test° lasts approximately three hours. In the listening and reading sections, students must answer questions about what they hear and read. For the speaking and writing sections, a trained rater evaluates each student’s performance. Each section is scored between 0 (“did not attempt the test”) and 9 (“expert user” of the language), and the average of the four scores is reflected in the overall band score (see Table 1).

Psychometrics

Psychometrics is the “branch of psychology that deals with the design, administration, and interpretation of quantitative tests for the measurement of psychological variables such as intelligence, aptitude, and personality traits” (American Heritage). The following analysis of the IELTS is based on Bachman and Palmer’s (1997) conceptual framework, which asserts that test usefulness can be gauged by the sum of six psychometric qualities: reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactivity, impact, and practicality. The underlying beliefs of the framework are that test usefulness is the most important consideration in devising a language test and that test developers need to find the right balance among the six qualities. The test taker is usually given a variety of language tasks based on situations a person is likely to encounter in the real world. On the basis of individual performance on these tasks, inferences are made about each student’s language ability.

The first test quality is critical for any test that is used for making inferences or decisions: Reliability refers to both the consistency of a test score over multiple test procedures and the absence of error (AERA, APA AND NCME 2014). It is usually measured with a reliability coefficient between 0 and 1. It can also refer to the consistency of interrater reliability, a score given by two raters. For example, with the TOEFL iBT® (internet-based TOEFL), two raters evaluate each writing sample, and three raters evaluate the speaking section. The scores are then correlated. An absolute minimum would be a reliability coefficient of 0.70, but a more reliable coefficient is considered to be greater than 0.80 (McNamara 2000). Only one rater evaluates the writing and speaking samples in the IELTS. O’Sullivan (2005) reviewed the test and found that the reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band Score</th>
<th>Skill Level</th>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Expert User</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Very Good User</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Good User</td>
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<td>Extremely Limited User</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Non-User</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Did not attempt the test</td>
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Source: IELTS (2020a).

° For a more detailed description, see <ielts.org/en-us/about-the-test/test-format>. 
coefficients for these two sections were low. Chalhoub-Deville and Turner (2000) commended IELTS for its training of raters for the speaking test. However, they, too, criticized the test makers for not providing sufficient documentation on rater reliability. Since then, however, the test developers have produced evidence showing that the correlations meet the minimum reliability standards (Cambridge ESOL 2006, Taylor and Falvey 2007). As for the listening and reading tests, statistical analyses of the 2004 version of the IELTS resulted in internal consistency reliability estimates ranging from 0.83 to 0.91 for listening and 0.83 to 0.90 for reading (Cambridge ESOL 2006). In conclusion, it appears that the IELTS meets the reliability criterion of this psychometric model.

The second quality in Bachman and Palmer’s (1997) model is construct validity. In the case of English-language proficiency exams, construct validity is the underlying ability to perform a language task, e.g., writing an academic essay, and construct validity pertains to the degree to which we can make inferences about a person’s language ability based on the test score. In other words, how well does the test score reflect the individual’s true English ability? Language ability is also related to the domain of generalization, or target-language-use (TLU) domain. The TLU domain for a lawyer would include tasks and language very different from those for a chef or electrician. With the IELTS, test takers choose either the Academic Module or the General Training Module; the TLU domain for the former is postsecondary education and for the latter is general employment for high school graduates. What test makers and test users need to do is justify their interpretations of test scores by demonstrating the validity of those interpretations—a complex, ongoing process.

The University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (C-EsOL), the British Council, and International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges have begun to examine the construct validity of the IELTS, particularly the reading and writing sections (Stoynoff 2009).

It is difficult to devise an exam that measures a student’s ability to write at the postsecondary education level. IELTS developers have attempted to do so by requiring test takers to complete two tasks. According to Stoynoff (2009), the writing construct of the IELTS can be inferred from the writing tasks that test takers are asked to complete as well as from the criteria the rater utilizes to evaluate them. However, Uysal (2010) and others have criticized the grading criteria of Task 2 of the IELTS, arguing that they compromise the construct validity of the writing section of the test. Thus, it appears that there is disagreement as to whether the writing construct of the exam clearly meets the criterion of construct validity.

As for the other two sections of the test, we can infer from the sample online listening tasks that the test taker comprehends English spoken in a variety of accents and from the speaking tasks that the test taker can converse on a variety of topics (Stoynoff 2009).

In summary, all four sections of the listening test not only involve English speakers with different accents, but they also pertain to the target-language-use domains of academia or living in an English-speaking country. The speaking test, too, appears to meet the criterion of construct validity in that a competent speaker (band score 6) can communicate effectively with an interlocutor in a socially appropriate way using correct vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Taylor and Falvey 2007).

The next two characteristics in the test-usefulness model are authenticity and interactiveness. Authenticity is concerned with the relevance of the test task to the target-language-use domain. In other words, is the test asking the individual to do something similar to what might be required in the real world? Interactiveness assesses the extent of the test taker’s engagement in the test task. This engagement is evaluated by considering which types and how many of the test taker’s characteristics are required: factual knowledge, affective schemata, and language ability, which includes language knowledge and metacognitive strategies (Bachman and Palmer 1997).

IELTS tasks appear to be authentic in that they are both social and academic in nature. In the listening section, for example, the monologues and dialogues are related to situations and topics the test taker would most likely have to deal with at a university in an English-speaking country. The academic reading section includes “three long texts…taken from books, journals, magazines and newspapers…. [which] have been selected for a non-specialist audience but are appropriate for people entering university courses or seeking professional registration” (IELTS 2020b).

As for the writing, in Task 1 the test taker is asked to describe and explain data in a graph, table, chart, or diagram or to describe a process, object, or event. Task
2 requires the test taker to write an essay in response to an opinion, argument, or problem. For example:

**Write about the following topic:**

As mass communication and transport continue to grow, societies are becoming more and more alike, leading to a phenomenon known as globalization. Some people fear that globalization will inevitably lead to the total loss of cultural identity. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons for your answer, and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

*Write at least 250 words.*

(IELTS 2020C)

Unlike Task 1, neither this nor other sample tests’ examples of Task 2 appear to meet the criterion of authenticity. Moore and Morton (2005) concluded that there were major differences between the characteristics of the writing required in the IELTS and those for university writing tasks in Australia. The researchers state that the IELTS writing task does not reflect what is required in academia.

As for the criterion of interactiveness, which is evaluated by considering how engaged the test taker is in the task, the sample writing task appears to require many characteristics of the test taker, including a high level of factual knowledge about globalization as well as the meaning of cultural identity. If the test taker belongs to an ethnic minority, affective schemata would be activated, and the individual most likely would engage metacognitive strategies to make the argument to agree or disagree with the statement and to give appropriate examples. Writing a response which organizes ideas logically and communicates them constitutes evidence of an individual’s knowledge of written text in academia.

With regard to the IELTS’ speaking section, my impression is that the interview is authentic in the social domain; however, I have reservations about its authenticity in the domain of academia. The sample task on the IELTS website asks the test taker to describe her hometown. This might be something one would be asked to do in a social situation, so it would rate high on the criterion of authenticity. Yet in Parts 2 and 3, the questions are, in my professional opinion, neither of an academic nature nor even related. At least one empirical study confirms this impression. In researching speaking tasks at U.S. universities, Ferris and Tagg (1996) found that all of the speaking required in graduate and undergraduate courses related to the academic content of the lectures and readings. In sum, I would rate the speaking section of the IELTS low on authenticity.

Nevertheless, the speaking section appears to be high in interactiveness. In the sample interview online, the student is required to marshal a variety of attributes in order to respond to Parts 2 and 3, which require speaking about a possession of personal value. This requires use of affective schemata to choose something personally important as well as factual knowledge of one’s culture when discussing social status and the history of values. Finally, the test taker must organize the information into a coherent oral argument using appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and intonation. Speaking to the examiner in person also requires culturally appropriate eye contact and body language. Thus, I agree with Stoynoff (2009) that the speaking part of the IELTS meets the criterion of interactiveness.

A test’s *impact* comprises the consequences as well as the implied values of the test and its use—that is, consideration of the impact on individual test takers, their teachers, education institutions, and society as a whole. English-proficiency exams such as the IELTS are high-stakes tests and thus have a significant impact on students’ futures. The results of the exam determine who will be accepted at colleges and universities—and, thus, who will become members of a country’s elite. It is this aspect of impact over which admissions officers have power. Your decisions about whom to accept for study at your institution have ramifications for students, faculty, departments, and the reputation of your college or university.

It is evident that the University of Cambridge English to Speakers of Other Languages Examinations (C-ESOL) have taken the impact of the IELTS into consideration. In addition to conducting an impact study that included data from a variety of stakeholders involved in the test, C-ESOL belongs to the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), which, like AERA, APA, and NCME in the United States, promotes standards to ensure that exam developers strive for high quality and fairness (Stoynoff 2009).

The final feature of this test paradigm is practicality, which concerns test development and administration. Bachman and Palmer (1997) concur with McNamara (2000) that the cost of the test in time, money, and human resources must be considered. My own concern is
not about how practical the exam is for the test developers, for they are profiting from this enterprise. (They must work continually to ensure test security, effective training of raters, test validity, reliability, etc., but they can increase their fees when those costs go up.) My concern is about the test takers—especially those who come from underprivileged backgrounds. Not only do they have to travel to the capital city of their country in order to take exams such as the TOEFL® or the IELTS, but they also have to pay expensive test fees. For example, a student in Ethiopia, which ranked 174 out of 188 countries on the United Nations’ Human Development Index (UNDP 2015, 210), must pay the equivalent of $200 to register for the IELTS exam. That is an unimaginable amount of money for most Ethiopians. Universities should take this into consideration when making decisions about which examinations to require students to submit as part of their application for admission.

Determining the usefulness of a language test is complex and involves the psychometric qualities of reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactivity, impact, and practicality (Bachman and Palmer 1997, 18). Now that we have considered how the IELTS measures up to some psychometric standards, let’s turn to a case study illustrating the importance of decisions about cut-off scores and the International English Language Testing System.

Case Study: One University’s Mistake
I teach at an intensive academic English-as-a-second-language program (IEP) at a state university in the intermountain west (intensive in that students are required to take eighteen credits of academic ESL every semester). When I became director of the program in 2007, international students applying to my university could meet the English-proficiency requirement in any of four ways: (1) a minimum score of 500 on the paper-and-pencil TOEFL® or at least 61 on the TOEFL iBT® (the internet-based test); (2) a minimum score of 5.0 on the IELTS; (3) a score of 146 or greater on the placement exam for the Intensive English Language In-
stitute (IELI); or (4) successful completion of the IELI program.

From 2007 until 2009, the Intensive English Language Institute, like many other intensive English programs in the United States, experienced an increase in the number of students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia because of a government scholarship (IIE 2009). In fall 2007, Saudis represented 10 percent of my institution’s enrollment; in fall 2008, they represented 27 percent of it. The scholarship stipulated that the students could spend only approximately one year studying English. Unfortunately, most of the students began at Level 1 (high beginning) and needed to take all four levels of IELI in order to be prepared for undergraduate studies. Students took eighteen credits (five courses) at each level, so they would need to be in the program for at least four semesters.

Many of our Saudi students were driving as far as Las Vegas and Denver in order to take the IELTS and begin their major studies without completing our ESL program. Many were not studying in the highest level of the program and clearly were not prepared academically, culturally, or linguistically to meet the demands of U.S. postsecondary education, yet some “passed” the IELTS. Given their performance in IELI, I was surprised that they were able to demonstrate proficiency in listening, reading, writing, and speaking English.

After some investigation, I learned that my institution had chosen an overall cut-off score of 5.0 for the IELTS, which, compared with peer institutions, was low (IELTS recommends a minimum of 7.0 for university studies) (22). (This overall score reflects an average of the four sub-scores for listening, reading, writing, and speaking.) It appeared that the Saudi students were passing the IELTS by taking advantage of a cultural value, i.e. eloquence of speech (Nydell 2006). These Arabic speakers apparently were receiving high scores on the listening and speaking sections of the test, thus compensating for failing scores on the reading and writing sections. According to the band score of 6, these Saudi students were “competent users” of the English language, yet their reading and writing were either “limited” or “extremely limited.”

IEPs all over the country teach their international students the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; our goal is for students to be successful in their university studies (University and College Intensive English Programs,3 EnglishUSA4). When I realized what was occurring, I spoke with the director of the International Student Office, who agreed that a “limited” understanding of written English and/or a “limited” ability to write in English was setting the students up for difficulties, if not failure, at the university. We felt that students’ reading and writing should not be undervalued, so we proposed that the cut-off score for the IELTS include minimum sub-scores as well as an overall minimum score. After presenting our data to the appropriate committee, the university decided to make the IELTS cut-off score a better reflection of academic language proficiency by requiring not only an overall score of 6.0 but also a minimum of 5.0 on each of the sub-scales. In other words, students needed to be somewhat proficient in all language skills. The university also raised the minimum score for the TOEFL iBT® to 71.

Proficiency in English is just one criterion of many in evaluating prospective students, and the cut-off scores should reflect what your institution’s needs are—not what other schools are doing (Chalhoub-Deville and Turner 2000). My concern is that some admissions officers may become complacent regarding English-profiiciency exams and either follow the example of peer institutions or succumb to the pressures of marketing. When considering a change in the English test scores required of international students, it would be wise to consult your intensive English program (if there is one on campus), especially if it is a member of University and College Intensive English Programs or EnglishUSA, the American Association of Intensive English Programs. Other resources on campus might include someone with expertise in psycholinguistics.

I hope this article has increased your understanding not only of the IELTS but also of some basic principles of psychometrics and the complexity of developing a language test. My other hope is that you may learn from this case study to make better informed decisions about international students applying to your institution of higher learning while conducting yourself with integrity, fairness, honesty, and respect for others.

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3 See <uiecip.org>.
4 See <englishusa.org>.
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References


ETS. See Educational Testing Service.


IIE. See Institute of International Education.


UNDP. See United Nations Development Programme.


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Three Key Values of Generation Z: Equitably Serving the Next Generation of Students

By David B. Johnson and Lindsay Welsch Sveen

As the Millennial generation matures and commentary about it fades from public discussion, a new generation of students is taking center stage on our campuses: Generation Z. Sometimes referred to as iGen, Centennials, or the Recession Generation, this new generation has officially been named Generation Z (or Gen Z) by the Pew Research Center (Dimock 2019). While speculation about this segment of the population has been underway for several years, a flurry of recent research has emerged as Gen Z has begun to enter college. Now is the time to adapt and to ensure that higher education institutions serve it in the best way possible.

This article distills the ongoing conversation about who Gen Z is—and what they want in a college—into practical observations and actionable steps to help institutions optimize the student journey from enrollment to the campus experience to post-graduation outcomes. At each stage of the journey, it considers adaptations necessitated by three key values of Generation Z—personalization, technology, and outcomes—and proposes questions we should ask ourselves as admissions and enrollment officers in the midst of this paradigm shift.

In The Chronicle of Higher Education’s recent report, “The New Generation of Students: How Colleges Can Recruit, Teach, and Serve Gen Z,” Selingo (2018) explains that “Gen Z is the most diverse generation in modern American history, and its members are attentive to inclusion across race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity” (4). The parameters that dictate majority and minority in the United States are shifting, and higher education institutions must make changes now to prepare for a generation of students with significantly different experiences, opportunities, and expectations.

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) predicted in a 2017 report that “the decreasing number of white high school graduates will be counterbalanced over the next decade by swift growth in the number of Hispanic graduates, in particular, and Asian/Pacific Islanders” (Bransberger 2017, 2). The WICHE report also states, “Across the nation, graduating classes are projected to gradually become smaller at the same time that they become even more diverse” (Bransberger 2017, 1). Extending the analysis to college prospects in particular, Grawe’s (2018) Higher Education Demand Index forecasts substantially fewer college-going students over the next decade, creating a more competitive enrollment landscape. And more Gen Z students will be from lower-income households and will have parents who have not attended college. As Selingo (2018) writes, Gen Z “comprises growing shares of first-generation and low-income students” (11).

To serve an increasingly diverse population, we must ensure that the college experience is not only accessible but equitable for all students. This means more than making sure that students feel seen—although representation is important. From curriculum and programming to resources and support, higher education institutions have an imperative to develop an equity agenda.

Equity means providing the fair opportunities and support that students need in order to be on an equal
playing field. Given changing demographics, we must focus more on equity now than ever before. We need to move beyond access to an equity agenda in order to make opportunities for engagement a reality for all students.

Certainly, any university’s equity agenda should include focused attention on pricing, need-based aid, and affordability initiatives. Just as important, it should include engaged campus conversations, research to analyze student survey data and identify service gaps, and participation in opportunities to learn and share. These opportunities include the Summer Institute on Equity in the Academic Experience held at Georgetown University as well as the College Board’s conferences A Dream Deferred: The Future of African American Education and Prepárate: Educating Latinos for the Future of America.

As we welcome Gen Z and adapt to the values articulated below, we must constantly consider not just diversity but also equity. We must provide pathways so that all students can engage, survive, and thrive in their academic experience.

Personalization: Are we individualizing student experiences?
To appeal to a range of different students from different backgrounds, universities need to segment messaging based on student interests and attitudes—that is, to personalize the university for each student. Two research approaches are helping colleges understand the individual desires of students and segment messaging in meaningful ways. Research and advisory firm Education Ventures has identified mindsets (career, experience, and academic) to enable universities to deepen their targeting tactics and promote academic programs strategically. If an institution’s (or specific school’s or department’s) primary audience has a grad school–bound mindset or a social focus mindset, for example—and has the data to understand how that mindset tends to inform behavior—then it can tailor its messaging and programming much more precisely.

Another useful framework is consulting firm EAB’s personas. By mapping student types according to their levels of engagement and college preparedness, EAB has created personas (complete with names and back stories) to help recruitment and marketing offices predict application and enrollment behaviors and communicate with students through the right channels at the right time.

With the power of segmentation, we can deliver tailored messages about specific majors, minors, and other programs that match what we know about prospective students’ programs of interest. This is important, because prospective students rank desired program of study as one of the most important factors in their college choice. Gen Z students “are much more aware of the details of each major or field of study and will want to know what a specific department on a college campus has to offer” (Paterson 2019, 30).

Once students are on campus, we must be purposeful about opportunities for engagement as well as delivery of support services. Selingo (2018) suggests that Gen Z students are less self-directed and “seem younger” than their predecessors and therefore require more social and mental supports (34). In promoting opportunities, we must give students the tools to create their own paths. A student’s individualized college experience might include mentoring, research, internships, and study abroad. Support needs also demand an individualized approach. Gen Z students want convenient, personalized services, from application through graduation: “The services Gen Z-ers want range from career development to tutoring to mental health—and on terms that are convenient to them” (Selingo 2018, 22). A university’s equity agenda should extend across these engagement and support areas to ensure that all students can take advantage of these opportunities.

Technology: Are we meeting students where they are?
As the first generation to be true digital natives, Generation Z students are technologically savvy. They grew up in the age of smartphones, and they use them to do most things—including researching and even applying to colleges.

We must be innovative and utilize appropriate platforms to meet Gen Z students where they are (e.g., YouTube, TikTok, Instagram). But we shouldn’t disregard the legacy channels they still rely on, such as Facebook, e-mail, and print (EAB 2019). Gen Z students expect businesses and institutions to communicate with them in “official” channels, so they still look to e-mail and
print for those purposes. While the demand to keep up with emerging tools and trends can feel overwhelming (and tempting as it is to keep adding new channels), it can actually be productive to let go of some channels or technologies that are no longer serving your institution. Like the previous transition from mostly print to mostly digital communications, we will surely transition away from certain platforms in the coming years.

Some institutions are also beginning to enhance the student experience through artificial intelligence. Virtual advisors use semantic interpretation to answer student questions 24/7, and chatbots utilize conversational guidance to go beyond questions and answers to provide more context and assess when human intervention may be needed.

Technology is also enabling student support and guidance in ways previously limited by on-campus staff capacity. Online tools such as the Mentor Collective, which partners with universities to create mentorship programs, allow for increased personal support for students. When institutions utilize technology that leads to more personalized guidance and mentorship, they can more efficiently meet the needs of this new generation.

Technology will be key not only in how we communicate with students, but also in how we communicate their experiences. As new ways to represent competencies and co-curricular engagement emerge, the academic transcript is now just one part of the student record. As AACRAO’s Comprehensive Learner Record initiative helps address data integration barriers, and as many universities address these barriers internally, higher education moves closer to a model of student self-sovereignty. Blumenstyk (2019) echoes a recent report calling on colleges to “think about curricula from a ‘skills’ perspective and create ‘skills-based transcripts” to help students understand not just the subject matter they studied but the skills acquired or exercised in class.” As Gen Z seeks convenient digital solutions to attain a well-rounded education and a portable set of skills, new capabilities will allow us to verify a student’s participation in engagement activities such as research, community service, and internships through a validated digital record that makes those accomplishments visible to potential employers—and to students themselves.

As we deploy these emerging technologies, we need to understand how this increasingly diverse generation consumes, uses, and expects technology throughout the student experience and to represent that experience.

Outcomes: Are we developing career readiness?

Gen Z students seek financial value and transparency, and they are interested in practical pathways to a good job. Selingo (2018) sees Gen Z students as generally more wary about cost than their predecessors: “Their views on personal finance have been shaped not only by the Great Recession but also by seeing their millennial counterparts take on student debt and struggle in the job market” (19). It is more important than ever for institutions to communicate the value and return on investment of the education they provide.

Accordingly, Gen Z students “are interested in practical subjects with clear paths to careers” (Selingo 2018, 8). Outcomes-focused students want an educational experience that will prepare them for what comes next. In a recent podcast on Gen Z learning approaches, University of North Texas President Neal Smatresk explained how his institution has collaborated with corporate partners to embed real-world experience into the curriculum (Smatresk 2018). By exposing students to teamwork, design thinking, and workplace behavior as early as their freshman year—and under the supervision of an actual corporate manager—Smatresk sees students becoming more prepared for careers and better developed as citizens by the time they graduate.

Preparing Gen Z students for their future careers does not mean that every college is now a trade school, meeting specific requirements for specific jobs. On the contrary, it means equipping students with soft skills—communication, analytical thinking, problem solving—and in ways that complement their majors and engage directly with the industries that demand such skills of their employees and leaders. As Blumenstyk (2019) writes, “Show students that the majors they like are also majors that can lead to good jobs, and everybody wins.”

Conclusion

Gen Z’s key values will require us to evaluate our institutions more deeply than we have in the past. Twenty years ago, many were immersed in research about the mysterious new generation we would come to know as Millennials. Now we must pivot again—and more radically—to develop and act on an equity agenda that permeates all aspects of the student journey and speaks
to Gen Z’s valued areas of personalization, technology, and outcomes. A new generation of students, changing demographics, and a competitive enrollment landscape require that we provide students with equitable opportunities for engagement and more clearly articulated value propositions for their academic experience.

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Internationalization does not simply broaden the U.S. community college mission but is a vital and integral component that specifically serves the mission of open access and student success. This article examines the literature to highlight the unique practices of U.S. community college education abroad.

In the United States, approximately 33 percent of all community colleges offer at least one type of international education program; of those, about 13 percent offer designated education abroad programs (Malveaux and Raby 2019). International education is not new to the community college, and documentation on international education has existed since 1968. Advocacy for community college international education is also not new and is evident in publications, reports, and addresses given by multiple generations of community college leaders and researchers who view internationalization as an important way to serve the community college missions of open access and to support student success initiatives (Boggs and Irwin 2009, Gleazer 1975, Hess 1982, Raby and Valeau 2016).

Unique Characteristics of Community College Education Abroad

Unique Characteristics of U.S. Community College Education Abroad

By Rosalind Latiner Raby

Seven characteristics guide the field of community college education abroad.

- **Open Access.** A foundational philosophy of the community college is open access, according to which no student is denied access to college education, including studying abroad. As applied to education abroad, open access encourages a minimal admission GPA and few curricular requirements. Open access extends to a broad definition of who is considered a student, to include those who are first-semester freshmen, pre-college (high school) concurrently enrolled, adults, first generation, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ+, international, undocumented, studying in STEM fields, and non-degree and/or community members.

- **Multiple Missions.** The community college supports multiple missions, including workforce and career education, developmental education, lifelong learning, community service, and academic transfer. Students enroll to earn a first credential, a certificate or degree, multiple credentials to advance career pathways, enhance remedial skills, engage in lifelong education, or prepare to transfer to a four-year college or university. Education abroad classes provide credit for each of these areas of instruction. This broadens the accessibility of education abroad to disciplines not offered by the university. Given that most community college students enroll in terminal programs and do not transfer to universities, their only opportunity to study abroad is while enrolled at community (Raby 1996).

- **Institutional Programming.** Community colleges use guided pathways and high sequence certification programs to promote student completion. This in-
includes integrating a specialized curriculum to satisfy degree or certificate requirements. In the past, an education abroad stand-alone or elective course has not always been linked to a degree or certificate pathway program. Today, more colleges are offering education abroad courses that are fully integrated into departmental curricula. The “stackable credential” enables community college students to earn credit for traditional degree-based and/or non-traditional credentials obtained from certificates, certifications, licenses, badges, and apprenticeships. Education abroad can be identified as a “credential” so students can count their non-formal and experiential learning toward a completion agenda.

Cost. The open access mission supports extremely low to free tuition, which increases access to higher education by large numbers of lower-income, first-generation, and adult students as well as students of color. This becomes a challenge for study abroad, which is not a low-cost option: programs cost from $600 to $8,500 more than tuition. While students may apply financial aid to study abroad, many simply cannot afford these costs. Innovative funding models are a critical component of community college education abroad. Many community colleges are developing Internationalization at Home programs that provide a lower-cost internationalization experience for students.

Student Profiles. The average age of a community college student is 28. As adults, community college students bring a range of experiences and knowledge that enhances their educational experiences, including choices to study abroad. Community colleges are purposefully located in areas that are accessible to students. As a result, community college student populations typically mirror the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic characteristics of the communities in which the institutions are located. Similarly, students who study abroad reflect this same diversity. In the 21st century, community college students who study abroad comprise a more diverse cohort than university students who study abroad (IIE 2018). In 2017–18, 60.7 percent of community college students who studied abroad were white, 25 percent were Latinx, 4.1 percent were Asian American, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander, 6.1 percent were African American, 0.9 percent were Native American, and 3.2 percent were multiracial (IIE 2018). Note that the percentage for each racial and ethnic group approximates its percentage within the community college student population (Raby 2019b).

Institutional Support. Decreased state and federal funding for community colleges adversely affects the financing of study abroad offices and staff. The first generation of community college education abroad programs comprised stand-alone classes created according to individual faculty members’ interests (Raby 2019b). These faculty ran and marketed their programs with little campus oversight, including minimal campus-wide policy, institutionalization in campus services, and leadership support. Today, while faculty still play a critical role in organizing and running programs, there are more examples of institutionalization, including campus-wide policy, education abroad committees, and administrative oversight. Leadership roles in education abroad are also changing as an increasing number of full-time mid- to senior-level administrators oversee education abroad. These individuals are also responsible for holistic programming that includes partnerships within and among departments and campus services (Smith 2019), education-abroad assessment practices (Wood 2019), and Global Distinction certificate programs (deWit and Furst 2019).

Research on Community College Education Abroad

Current research details education-abroad benefits and identifies influencers who encourage students to study abroad.

Benefits

Politically, the abroad experience supports national security and foreign policy initiatives. In a humanitarian context, the abroad experience enhances understanding of others and can build citizen ambassadors. Socially, the abroad experience builds long-lasting friendships that can turn into business relationships. Intercultural gains include growth in maturity, increased self-confidence, better understanding of self, and the ability to evaluate one’s own culture in an unbiased manner (Raby 2019a).

Career Readiness. Studying abroad results in the acquisition of so-called soft skills that are honored by the global economy and that include problem solv-
ing, independence, adaptability, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (Farrugia and Sanger 2017; Harder, Andenoro, Roberts, Stedman, Newberry, Parker and Rodriguez 2015).

**Personal Growth.** Studying abroad can result in psychosocial and cross-cultural knowledge growth (Dwyer 2004), a deepened sense of self (Harrell, Sterner, Alter and Lonie 2017), intercultural competency (Bandyopadhyay and Bandyopadhyay 2015), and independence (Harrell, Sterner, Alter and Lonie 2017). Personal growth also occurs as a result of being part of a social cohort (Amani and Kim 2019) and being away from home, often for the first time (Raby and Rhodes 2018). Finally, the abroad experience can create a context of empowerment, agency, and self-actualization (Raby 2019b). Personal growth is contingent on program focus and length, environmental conditions, and personal knowledge, and as such varies from student to student.

**Engagement and Academic and Student Success.** Students who study abroad often do better in their studies, earning higher GPAs and graduating at a higher rate than their peers who do not study abroad (Coker, Heiser and Taylor 2018; Raby, Rhodes and Biscarra 2014). Academic engagement and student success do not occur automatically but are dependent on specific factors that shape the study abroad experience, including the length of time abroad, location, structural conditions, and individuals’ agency. It must be noted that while the educational context of studying abroad is at the core of all programs, what and how much is learned varies. Nevertheless, the more engaged a student is in learning, the more positive the experience (Kuh 2008).

**Intentional Design to Enhance Engagement and Learning.** Designed college-impact models and dedicated forms of assessment (Deardorff and Banta 2015) are examples of intentional design to enhance engagement and ensure deep learning (Young 2014). When individual students are left to navigate their international experience on their own, there is less depth in their intercultural learning. Intentional design includes efforts at the student level (interaction with host students, engagement with experimental learning), at the community level (intercultural training for faculty and staff), and at the institutional level (host institution support networks) (Spencer-Oatey and Dauber 2019). Assessment practices have also changed from end-of-course surveys to more elaborate means of measuring intercultural growth and international learning. Some community colleges connect education-abroad assessment and campus student success initiatives (Smith 2019, Wood 2019). Intentional design is aided by institutional programming and staffing (Jean-Francois 2017, Rientes and Tempelaar 2013).

**Influencers on Community College Students’ Choice to Study Abroad**

Harrell, Sterner, Alter and Lonie (2017) identified intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence decisions to study abroad. Intrinsic factors include identifying education abroad as an opportunity to experience and appreciate another culture, having a desire to travel, and linking the experience to an “opportunity of a lifetime.” Extrinsic factors include using study abroad to gain academic credits that satisfy college requirements for graduation. While community college students connect studying abroad to an opportunity of a lifetime, their decisions to study abroad are greatly influenced by a cost/benefit analysis that compares the benefits with the financial cost, the cost of missing work, and the cost of leaving their families (Amani and Kim 2017, Raby and Rhodes 2017, Robertson 2019).

**Deficit Stereotypes and Influencers.** Some research uses deficit theory to define barriers that influence student choice to not study abroad. Characteristics include resistance from families, lack of role models, lack of support from faculty, lack of encouragement, fear of travel, inability to take time away from family and/or work, and lack of finances (Commission on Abraham Lincoln 2001). Deficit characteristics are often attributed to those who are minoritized and/or who live in low-income areas. For example, Simon and Ainsworth (2012) found that minoritized students have cultural capital barriers because they lack the background knowledge needed to successfully navigate institutional bureaucracy.

**Counter-Deficit Influencers.** Lu, Reddick, Dean and Pecero (2015) found in their study of African American students that family and friends’ encouragement, ethnic community support, and faculty encourage-
ment were the dominant influences for studying abroad. Robertson (2019) found that the number of administrators and staff working in a community college study abroad office related positively to the number of students at that institution who accessed study abroad. Raby and Rhodes (2018) found that institutional barriers such as not offering education abroad, insufficient staffing and advising, and limited funds for marketing and professional development negatively influenced students even more than student deficit characteristics. Environment, such as urban poor or rural locations or areas with high unemployment, are influences as there are fewer resources to support student choices to study abroad (Whatley 2019).

**Barrier Stereotypes and Program Design.** While students will learn in any education abroad program that is well-constructed, some measures of student success will occur only as a result of time spent abroad. Nationwide, at all higher education institutions, the average length of the education abroad program is decreasing (Brewer and Ogden 2018; Raby 2008; Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut and Klute 2012). The majority of students now enroll in short-term programs of three to six weeks or in very short-term programs of seven to sixteen days. There are contexts in which very short-term programs serve specific students who do not want to be away from campus (Raby 2019b). These students are not necessarily lower income nor of color. However, when the choice to design a program length is defined by a deficit-based stereotype, three concerns emerge: First, research shows that when community college students are given program length options, they do participate in longer-term programs (Raby, Rhodes and Biscarra 2014; Robertson and Blasi 2017). Second, the longer the duration of study abroad, the greater the impact on student learning, including a deeper experience (Paige, Fry, Stallman, Jon and Josić 2010). In turn, very-short term programs seem to have the weakest results in terms of sustained student learning (Engle and Engle 2003, Strange and Gibson 2017). Finally, when a college only provides very short-term programs to non-traditional students based on stereotypes, they offer a differential and often unequal educational experience (Gaia 2015).

**Counter-Deficit Arguments.** Literature shows that aside from finances, most “deficits” are not applicable to community college students who, in this century, are increasingly familiar with education abroad, have friends and family who studied abroad, have family and friends who see study abroad as a positive experience, and who themselves or have faculty and/or friends who have worked abroad or who have had military experiences abroad (Amani and Kim 2019, Raby and Rhodes 2017, Robertson 2019). Whatley (2019) found that at community colleges, under-represented students were more able to participate in intercultural experiences, including study abroad. Finally, counter-deficit arguments demand that “researchers challenge their persistent narrative and trend toward ‘damage-centered’ and deficient framing to include more humanizing methods” to understand student agency (Baldridge 2014, 467).

**Conclusion**

Students attend U.S. community colleges to better themselves, and they make sound decisions to engage in college programs to expand their knowledge. This includes studying abroad. Research shows that students know about the benefits in terms of personal development and career readiness. Many community college students have traveled abroad previously to visit relatives, for leisure, or as part of military service and view education abroad as an experience in which they want to participate. Access to study abroad is expanded when there is a choice of program length and the ability to earn credit toward one’s major, a certificate, or elective or general education requirements.

Community college education abroad is adversely affected by funding limitations. After the 2008 recession, Raby (2012) found that education abroad became a “periphery program” (5). Funding concerns stemming from decreasing student enrollment—including international student enrollment—are again negatively affecting financial support for full-time leadership positions, consortia membership, and professional development. Inaccessibility of programs begins with colleges not offering options or only offering very short-term programs that discriminate against non-traditional and poor students.

International education has been a feature of U.S. community colleges for more than a half century. Con-
sistent ly, research shows that the predominant issue preventing U.S. community college students from gaining international literacy skills is not a lack of student interest but rather a lack of access to programmatic opportunities. More and more, equal opportunities are based not on chance but on intentional design to guide comprehensive reform efforts.

References


IIE. See Institute for International Education.


About the Author
Rosalind Latiner Raby, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer at California State University, Northridge in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department of the College of Education and is an affiliate faculty for the ELPS Ed.D. Community College program. She also serves as the Director of California Colleges for International Education, a non-profit consortium of California community colleges. Dr. Raby received her Ph.D. in the field of Comparative and International Education from UCLA and since 1984, has worked with community college faculty and administrators to help them internationalize their campuses. Dr. Raby has been publishing in the field of community college internationalization since 1985. Her latest books are Study Abroad Opportunities for Community College Students and Strategies for Global Learning (IGI-Global, 2019); Handbook on Comparative Issues of Community Colleges and Global Counterparts (Springer, 2018) and International Education at Community Colleges: Themes, Practices, and Case Studies (Palgrave, 2016).
How to Identify Diploma Mills and Axact Websites, and Tools for Your Protection

By Allen Ezell

Editor’s Note: This is the final in a series of three articles about academic fraud.

Article one provided background into the centuries-old fraud of selling diplomas and transcripts from fake schools and counterfeit documents in the name of legitimate schools. Article two provided a detailed look into the operations of the world’s largest diploma mill, Axact, Ltd., which is still operating today. This article identifies ways to recognize fake schools quickly and provides tools for detecting them.

Axact Red Flags

Knowledge is power! The more you know about any subject increases your ability to quickly recognize what you are looking at for what it truly is, especially in the realm of academic credentials. In the infancy of the Internet, and before Axact had been identified with its cadre of fake schools, Dr. John Bear and I developed a “red flag” list (“92 Things Bad and Fake Schools Do to Mislead People”) that was included in our 2005 book (and the 2012 revised edition) Degree Mills: The Billion Dollar Industry That Has Sold over a Million Fake Diplomas. Bear recently added this list to our website, which also contains the Pakistan Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) FIR (First Information Report) on the Axact investigation (prepared after the May 2015 raids).1

The red flag list deals with some of the major fraud areas, including false statements regarding schools’ existence, facilities, faculty, student body, etc.; accreditation; memberships or affiliations; misleading statements; advertising and marketing; and claims regarding acceptance of degrees. There are probably more than 5,000 diploma mills and accreditation mills on the Internet today. But given the sheer size and breadth of the Axact fraud empire, you are most likely to encounter its fraudulent documents rather than those from other sources. Axact has more than 4,000 websites and has issued an estimated 8,000,000 fraudulent diplomas, 250,000 plus of which have gone to people in the United States. In view of this, I have created a new list of 71 Axact red flags derived from my review of numerous Axact websites. Bear in mind that Axact continues to operate today and is constantly creating new websites and honing its techniques as it identifies new sales avenues.

The fictitious diplomas, transcripts, and counterfeit attestations being created and sold by Axact will haunt the academic and business communities for at least the next 20 years. To better understand Axact, see the video at <aljazeera.com/programmes/101east/2019/05/pakistan-fake-degrees-190501095813064.html>. You will see at least seventeen Axact schools, including: Adamsville, Al Arab, Brooklyn Park, California Creek, California Port, Drumount, Gatesville, Grant Town, Martinville, McGraw, Must (“world’s largest university”), Nicholsville, Neil Wilson, Newford, Nixon, Oscarmount (red, white and blue), and Presley. Several of the officials interviewed spoke in a guarded

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1 Content of the report has been reproduced and made available at <dgreemills.com/axact.html>.
manner and of “witness intimidation and bribery” and “statutory delay.” In addition, a list of all the “facilities” (perks) the schools offer employees is included. This is the “bait” Axact uses in its recruiting of new, young, inexperienced employees. Similarly, Axact attracts new “students” by promising new jobs and attractive scholarships via fake personnel agencies.

Website Commonalities

Axact typically makes grandiose statements regarding its fake schools. When you encounter this verbosity, you will recognize it. Here are some examples:

- “Accommodative learning”
- “Accreditation is a critical credential, a symbol of credibility.”
- “A global university for the 21st century”
- “A mission-driven university ensuring excellence in education and teaching”
- “Methodologies”
- “Among top 5% universities worldwide”
- “Begin your journey (here); blog”
- “Better tomorrow program (promote quality affordable education globally)”
- “Countless options”
- “Creating future leaders”
- “Creating leaders that are ready to make a difference”
- “X,xxx degrees granted”
- “Delivering valuable academic experience to ambitious students”
- “Distance learning university”
- “Enroll for just $199!” (for early schools which sold ‘graduation package’ of documents)
- “Experience beyond classroom”
- “Explore, prepare, and succeed”
- “Faculty members who are experienced experts and leaders in their respective fields”
- “Faculty—visiting, permanent, and associated”
- “First choice of working adults across the globe”
- “Freedom in education”
- “Free consultancy”
- “Free yourself from boundaries”
- “Gain international experience”
- “Global alumni network” (regional chapters listed)
- “Global footprint university, 180 countries”
- “Global presence across 6 continents, in 120 countries, 1,300 cities”
- “Great course options”
- “Highly experienced and qualified faculty”
- “High-quality education delivered!”
- “Industry experts teach here”
- “Intellectual excellence”
- “Investing in the future”
- “Learn from top minds”
- “Learning on your finger tips”
- “Limited time offer—Reserve your scholarships now!”
- “Limitless global career opportunities”
- “48,527 lives made better and still counting—‘become an alumni’”
- “www.nationalcreekuniversity.education”
- “New online classrooms”
- “97% of our graduates get employment offer from multi-national organizations within the first 6 months of their graduation”
- “94% student satisfaction”
- “100% globally accredited online programs”
- “Offers online chat, toll-free telephone number, or e-mail”
- “Online education at its best”
- “Online learning at its best”
- “Our university consists of 70% (also 90%) Ph.D.-qualified faculty members.”
- “Open the door to unlimited opportunities.”
- “Our alumni and graduates earn 13 percent more than other universities’ students—as much as $73,500 per annum.”
- “Presidential scholarships (eligibility criterion so minimal that 90 percent of applicants qualify)”
- “Pursue your goal, reach your destination”
- “Providing the best academic experience anywhere, anytime”
- “Ranked in the top 15 best online universities”
- “Reserve your scholarship –up to 90 percent qualify—Enroll today.”
- “Roosevelt Scholarship saves up to 90% of tuition.”
- “Scholarships available for students in United States.”
- “Scholarship programs for student’s worldwide”
- “School displays logos of all acceptable means of payment: Visa, MasterCard, Discover, Diners Club, AMEX, JCB, Cash U, Travelers Express, Western Union, and Money Gram.”
- Special tuition fees for military personnel, reducing their total tuition program fee by 50 percent
“State-of-the-art online education”
“Step into the world of Inspiration and knowledge”
“73 percent of our alumni are in upper management and leadership roles with multinational firms (increased by 2 percent last year)”
“The most credible online university”
“The place for effective learning and education”
“Today only, registration deals”
“Top 100 + employers want graduates who are job ready”
“Tour virtual Campus”
Translate page; Offers to translate home page into 103 languages (Afrikaans to Zulu)
Tuition fee comparisons (displays graph showing supposed tuition rates for five legitimate schools with the lowest tuition shown being for the Axact school)
“Unmatched ‘affordabilities’”
“World class’ frequently used”
“We are one of the world’s top 10 (or 100) universities in the world.”
“We have global collaborations.”
“We have the same level of institutional accreditation as the world’s elite schools.”
“World’s Largest University (statement observed on several of their school sites during the same time period!)”
“You may seek education through our 48 campus-based universities.”
“Your time, your place, our support!”

Website “Flow”
In addition to puffery, Axact sites typically have a certain “flow” to them. Usually, their sites present content in the following order (recall the various false statements/claims cited above):
- Web address (especially if .edu or .education extension is included in the school’s URL)
- School name and address
- About us; why choose [school name]
- Mission and vision
- Photos of school buildings and facilities
- Photos of expert faculty and school leaders

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President or chancellor’s message
Student and campus photographs
Global presence and regional chapters shown (great graphics)
Accreditations (with links to “certification” and their website)
Calendar
Scholarships
Tuition and financing; fee reduction options
Referral program (earn points toward discounts on enrollment fees)
Download school brochure (which may turn out to be a recruitment booklet for a new “University Certified Educational Associate Program,” representative who collects “tuition” from recruited students, retaining portions for himself based on his sales volume—e.g., 40 percent, 50 percent, and 75 percent [silver, gold, and platinum recruiters]. The site may also include the following statements: “For our PLA (Prior Learning Assessment) degree, you can charge any tuition you want from your referred students, after covering the cost of our education process, which is only $500.” Also: “You can offer apostle [sic] and embassy legalization to students who successfully earn PLA degree at your price after covering up our quoted price.” No base fee or “quoted price” is given. (Sources advised that the amounts are between $500 and $4,000, with resales up to $100,000, depending on the wealth of the victim.)
Website may display “sample” copy of school diploma, transcript, and/or verification form letter
Schools: natural sciences, performing arts, psychology, education, social sciences, fire sciences, social services, and applied arts
Professional schools: business and management, nursing, criminal justice, law and legal studies, computer science, health sciences, engineering, and political science
Degree programs: associate degree, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, Ph.D. programs, certificate programs, diploma programs
News and events; view demo
Services we provide (e.g., scholarship program; online student and alumni center; credit transfer facility; apostille and embassy legalization; career center, and free consultancy (student/career advisors)) accessible 24/7 through e-mail, call (toll-free number) or chat
Student life
Corporate partners
Alumni association and career center
School ranking
News room
Overview
Acceptance of degree
Graduates employed at Fortune 500 companies. (Their colorful logos are displayed in the background or in the form of an impressive rubik’s cube).

Axact Websites to Review
Thirty-two of Axact’s thousands of websites, including its home office, are listed in Table 1 (on page 51). These fake school sites were in existence from 1998 until 2019, with URL extensions ranging from .com, .us, .org, .net, and .edu to .education. The company has also used .university. Several of the older schools are listed to demonstrate the foundation of Axact’s growth from “early primitive” (when the schools outright sold “graduation/degree packages” with “Enroll now with just $199”) to their more expensive professional-looking websites of today.

How Fake Schools Mislead Prospects (71 Red Flags)

Accreditation Claims

Claims accreditation by an unrecognized agency (even using gceab.org).
The unrecognized accrediting entity uses words such as “global,” “international,” “national,” “American,” “United States” (or name of a specific region), “Mid Eastern,” or “GCC,” etc., as well as the URL extension .org.
The unrecognized agency claims to accredit legitimate schools and provides a long list and state search.
Fake accrediting entities have names similar to legitimate entities; for example, ushlc.education (United States Higher Learning Commission) is a look-a-like/sound-a-like
for the legitimate hlcommission.org (Higher Learning Commission, Chicago, IL).

- Accreditation may be claimed from a legitimate entity that has name recognition but does not accredit institutions.
- Links are provided to a certificate and to accreditors’ website(s).
- Whereas legitimate schools usually have one accreditor, Axact schools have four “international, regional, and subject specific”; Mount William University indicates it has “20+ different accreditation bodies.” (More fakes must be better in this instance!)

**Other False or Misleading Claims**

- Steals photos of legitimate school buildings, facilities, students, and texts

Table 1. Select Axact Fake Schools and Their Websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Registered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>axact.com</td>
<td>Axact (parent company)</td>
<td>11/4/98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alhosnedu.com</td>
<td>Alhosn University</td>
<td>5/30/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nationalcreekuniversity.education</td>
<td>National Creek University</td>
<td>3/9/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trevorfielduniversity.education</td>
<td>Trevor Field University</td>
<td>2/27/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whitelakeuniversity.org</td>
<td>White Lake University</td>
<td>2/7/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pfu.education</td>
<td>Paragon Field University</td>
<td>1/1/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hsu.education</td>
<td>Hempster Shire University</td>
<td>12/24/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uomayford.education</td>
<td>University of Mayford</td>
<td>10/11/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uot.education</td>
<td>University of Tulane</td>
<td>9/10/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brexituniversity.com</td>
<td>Brexit University</td>
<td>8/5/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uocv.education</td>
<td>University of Camville</td>
<td>7/12/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>umf.education</td>
<td>Myers Field University</td>
<td>5/28/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uocf.education</td>
<td>Costa Field University</td>
<td>2/21/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tisdaleuniversity.com</td>
<td>Tisdale University</td>
<td>2/3/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>richforduniversity.com</td>
<td>Richford University</td>
<td>12/26/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uogw.education</td>
<td>University of Greatwood</td>
<td>12/6/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hcu.education</td>
<td>High Claire University</td>
<td>11/14/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bayshoreuniversity.com</td>
<td>Bayshore University</td>
<td>8/28/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>universityofmayford.com</td>
<td>University of Mayford</td>
<td>7/16/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainefielduniversity.edu</td>
<td>Mainefield University</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mainefielduniversity.com</td>
<td>Mainefield University</td>
<td>3/4/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gatesvilleuniversity.com</td>
<td>Gatesville University</td>
<td>9/12/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mayfielduniversity.com</td>
<td>Mayfield University</td>
<td>9/10/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corllinsuniversity.org</td>
<td>Corllins University</td>
<td>9/19/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hilluniversity.net</td>
<td>Hill University</td>
<td>11/5/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lorenzuniversity.com</td>
<td>Lorenz University</td>
<td>11/5/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nauedu.us</td>
<td>Northeast Alabama University</td>
<td>7/30/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orlandouniversity.com</td>
<td>Orlando University</td>
<td>5/18/04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almedauniversity.com</td>
<td>Almeda University</td>
<td>6/23/04</td>
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<td>belforduniversity.org</td>
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<td>rochvilleuniversity.org</td>
<td>Rochville University</td>
<td>7/9/03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mississippistateuniversity.com</td>
<td>Mississippi State University</td>
<td>1/26/02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standforduniversity.com</td>
<td>Standford University</td>
<td>10/17/00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abuses the process of awarding life/work experience credit
Creates fictitious school background, length of existence, size, number of faculty, and graduates
Claims fifteen schools with 70 majors and 1,100 programs (exact figures vary)
Frequently lists names of legitimate schools and their tuition amounts (usually Kaplan, Capella, Strayer, and Walden University) and indicates that the fake school’s tuition is lowest and the fake school is the best choice
Displays logos of Fortune 500 companies claiming that their graduates are employed there
Often displays a Rubik’s cube depicting logos of the many companies that employ their graduates
May tout academic offerings with the statement “Top 3 Ranking as Gulf’s Top Islamic Banking Program Provider”

False or Misleading Memberships and Affiliations
Membership in real organizations but ones that don’t screen members
Implied legitimacy through United Nations–related organizations, or school listings
Membership in nonexistent or bogus organizations established by themselves—some with websites

Fake or Meaningless Documents
International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9002 and similar certifications
Occasional misuse of state certificate of incorporation to claim degree-granting authority
Testimonial videos by staff and students posted on various social media sites (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google+, etc.)

Advertising and Marketing
Paid search engine placement (search engine optimization) so the fake school’s name often appears with the names of legitimate schools
Relies daily on all aspects of internet-based social media sites to create “drumbeat”; uses Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, Bing, Yahoo, and other sites to distribute propaganda to attract new students and others to establish credibility

Issues press releases regarding their schools then posts these for the world to see on free websites such as CNNiReport and prweb.com.
Posts school PowerPoint presentations for potential students on various sites, such as slideshare.net and others, thus lending credibility to the fake school
Occasionally saying they are not a degree mill, because “degree mills are illegal”
Persuasive, aggressive telemarketing calls by fake school officials who themselves did not attend college
Offers “graduation packages” at a flat price (backdated, if one desires), with discount if purchased today
Offers numerous degree options (e.g., associate, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral) individually or combined (with hefty discounts for multiple degrees packages)
Claims to offer “employer tuition reimbursement program”
Utilizes a “spiderweb” of websites to entangle potential students searching for online education
Utilizes fake job placement and personnel agencies to entice individuals to purchase degrees in order to obtain the high-paying job offered, sometimes in the Middle East
If the fake school requires students to submit a thesis or dissertation as part of their “online education,” the school offers means by which to have the paper prepared for a price.
If a student desires a “required” paper to be published, the school conveniently has a vanity publishing company that will also do this for a price.

Misleading or Fake Internet Presence
Purchases older schools’ websites for their .edu extensions then assigns names to new fake schools with the same initials as the old
Fake schools also use the school name followed by .edu, .university, or .online to appear legitimate
Assign the new fake school a name similar to that of a well-known legitimate school (i.e. confusion by design)
Establishes fake chat rooms and discussion groups, along with social media, to increase the frequency with which the new fake schools are publicized
The Trappings of Real Schools

- Occasionally sells school paraphernalia (e.g., t-shirts, rings, coffee mugs, etc.)
- Offers “presidential scholarships” in the form of tuition reduction (70 to 90 percent)
- Fake course lists may occasionally appear, usually copied from legitimate school sites
- May provide map of or directions to non-existent campus
- Frequently, “internships” are offered on fake school sites
- May only offer PLA (prior learning assessment) and OE (online education) but no “live, on-campus classes”
- Occasionally mentions a student loan program, but it’s really a tuition discount
- “Tuition fee reduction” may also be mentioned; In reality, these are 7, 9, 14.5, 15, and 20 percent tuition discounts, depending on whether one pays the entire balance in one or two payments
- Referral program (earn points toward “discounts” for each tuition paid)
- Non-existent alumni association and/or alumni gatherings, with regional chapters on all continents
- Several display copies of the diploma, transcript, and verification letter they award.
- Uses “copyright date,” for example, 1995–2015, when the website was created, e.g., 3/7/12 in Delaware. (Note: The internet was “created” in mid 1995.)

Misleading “Acceptance of Degree” Claims

- Broad statements regarding graduates’ employment, never specifically identifying a named student with a specific employer
- General statements such as “Our graduates are employed by Wells Fargo, Ford, Apple, etc.” that cannot be verified or refuted because no graduates’ names are given
- Displays logos of graduates’ employers around the world

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BOOKSTORE.AACRAO.ORG
School makes claims such as “More than 952 global partners provide employment opportunities to our graduates.”

Misleading or Fake Physical Presence
- Fake pictures of the school’s buildings that in fact are stolen from the websites of legitimate schools. (For example, several Axact schools’ websites show a picture of Butler Library at Columbia University.)
- Photos of real buildings with the sign of the fake school superimposed
- PMB (private mail box) presented as “Suite” or “Floor” or “Building number”
- Photo of a building in which the fake institution either does or did rent a room or use a mailbox service

Misleading Policies
- Claims to be the “world’s largest university” and the “world’s largest distance learning university” simultaneously while “sister schools” make the same claims
- Claims exclusivity—for example, stating that only 5 percent of applicants are accepted
- Backdates diplomas to the year 1997
- Sells graduate honors (e.g., magna cum laude, summa cum laude) and grades of buyer’s choice
- Allows students to select which courses/grades they wish to appear on their transcripts
- Assures the student, “We’ll always be here for you”; “lifetime degree verification and support”
- “Free lifetime credentials verification services”
- Claims “We are here 24/7”
- Allows students to enroll for more than one degree at a time
- Multi-level marketing (sale of diplomas) through “certified educational associates” and brokers worldwide, with commissions ranging from 40 to 75 percent of tuition collected
- Uses hard-sell marketing techniques such as “Order by midnight tonight,” “today only, during this call”
- Promises “your degree and transcript will be in your hands in five to ten business days, or within 24 to 48 hours” by new “overnight courier service,” if desired
- Sells degrees and transcripts for fake schools COD (cash on delivery); buy now, pay later!

Table 2. Internet Research Tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type/Tactic</th>
<th>Service URLs</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domain Name Lookup</td>
<td>lookup.icann.org</td>
<td>Determine ownership information for any given URL, including varying amounts of registrant detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse IP Lookup</td>
<td>mytoolbox.com, ipchecking.com</td>
<td>Identify URLs associated with a user-provided IP address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Archive</td>
<td>archive.org</td>
<td>Its “Wayback Machine” provides the number and date range of a massive collection of archived web pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse Image Search</td>
<td>tineye.com</td>
<td>Determine where user-provided images (via upload, URL, or copy/paste) appear online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse Information Search</td>
<td>whitepages.com, 411.com</td>
<td>Help in finding/verifying contact information for people and businesses based on user input (names, telephone numbers, addresses, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street and/or Satellite View</td>
<td>maps.google.com, showmystreet.com, mapstreetview.com, apquestview.com, instantstreetview.com</td>
<td>Helps in verifying the existence of an entity based on street-level and/or aerial views of its physical address</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Internet Research Tools

Data Type/Tactic                  | Service URLs | Notes
-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
Domain Name Lookup                | lookup.icann.org | Determine ownership information for any given URL, including varying amounts of registrant detail |
Reverse IP Lookup                 | mytoolbox.com, ipchecking.com | Identify URLs associated with a user-provided IP address |
Internet Archive                  | archive.org | Its “Wayback Machine” provides the number and date range of a massive collection of archived web pages |
Reverse Image Search              | tineye.com | Determine where user-provided images (via upload, URL, or copy/paste) appear online |
Reverse Information Search        | whitepages.com, 411.com | Help in finding/verifying contact information for people and businesses based on user input (names, telephone numbers, addresses, etc.) |
Street and/or Satellite View      | maps.google.com, showmystreet.com, mapstreetview.com, apquestview.com, instantstreetview.com | Helps in verifying the existence of an entity based on street-level and/or aerial views of its physical address |
Research Tools

Table 2 highlights some of the methods and resources to assist in determining the legitimacy of schools and their websites.

Of Special Interest

Beware of one Axact website and its implications. It is like no other site: It hides in plain sight, under the guise of credential evaluation and verification, along with accreditation, yet fits in perfectly in conjunction with the blackmail, extortion, and strong-arm tactics of Axact and its employees against its “students.” This site is for Global Credential Evaluation and Authentication Board, created March 17, 2019. It purports to provide “worldwide credential verification” (with a twist). There appear to be two main areas: Global Alert Database (GAD) and Global Board of Investigation (GBI). GCEAB is purportedly a “regional accreditor” for Bayshore University (created August 28, 2017).

GCEAB “is an international body that verifies educational records, medical records, criminal records, employment records, traveling records, and credit records.” Look at the flags displayed for all the countries it says it serves. Look at the “august partners,” including the building at the center, and “Government Bodies” with the bright United States flag. The site states that it is “The Sole International United National Organization for Verification of Credentials.”

Read the Global Board of Investigation content closely: Through its own Global Verification Agents (GVA), it examines records for discrepancies, and, if detected, places the names of individuals (as appropriate) in GAD (Global Alert Database). GCEAB claims to share the GAD data with “embassies, missions, immigration bodies, global organizations, government ministries, law enforcement agencies, education institutes, health institutions, and large private and public concerns, such as insurance, banking, technology, automotive, real estate, construction, and various others. The effect is such that if an individual is undergoing any process such as admission, employment, immigration, credit verification, travel, investigation, or health, then it is halted immediately and the relevant institution makes the appropriate decision. There are cases in which criminal investigations were provided assistance and the subject individual was brought to justice by going to jail.”

Following the previous statements, GCEAB displays numerous red ink stamps with “Here’s what happens to individuals upon entry in Global Alert Database.” (See Figure 1, on page 56.)

Practical Application

You now have the tools to peel the Axact diploma mill conglomerate “onion” one layer at a time and to expose it for what it truly is. You have learned about Axact’s 71 red flags, along with other material, as well as a list of tools available when checking the legitimacy of academic credentials.

Practice this for a moment. With your red flags checklist at hand, select one (or more) of the Axact schools listed above, apply your knowledge, and examine it critically. Check off each red flag you identify. (Hint: If you select National Creek University—a typical Axact fake school site—download the 34-page brochure, then look at page six closely. Note that the NCU website was created on March 9, 2019, whereas the Richford University site was created on December 26, 2017.) On many occasions, quality control is lacking; these are the tell-tale signs you are looking for. I found at least 30 tell-tale signs (i.e. misspelled words, improper grammar, unusual word combinations, the name “Richford,” etc.) in this brochure. Investigate the University of Tulane, and you will note that it is modeled after Myers Field University. Axact has consistently used one fake school website after another as the foundation for its next new school, sometimes neglecting to change some of the “little things”; these are the very things you are searching for.

Conclusion

This article describes the normal “flow” of an Axact website as well as the commonalities that link its sites together and make it easier to trace. Warning signs are categorized and detailed as are the URL extensions used by Axact schools (i.e. .com, .us, .org, .net, .edu, as well as .university and .education. Thirty-two (32) Axact fake school websites spanning from November 1998 through May 2019, including Tulane University and

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2 See <gceab.org>.
3 See <bayshoresuniversity.com>.
Standford [sic] University, are listed with their “created on” dates to serve as benchmarks, in conjunction with 71 red flags specific to Axact fake schools and their fake accreditors. Numerous Internet tools are described for use when checking the legitimacy of academic credentials. You are encouraged to utilize all of the information provided, in conjunction with the 71 red flags list, and to examine several of the listed Axact sites (and the school brochures, if offered), to see how many boxes you can check. You were also alerted to the heinous Axact site gceab.org, the Global Credential Evaluation and Authentication Board (also offering “regional accreditation”) and its tentacles, global verification agents, and the “Global Alert Database” used by Axact in its overall blackmail, extortion, and strong-arm tactics.

Adhere to your office protocols in conjunction with using the recognized school databases maintained by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation⁴ and the U.S. Department of Education,⁵ which contain information about 7,600 legitimate schools and 23,000+ programs.

Remember: To protect yourself and your institution, verify everything.

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⁴ See <chea.org/directories>.
⁵ See <ed.gov/accreditation>.

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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 until 1991. He continues academic fraud consulting today and is a frequent AACRAO presenter and author.
FORUM Campus Viewpoint

What’s In a (Course) Name?

By Stephanie Ntim, Alexander Taylor, Devon Cross, Rodney Parks, and Caroline Dean

Higher education officials have recently begun to focus their attention on summer enrollment as an alternative means by which to improve recruitment and retention. Utilizing business analytics and forecasting, Elon University has seen significant growth in its summer college enrollment and revenue. The current study seeks to address how students are influenced in their registration decision making. The authors explore the literature surrounding student motivations and consider what factors students weigh when registering for classes. Implications are considered in order to help institutions develop policies for improving recruitment and retention for summer college programs.

Higher education is in a state of flux. As uncertain enrollment projections continue to cause concern about financial well-being, leaders have looked to other methods beyond traditional enrollment strategies to attract students to their institutions. One option that has drawn the attention of many has been bolstering summer college enrollment to offset losses during traditional semester enrollment. This has received much attention as demand has increased for students wanting to take summer classes. While summer courses may not be practical for all college students, they provide an opportunity to get ahead, graduate early, retake a failed course, or repeat a course in an attempt to earn a higher grade. Students are also drawn to abbreviated, intensive summer courses rather than full semester-long courses. And because students can usually transfer credits earned at other institutions, summer courses often prove more affordable for students taking courses online or at institutions closer to home.

Research indicates that a number of benefits draw students to enroll in summer courses. Kucsera and Zimmaro (2010) found that students preferred the intensive nature of such courses due to increased opportunities for discussion and more interactive teaching methods. Furthermore, because students tend to take a limited number of credits, students are able to engage in other activities, such as internships, volunteer work, or experiences that would be impractical during the regular semester. In her review of time-shortened courses, Daniel (2000) also identified positive outcomes such as greater mental investment and commitment from students, although this study defined “short-term” as lasting from two to three weeks rather than five to fifteen weeks.

Despite the attention given to summer college, it has not been without its share of criticism. Researchers have found that instructors often alter their teaching methods when courses are shortened; for example, they may be less likely to give lectures, assign term papers, or cover as much material (Allen, Miller, Fisher, and Moriarty 1982; Kretovics, Crowe and Hyun 2005, 2012). Due to its condensed nature, a course offered during the summer term may be viewed as less challenging than the same course offered during the academic year, though Anastasi (2007) found that students performed the same academically in summer courses as in equivalent semester-long courses.
This recent attention to summer college enrollment caught the attention of Elon University’s registrar, who considered how the institution could increase enrollment in its summer programming. With the use of business intelligence and forecasting activities, Elon University has expanded summer college enrollment in recent years. This change made leadership consider what metrics influence a student’s decision to take summer classes. What we found were primarily quantitative metrics, such as the number of sections offered for each course, the capacity of each section, and the rate at which seats become occupied. These activities are also powerful tools for informing several qualitative metrics. Foremost among these is the name of the course, which can send important signals about course content, appeal, and applicability.

Factors related to course offerings and enrollment have been studied for some time, but institutions still struggle to capitalize on conclusions drawn from student decision making and course preferences. There is also continuing evidence that enrollment in the arts and sciences is declining (American Academy of Arts & Sciences n.d.). Despite the growing consensus among institutions and employers that liberal studies help develop skills that are strong signals for workplace production (Fontenot 2016), institutions struggle to connect the relevance of the arts and sciences to the workplace today.

To gauge how certain factors are weighted more than others in the registration process, our study sought to collect data on what factors influence students’ course selection process. Existing literature on student decision making informed the framing of our methodology and our student survey. All students enrolled during the 2016 summer term were asked to assess how course information influences their registration decisions. Our study sought to clarify which factors students weigh more heavily when considering courses and how institutions can better utilize course efficiencies to improve retention.

Decision Making, Decision Theory
Decision making is the process of selecting one option from among a variety of alternatives to attain a desired
result (Lunenburg 2010). The process of decision making varies in complexity according to the nature of a problem. Some decisions are simple: We can decide whether to take the escalator or stairs in a matter of seconds. Other decisions—the more impactful and memorable ones—involve deliberation, consideration of alternatives, and the input of trusted sources.

Course selection represents a specific type of decision making in which the student chooses a course based on prescribed degree requirements, institutional enrollment limits, financial aid restrictions, and student interests (Babad 2001). This decision-making process is a critical element of the undergraduate experience. Course selection may be challenging in part because students may lack a clear understanding of their priorities and goals for the term. Course selection decision making can also involve a certain level of personal investment on the part of the student. A study on investment decisions found that feelings and emotions experienced during decision making can have positive effects on decision-making performance (Seo and Barrett 2007).

Adaption-innovation theory can be utilized to gauge different types of decision-making processes. The theory is founded on the assumption that all people solve problems and are creative (Stum 2009). It postulates a continuum in which people fall between “adaptors” at one end and “innovators” at the other. Adaptors rarely challenge rules and are concerned with solving problems rather than finding them (Stum 2009). Innovators have low self-doubt when generating ideas and provide the dynamics to bring about periodic revolutionary change (Stum 2009). Kirton and Pender (1982) found that members of occupational groups with numerous, less rigid paradigms, such as research and development personnel, were more innovative than those in more structured, rigid occupations, such as engineering (Kirton and Pender 1982). Students’ decision making during course selection may be gauged by how they solve problems. Depending on where students fall on the adaption-innovation continuum, they may create a term schedule they like on their first attempt, without making revisions. By contrast, students on the opposite end of the spectrum may continually adjust their schedules in order to produce the most satisfactory schedule.

Course selection can be an overwhelming process as students attempt to follow their intended four-year plans (i.e. academic schedules used to guide students’ course planning during their college years). Decision making regarding course selection may result in student satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the four-year planning process. In decision theory, decision makers are assumed to be risk averse such that they may try to reduce the risk associated with their decisions. As in other forms of decision making, students engage in risk mitigation while making course selections. In fact, Zocco (2009) found that “the key (compound) question related to the course selection decision is: What are the expected returns/benefits this course will give me, and what is the risk that I will not receive those benefits?” Zocco (2009) identifies seven return expectations in course selection:

- Personal interest in the course or subject matter;
- Intellectual challenge and rigor;
- Demand on time;
- Grade potential;
- Assistance in achieving career goals;
- Enjoyment of the classroom experience; and
- Performance in the learning environment.

Aside from the prevailing factor of meeting degree requirements, students tend to manage course selection risks by speaking to the course instructor; previewing the syllabus; reviewing information provided by the school, such as the course description or course evaluation results from previous semesters; and tapping into the student network of positive and negative referrals (Zocco 2009).

Across the literature (Babad and Tayeb 2003, Milleron 2008), a strong work avoidance factor was a significant characteristic in course selection. Millennial students may avoid taking courses that require a significant amount of effort or that present high expectations in terms of student output (Milleron 2008). Students must compromise if a course is required for their degree or if other qualities, such as course availability, outweigh course difficulty (Babad and Tayed 2003).

While it may seem counterintuitive given their penchant for avoiding work, students nevertheless express a strong preference for “high learning value” (Babad and Tayeb 2003). They want to gain relevant and useful knowledge, despite demonstrated work avoidance. These two factors highlight students’ preference for efficiency during course registration. They want to take the shortest, least burdensome path possible to obtain value. Badad and Tayed (2003) found that students at an Israeli university preferred easy or moderately dif-
difficult courses over courses that involved an extensive workload. Older students (i.e., students with higher academic standing) were more likely to select high learning value courses and were slightly more willing to select more challenging courses.

Word of mouth (WOM) is widely identified as the most important factor influencing course selection (Coleman and McKeachie 1981, Kocak and Sever 2011). Students often make decisions based on what their peers (mainly students in their senior year) have told them. They inquire about how effective an instructor is as a lecturer, the attractiveness of the course as an elective, and course difficulty. Negative WOM messages tend to be more effective than positive WOM messages in affecting students’ judgment about a course. Peer recommendations also communicate messages about course difficulty. If students anticipate that a course (especially an elective) has an intensive workload, they are more likely to drop it (Kocak and Sever 2011).

Students also seek official, institutionally based course evaluations as resources for course selection (Kocak and Sever 2011). The influence of such evaluations ranks lower than that of WOM because of students’ limited access to such information. Students may use the Internet to research the academic background and practical experiences of a course instructor (Coleman and McKeachie 1981), but they believe evaluations of instructors’ in-class performance are more important. Students—especially those more likely to be at risk (i.e., those who are ethnic minorities, are academically disadvantaged, have disabilities, are of low socioeconomic status, and/or are probationary students)—may also seek specific counseling from academic advisors (Heisserer and Parette 2002). Advisors utilize various models to increase student retention and improve student decision-making skills. Effective models include integrated advising, in which advisors can assume responsibility for student decision making when needed or facilitate the development of greater student independence in course selection, and intrusive advising, in which advisors utilize a range of intervention strategies to increase students’ responsibility for their academic planning (Heisserer and Parette 2002).

Student ratings of instructors on ratemyprofessor.com constitute an online manifestation of WOM. The site is a popular source in helping students select courses based on peers’ ratings of faculty performance. Otto, Sanford, and Ross (2008) examined how components of online ratings aligned with expected measures of student learning. These components included instructor clarity in the presentation of course material; instructor helpfulness as perceived by students; and course easiness. Results of the study showed that clarity, helpfulness, and easiness demonstrate patterns of association that are consistent with the assumption that ratings from ratemyprofessor reflect student learning. However, even though the website provides various perspectives on student learning, it may not be an honest instrument (i.e., students may provide biased evaluations) for faculty performance evaluation (Otto, et al. 2008).

Students making course selections are often interested in how technology is utilized in the classroom (Kocak and Sever 2011). A focal point of online instruction is student interactions with their peers and professors. Picciano’s (2002) study of online instruction found that students’ perceptions of learning (quantity and quality of instruction) and satisfaction with the course corresponded with students having higher perceived performance in the online course. High interaction with student postings to an online discussion board correlated with high scores on written assignments (Picciano 2002).

Does Course Title Make a Difference?

Words shape our everyday lives and the ways in which we process information. In the context of higher education, the words in course titles can be viewed as students’ first interaction with their instructors (Flaherty, McAdams and Leblanc 2017). At contemporary colleges and universities, there is a trend toward unconventional, catchy course titles that capture students’ attention in the marketplace of courses from which they have to choose.

Flaherty, McAdams, and Leblanc (2017) identify two factors related to the importance of course titles. The first is the proliferation of online courses. As one blogger noted, “Title-related issues loom even larger for online courses, since there may be fewer contexts for understanding course titles when a student isn’t on campus” (Neal 2008). The second factor is government cuts to postsecondary funding. Decreasing government funds suggest that colleges and universities are intensifying their marketing efforts to attract more students—
and, thus, more tuition dollars—in a highly competitive atmosphere (Enrollment Management Review 2009). Crafting course titles that attract student interest will likely be part of that competition. Flaherty, McAdams, and Leblanc (2017) emphasize that the appeal of “catchy” course titles varies by a student’s class year. First-year students fulfilling general education requirements may have more flexibility than upper-year students to take courses with creative titles (which may indicate that the instructor has inventive ways of teaching). A course with a catchy title may also be perceived as a less daunting, more comfortable option than a course with a conventional title and thereby attract the attention of first-year students apprehensive about academic success (Flaherty, McAdams and Leblanc 2017).

Course titles may also communicate messages about inclusivity and diversity to students. Spoor and Lehmiller (2014) explored the influence of course title on students’ interest in a women’s and gender studies course and found that students viewed courses with broader, gender-neutral titles as more credible and inclusive than they did courses whose titles were women-specific. The criteria for credibility were as follows: “The instructor will probably provide a fair and balanced perspective on these topics,” “The instructor appears to be credible,” and “Overall, this course looks like it is comprehensive” (Spoor and Lehmiller 2014). Furthermore, course titles that utilize women-specific language might dissuade a larger proportion of students—especially males—from enrolling in the course (Spoor and Lehmiller 2014). To better understand the impact of course titles on student interest, the present study seeks to examine how course titles influence student decision making during the course selection process.

Methodology

Students exercise decision making by selecting courses based on their scheduled commitments for the term, preferences for a professor, and class availability, along with other factors. This study was motivated primarily by the observation that key words in course titles were tied to quantitatively high demand for specific courses. The data highlighted demand for courses with titles that featured specific words—film, deviance, and fascism being among the most popular. The researchers sought to determine how students would respond to fictitious course titles incorporating these and other popular words.

In September 2016, a quantitative assessment was designed and sent via e-mail to all currently enrolled undergraduate students at a medium-sized, private institution in the South. Respondents first were asked to rank their preferences for registering for six fictitious courses. The course titles were based on data that identified the words film, deviance, and fascism as “signal words” with the highest and fastest rates of course registration (see Table 1). Moreover, these fictitious titles represented courses that could conceivably be offered to undergraduates. Each course was presented as a generic 200-level course (i.e. 2XX) to minimize bias and focus on accessibility (i.e. students of any level could take any of the six courses). Two of the six fictitious courses had titles with words previously identified as signal words. These courses were the test variables in the experimental portion of the survey.

Next, Likert scales were used to elicit students’ experiences regarding a variety of topics, including the influence of course title on their decision to register for a class. Respondents were also asked to rank statements regarding their preference for particular courses, course qualities during registration (i.e. previous course knowledge, WOM, course title, and interest in the course), and institutional practices that could influence their decision making in course selection. In total, 822 students’ responses were collected and analyzed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Ranking1 of Course Titles (n=822)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course Title</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSY 2XX Social and Personality Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENG 2XX From Fiction to Film: Movie Adaptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOC 2XX Deviance and Social Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>HST 2XX Fascism and Propaganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>REL 2XX Religion in the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHL 2XX Symbolic Logic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Range from 1 (most preferred) to 5 (least preferred)
Findings

Table 1 indicates respondents’ mean rankings of courses based solely on the course name provided. Students ranked PSY 2XX Social and Personality Development as the most preferred and PHL 2XX Symbolic Logic as the least preferred among the group of fictitious course titles. The results show that the signal words film, deviance, and fascism held significant weight in students’ decision making. The three courses titles with “signal words” ranked second, third, and fourth among the six options (though this inspires some speculation).

The three most popular courses, PSY 2XX Social and Personality Development, ENG 2XX From Fiction to Film: Movie Adaptations, and SOC 2XX Deviance and Social Control, are gender neutral and make no mention of a specific demographic. Two of the three least popular courses, HST 2XX Fascism and Propaganda and REL 2XX Religion in the United States, indicate a particular demographic or belief system tied to specific populations. Such difference may be attributed to students’ risk aversion in the decision-making process: that is, broader course titles may appeal to students seeking courses that offer balanced topics.

Figure 1 displays respondents’ evaluation of the importance of various course factors: 92 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they prefer courses with an interesting title; 74 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they prefer courses that align with their interest in the subject. Although students agreed that previous knowledge of the subject matter and word of mouth were important (58 percent positive responses), these were ranked as less important factors in course selection. Word of mouth was the least popular factor (25 percent strongly disagree) influencing course choice.

Table 2 shows participants’ ranking of factors they most and least preferred in the registration process. On average, participants prioritized selecting courses that satisfy a degree requirement over professor reputation, course availability, course title, and course popularity among friends. As expected, when considering major requirements, students sacrificed other considerations in order to focus on degree completion.

Discussion and Implications

Results from the study demonstrated students’ preference for course titles that contain particular “signal words.” The top three courses that students selected (Social and Personality Development, Fiction to Film, and Deviance and Social Control) demonstrate that
students choose courses based on the ‘catchy-ness’ of their titles (Flaherty, McAdams and LeBlanc 2017). Students also preferred courses with more inclusive titles (i.e. Social and Personality Development, Fiction to Film, and Deviance and Social Control) over demographic-specific course titles (Fascism and Propaganda and Religion in the United States). This aligns with findings from Spoor and Lehmler’s 2014 study on the impact of gender on course titles. This difference may be also attributed to students’ emotional thinking in the decision-making process, demonstrating that students respond to courses with broader topics to satisfy their level of personal investment in the course (Seo and Barrett 2007). Course titles as an important factor in the course selection process reinforce previous literature supporting more focus on this area in the coming years (Flaherty, McAdams and LeBlanc 2017).

Interestingly, the study findings provided mixed commentary regarding previous literature on student resources utilized during course selection. The data indicate that students demonstrate risk aversion by selecting courses that align with personal interest in subject matter rather than seeking out external peer input to make such decisions (Zocco 2009). These results are in direct contrast to previous studies that emphasize the role of peer input in course selection. Other scholars suggest that word of mouth is an important factor in student course selection. However, participants in the current study indicated that “friends who have taken the class or a class like it” was the least important factor in deciding between courses. This directly contradicts previous literature suggesting the strength of peer or media engagement during registration choices in college (Coleman and McKeachie 1981, Kocack and Sever 2011, Otto, et al. 2008). This difference could be due to various factors, including the source of the survey at Elon (i.e. administrative questioning), student demographics at the university, or false reporting. Regardless, this finding calls for further research on student influences on course selection, especially as they may be changing.

Future areas of study could include analysis of course titles and selections by students enrolled at a variety of institutions. As higher education grapples with enrollment and student engagement, course titles could serve as a means by which to engage student interests. These study findings also have implications for summer education opportunities as students continue to seek and select unique educational opportunities outside the traditional liberal arts curriculum.

References


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**About the Authors**

**Stephanie Ntim** is a Master of Science student at Johns Hopkins University. Stephanie is a former student assistant and undergraduate student at Elon University, where she worked in the Office of the Registrar. She graduated from Elon University in 2019 with a Bachelor of Arts in Public Health Studies.

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**Rodney Parks, Ph.D.** is University Registrar, Assistant to the Provost, and assistant professor of human services studies at Elon University, where he has served since 2013. He has published numerous studies on unique student populations, and is perhaps best known for his work on the AACRAO/NASPA Expanding the Academic Record project.

**Caroline Dean** is a Master’s of Higher Education student at Elon University. Caroline is a graduate apprentice in the Elon Office of the Registrar where she has worked on several initiatives such as expanding summer college programs, alternative credentialing, and expanding experiential learning access and awareness. She graduated from Elon University in 2018 with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology.
Leading through Andragogy

By Joseph Mews

Adult learning and leadership concepts have received heightened interest in recent years as enrollment of students ages 25 to 34 years at degree-granting postsecondary institutions increased 35 percent between 2001 and 2015 and is projected to increase 11 percent between 2015 and 2026 (Hussar and Bailey 2018). Within these same timeframes, enrollment of students ages 35 years and older has grown 13 percent and is projected to grow 4 percent—creating expanded generational diversity among student bodies and stakeholders throughout U.S. postsecondary institutions (Hittepole 2019, Hussar and Bailey 2018). While these increases are significant, these data may not surprise those following trends in our nation’s aging population vis a vis postsecondary education attainment.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census (2019) recently reported that the U.S. population’s median age increased to 38.2 years in 2018—an increase from 37.2 years in 2010. And while our population is growing older, only 47.6 percent of Americans between the ages of 25 and 64 years hold a credential beyond a high school diploma, even though roughly two-thirds of all U.S. jobs require a postsecondary degree or credential (Lumina Foundation 2019). As a result, many higher education institutions across the United States are seeking ways to effectively serve and educate adult learners, formally and informally. The purpose of this article is to offer insight into one framework that may aid faculty, staff, and administrators when leading, educating, and working alongside adults: andragogy.

Background

The term “andragogy” was conceptualized in the 1830s by German teacher Alexander Kapp and was popularized in the United States by Malcom Knowles in the 1960s, when he developed an associated framework and authored several books detailing “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles 1975, Smith 2010). The word itself was developed from the Greek andr, meaning “man,” and agogus, meaning “leader of”—and contrasting with pedagogy, from the Greek paid, meaning “child” (Peterson 2017, Smith 2010). Knowles, known in the United States as “the father of andragogy,” is most well-known for his work from the 1960s through the 1980s and in which he presented and applied his research while serving in various prestigious academic and administrative roles focused on andragogy and the adult learning movement (Knowles, Swanson and Holton 2012; Smith 2002).

Since the framework was popularized, andragogy has been commonly compared to pedagogy, a teaching concept often referenced in the field of K–12 education (Smith 2010). While there are differences between andragogical and pedagogical approaches, the purpose of this article is not to compare the two but rather to highlight the andragogy framework (see Table 1, on page 66) and its potential benefits when leading adult learners through effective instructional methods and student services. Knowles’ andragogy framework has evolved into six distinct principles of adult learn-
Applying Andragogy in Student Services

In addition to instructional strategies, principles from the andragogy framework can be utilized to enhance the adult learning experience through campus- and online-based student services (Kasworm 2012). In impressionistic offices involving services such as admissions, marketing, financial aid, academic advising, and records, administrators should be cognizant of factors relating to presentation and perception and should be sure to cater to the needs of both traditional and non-traditional students. This is especially true for campuses with growing adult student enrollment and interest, as many existing student services, programs, policies, and procedures are predicated on the needs of traditional- aged college students and are not designed for adults in contrasting circumstances (Caruth 2014).

Administrators and staff of student services offices can create a more welcoming environment and enhance the experience for adult students by embracing the andragogy framework. They can also positively impact key student performance metrics such as enrollment, retention, success, and graduation (Caruth 2014). Consider the following examples:

- Market programs to adults by focusing on career- and life-specific outcomes.

### Table 1. Andragogy Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learner’s Need to Know</td>
<td>Creating a sense of why for adult learners is essential in education and leadership. Adults need to understand the value in what is being presented and how it can apply to their current life objectives (Sang 2010). Correlating short-term objectives with long-term goals is likely to yield higher sustained interest in learning and progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Concept of the Learner</td>
<td>As a person matures, his self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one that is self-directed. Adult learners often have a sense of responsibility for their own decisions and want to be treated by others as being capable of self-direction (Knowles, et al. 2012). Allowing adults to learn together through collaboration and autonomy helps create a self-directed environment that may increase the retention of core information and problem-solving abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Experience of the Learner</td>
<td>An adult accumulates a growing wealth of experience, which is a rich resource for learning. Drawing on prior experience and knowledge is another way adults can learn for themselves and collaborate with others (Sang 2010). Educators and administrators should incorporate learning experiences that account for similarities and differences among the group, utilizing activities such as collective discussions, case studies, and simulation exercises (Knowles 1976). Introducing concepts through discussion may open adult learners to new ideas that may challenge or solidify existing biases as they comprehend the information (Knowles, et al. 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readiness to Learn</td>
<td>The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental- and life-related tasks of his or her social role. Adults tend to know when they are ready to learn based on the content and how useful it is at the time (Sang 2010). Educators and administrators can identify this level of readiness by exploring areas of interest and experiences through group discussion and other assessments and then relating back to program- and course-specific goals and outcomes (Knowles, et al. 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation to Learning</td>
<td>There is a change in time perspective as people mature—from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Therefore, adult learners are more likely to embrace and commit to problem- and life-centered methods than subject-centered learning. Rather than concentrating on subject matter for future implications as the sole orientation to learning, adults prefer having information as it pertains to real-life application (Knowles, et al. 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to Learn</td>
<td>The most potent motivations are internal rather than external. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs, interests, and benefits that are satisfied through learning. Factors such as career needs, advancement opportunities, family obligations, setting standards for children, and overall self-satisfaction are some of the various reasons that adults further their education (Park and Choi 2009). These factors are often the driving force that keeps adult learners motivated to progress and achieve (Knowles, et al. 2012). Educators and administrators should be aware and respectful of these motivators as they are unique and often personal, with ties to self-esteem and quality of life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In admissions and financial aid, offer open house and information sessions during evening and weekend hours to demonstrate availability and commitment to adults with full-time obligations.

In personal counseling or advising sessions, take time to build rapport and understand the true motivators and concerns of each student, and then provide genuine support.

Create purposeful discussion of the value and short-term payoff of specific degree programs through life-related admissions counseling.

Establish more frequent start dates to sustain student progress and motivation from inquiry through enrollment.

Create clear funding and financial aid models for part-time students.

Discuss common concerns and misconceptions during financial aid and veterans affairs counseling, with a focus on students’ fiscal responsibilities.

Allow students to earn credit toward their programs for prior learning experiences as evidenced by formal assessments or portfolios.

Offer flexible course schedules with evening or weekend and online options.

In advising and student retention offices, present course and program requirements in a way that promotes progress and accounts for adults’ interests and goals.

Incorporate campus organizations and activities that are open, self-directed, and inviting to both traditional and nontraditional students.

Assign academic advisors based on their familiarity and comfort with adult students.

Survey students to identify needs and develop methods to meet them.

Summary

Most adults prefer to know why they need to learn something; they also prefer to maintain responsibility for their own decisions and lives, to utilize their experiences, and to learn from real-life situations. They respond better to life-centered learning and are more responsive to internal motivators. While Knowles did not intend for these...
andragogical assumptions to constitute a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching or leading, they do provide a theoretical framework for creating a welcoming and conducive learning environment for adults (Knowles, et al. 2012). As the median age and generational diversity in the United States continue to increase, it is essential for faculty, staff, and administrators across our nation’s higher education institutions to embrace the needs of adult learners and utilize principles from the andragogy framework to help all students succeed.

References

About the Author
Joseph Mews, Ph.D., serves as Assistant Dean of Enrollment Management for the University of South Carolina’s Palmetto College and as a part-time instructor of leadership. His professional and research interests include organizational behavior, leadership, strategic assessment and planning, change management, team performance, adult learning, and student success. He holds a Ph.D. in leadership from the University of the Cumberlands, an M.A. in educational leadership from the University of Central Florida, and a B.S. in sport management from Peru State College.
The mission of higher education is a topic of continual debate among politicians, intellectuals, and employers. As the cost of higher education continues to rise, critics maintain that institutions are not properly preparing students for life after college. An annual survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2018) found a large gap between employer and student perceptions regarding career readiness as students consistently rated their proficiency in career readiness competencies higher than employers did. Many critics have argued that students are spending too much time participating in “leisure” activities, such as co-curricular activities and socializing, rather than studying and focusing on their academic pursuits (Babcock and Marks 2010).

College presidents also note that there is a perception that students are not allocating their free time to academics. A survey by the Pew Research Center revealed that 52 percent of college presidents believed their students were studying less than students did ten years earlier (Taylor, et al. 2011). However, while there is a prevailing belief that college has gotten easier, a growing body of research suggests that college is not just about academics. Encoura, a research and advisory firm for higher education institutions, has gathered new insights into prospective student opinions on the purpose of college. According to Encoura’s 2018 Prospective Student Survey Report, students share a range of mindsets about what they value in college: from social focus and career pragmatists, to exploration and meaning and grad-school bound (Trovato 2018). These constitute the lens through which students view the college experience and inevitably influence the many trade-offs they may face.

The current study explores students’ considerations of academic and personal trade-offs they may experience in college. Students are bombarded with so many opportunities, such as engaging in research, doing an internship, networking with local leaders, etc., that every decision has an opportunity cost. In an attempt to understand how students balance academic and co-curricular options, this study asks respondents to consider different survey methods. Finally, implications and recommendations for how institutions can utilize these data are considered.

Literature Review

Over the years, scholars who study higher education have sought to understand how students balance course rigor with a multitude of other priorities. Babad and Tayeb (2003) posit that students select courses on the basis of academic and personal/contextual considerations. Academic considerations are characteristics of courses that distinguish them from one another, such as course content and level, instructional quality, grading criteria, and the instructor’s pedagogical preferences or style. Personal/contextual considerations, by contrast, are drawn from the broader context of students’ lives and include factors such as working while enrolled, the de-
sire to earn higher grades, social or family pressures, etc. While some of these factors vary term by term, others are culturally socialized long before matriculation (Kennett, Reed and Stuart 2013).

Many variables impact how students select courses, including peers’ course recommendations, perceived rigor of a course, instructor’s reputation, and whether the course satisfies a degree requirement. College students have the choice to challenge themselves with a rigorous course load, but some may forego this opportunity, instead choosing a less rigorous path to completing their degree. Economists Babcock and Marks (2010) found that between 1961 and 2003, the average number of hours full-time college students spent studying decreased from 24 hours to fourteen hours per week. This finding led to the titling of the study “Leisure College, USA,” insinuating that college students spend an increasing amount of time “at leisure,” neither working for pay nor engaged in academic pursuits, rather than studying.

Although it is a compelling argument to suggest that students are taking more leisure simply because they study less, other scholars have argued against this. In an article for the American Association of Colleges and Universities (2011), McCormick notes the distinction of how we define leisure. Babcock and Marks (2010) define leisure as “any activity that is not spent working for pay or engaged in academic pursuits” (McCormick 2011). This definition clusters leisure activities such as socializing with other activities like commuting or dependent care. The National Survey of Student Engagement (2011) found contrary findings when leisure is redefined to exclude activities such as dependent care. When the redefined term is analyzed, what researchers describe as “discretionary” time—that spent in leisure—decreases. McCormick (2011) notes that “definitions matter” when we seek to capture students’ obligations and behaviors.

Another question is whether leisure is a vice that students should avoid. Kim, Sung, Park, and Dittmore (2015) found that leisure participation—non-obligatory and non-work activities based on individuals’ enjoyment and interests in their free time—has a positive effect on college students’ perceived stress, loneliness, and self-esteem. Other scholars affirm the importance of leisure but also note that institutions should take an active role in educating students as to their leisure participation. Researchers have found that leisure education has an effect on positive engagement outcomes such as an enhanced sense of community (Evans, Hartman and Anderson 2013) and self-reflection (Chen, Yarnal, Hustad and Sims 2016; Evans, Hartman and Anderson 2013). Rather than demonize leisure, institutions are invited instead to use leisure as a learning experience and to understand its positive and negative effects.

Finally, scholars have analyzed the perceptions of first-year students and the transition from high school to college. Meyer, Spencer, and French (2009) interviewed 52 first-year students about their perceptions of rigor and balancing varying priorities after enrolling in college. Sixty percent of respondents reported that college did not meet their high expectations of academic rigor after their first semester. Despite these findings, studies have seldom explored perceptions of rigor among students enrolled beyond their first year. Furthermore, previous literature has not considered the broader context of the student experience by examining students’ need to make trade-offs between the academic and non-academic facets of their lives. The current study addresses this topic by analyzing how students assess various academic and non-academic trade-offs.

Methodology

An online survey was sent via e-mail to all returning undergraduate students at a private, mid-sized, primarily residential university to identify how they decide between academic and co-curricular priorities. After reading a brief outline summarizing what the survey entailed and consenting to participate, students responded to an assortment of opinion-based and hypothetical questions. The survey included Likert scales for answering questions about students’ priorities in college. Respondents were also asked to evaluate their academic performance relative to that of their peers, reporting how often they attended class, completed reading assignments, and actively engaged in class relative to “the average student” at the same institution. Finally, respondents were asked to consider the relative importance of trade-offs presented in the context of two hypothetical scenarios: One asked respondents to choose between an instructor who was intellectually challenging and one who was entertaining and engaging. In the second scenario, students were asked to choose for which of three hypothetical courses they would prefer to register. The courses were distinguished by differ-
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ences in students’ mastery of learning objectives and the average grade distribution, both of which served as proxies for the difficulty of each course.

Three hundred fifty-five respondents completed the online survey. (Demographic tables are provided in Table 1.) This survey sample is consistent with the student population at this particular private institution. Next, frequencies were conducted to identify general student perceptions of rigor and course preference. A paired samples t-test was also conducted to examine the difference between students’ perceived engagement on campus relative to their perceptions of their peers’ engagement.

Results

Table 2 (on page 73) presents survey respondents’ expectations relative to academic planning. Questions related to whether students were intentional about their academics. Respondents were confident that they had planned for college effectively: Results indicated that approximately 60 percent of students strongly agreed or agreed that they knew what they wanted out of college before enrolling. A large majority (76.9%) of students reported that they had decided on their major by the end of their first year. While choosing a major early helps students stay on track to complete their degrees, this may come at the expense of exploring options outside their major or participating in interdisciplinary studies. When asked about their priorities for college, two-thirds (67.6%) of students strongly agreed that academics were their first priority. Eighty percent reported that their institution promoted academic rigor regardless of major.

To gauge how they assess their own academic engagement relative to that of their peers, students were asked to respond on a scale of 0 to 100 percent. Respondents did the same for their expectations of the average student at the same institution. A paired samples t-test (displayed in Table 3, on page 74) was utilized to determine the significance between academic engagement and the expected engagement of students’ peers.

Respondents reported that they were significantly more engaged in attending classes, completing readings, and taking notes in class than were their peers. Students believed they attended class meetings, completed assigned readings, and took appropriate notes approximately 20 percentage points more compared to the average student. This is unsurprising, as most students would not discount their own academic performance and are confident that they are utilizing their time in college effectively.

Despite a significant disparity between students’ perceptions of their own academic commitment in comparison to that of their peers, one group’s responses ran contrary to this trend. When controlling for the question “My school promotes academic rigor regardless of major,” students who strongly agreed had a narrower gap between their perceptions of their own academic performance and that of their peers. While their perceptions of their own performance were still significantly higher than those of their peers, on average they perceived less of a difference between their own performance and their peers’.

Figure 1 (on page 74) displays trade-offs in which students were asked to allocate 100 points between two variables based on their importance to the student. This metric captures how students ideally would choose to
dedicate their finite time and resources. (It may not accurately reflect how students actually allocate their time.) The most skewed response related to the purpose of students’ study time. Responses indicated that students ideally would dedicate 69 percent of their study time to earning the best grade possible, compared with 31 percent devoted to earning an acceptable grade. Students also reported allocating 55 percent of their time outside of class to studying, compared to 45 percent of their time to socializing and relaxing. However, because “study time” is not clearly defined, students may view participating in co-curricular activities as part of their academics and categorize such participation as study time.

When considering class characteristics and instructors, 65 percent of students responded that they would take a course that satisfied a degree requirement, compared to 35 percent who would take a course to expand their knowledge. While some courses would enable students to achieve both goals, it seems intuitive that students would prefer to build a course schedule that would satisfy degree requirements rather than simply support self-enrichment. When asked whether they would choose a course that would enable them to maintain a high GPA, 58 percent reported that they would, compared to 42 percent who would choose to take a rigorous course. Despite preferring a less rigorous curriculum, 53 percent of students agreed that they would take a course with a professor who would challenge them intellectually rather than take a course with a professor who would entertain them.

Finally, 61 percent of students reported that they would select a co-curricular activity that was personally fulfilling whereas 39 percent would seek co-curricular experiences such as compulsory internships, service learning, etc., because they would satisfy degree requirements. This supports the notion that rather than just conforming to what is expected, students seek experiences that fulfill their personal and career goals.

The final survey question asked how students would choose among three hypothetical course options. The three courses differed in learning objectives and the percentage of students who earned an “A” in the course. Table 4 (on page 75) shows that 56.6 percent of students selected the course that represented a compromise between these two variables. Course Section B neither offered the greatest number of learning objectives nor was the most difficult in which to earn an “A” but instead

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Students’ College Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>“As a college student, academics are my first priority.”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **“I knew what I wanted from my college experience before my first year.”** |
| Strongly Agree | 63 | 17.7 |
| Somewhat Agree | 149 | 42.0 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 52 | 14.6 |
| Somewhat Disagree | 65 | 18.3 |
| Strongly Disagree | 26 | 7.3 |

| **“I knew my major by the end of my first year.”** |
| Strongly Agree | 190 | 53.5 |
| Somewhat Agree | 83 | 23.4 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 14 | 3.9 |
| Somewhat Disagree | 33 | 9.3 |
| Strongly Disagree | 35 | 9.9 |

| **“I currently have a plan for meeting my degree requirements.”** |
| Strongly Agree | 290 | 81.7 |
| Somewhat Agree | 57 | 16.1 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 2 | 0.6 |
| Somewhat Disagree | 6 | 1.7 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 |

| **“My school promotes academic rigor regardless of major.”** |
| Strongly Agree | 115 | 32.4 |
| Somewhat Agree | 169 | 47.6 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 24 | 6.8 |
| Somewhat Disagree | 38 | 10.7 |
| Strongly Disagree | 9 | 2.5 |

| **“My school offers adequate resources to support my academic success.”** |
| Strongly Agree | 207 | 58.3 |
| Somewhat Agree | 115 | 32.4 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 18 | 5.1 |
| Somewhat Disagree | 13 | 3.7 |
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 0.6 |

| **“My school encourages out-of-class engagement beyond what is expected for my degree requirements.”** |
| Strongly Agree | 215 | 60.6 |
| Somewhat Agree | 108 | 30.4 |
| Neither Agree nor Disagree | 19 | 5.4 |
| Somewhat Disagree | 9 | 2.5 |
| Strongly Disagree | 4 | 1.1 |
provided a balance between the extremes represented by the other two courses. Those courses—antitheses of one another—split the remaining 43 percent of respondents evenly. Students’ responses indicated that neither mastery of learning objectives nor course difficulty was a determining factor in selecting courses.

Implications
These findings support those of previous literature related to course selection (Babad and Tayeb 2003) and student mindsets (Kennett, Reed and Stuart 2013). Students are generally rational when making decisions about their academic and co-curricular involvement, often striking a balance between courses that are engaging and those that are moderately challenging. A course that is imbalanced in any aspect could influence the balance of other academic and/or personal decisions. Consistent with the authors’ prior literature, institutions should acknowledge the importance of leisure, take an active role in leisure education, and champion certain co-curricular activities. As Evans, Hartman, and Anderson (2015) note, leisure participation can have positive effects on overall institutional engagement.

Table 3. Paired Samples T-Test of Respondent’s vs. Average Student’s Academic Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>μ</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>σx</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I attend n% of class meetings.</td>
<td>18.83</td>
<td>12.34</td>
<td>0.660</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I complete n% of the required readings for each class.</td>
<td>24.10</td>
<td>19.83</td>
<td>1.067</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I take notes as appropriate during n% of class meetings.</td>
<td>22.34</td>
<td>18.92</td>
<td>1.018</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 2-tailed; significant at p < 0.01

Figure 1

Paired Survey Trade-Offs
Based on these findings, institutions should also consider the mindsets of their students and what their students value. Similar to the Encoura findings (Trovato 2018), students enroll with predetermined expectations and desires about college, and these shape their decision making in college. Institutions should clearly articulate their degree requirements and competencies in their catalogs and other popular channels of communication with students. Institutions should also use outcomes data not just as a marketing tool, but also as an educational tool to inform students of projected career outcomes when they declare a degree program. Such efforts can help students understand what their degrees entail and how those degrees are valued in the marketplace.

Limitations and Recommendations
Like any study of this nature, these findings have certain limitations. The sample comprised students attending a single mid-size, private university. Because it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Section</th>
<th>Learning Objectives Mastered (n)</th>
<th>Average Share of Students earning an A (%)</th>
<th>Course Section Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Course Preferences

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consisted primarily of white eighteen- to 22-year-olds, the perceptions of populations such as first-generation students, students of color, adult learners, and others could not be analyzed. Further, the issue of student mindsets and how students should prioritize academic success is a nuanced issue that cannot be fully explored via a survey. Nevertheless, this study provides insight into how students prioritize their academic and co-curricular options and the accompanying trade-offs.

This study provides many points of discussion as to how students evaluate trade-offs in their college careers.

A longitudinal study examining how students’ views change from their first semester of college through graduation would be an intriguing follow-up. Regardless, the current study provides evidence that with all of the options available to students, many are seeking balance between their academic and personal life. Students enroll in college for a multitude of reasons; trade-offs may result in dramatic change, depending on when and why students enrolled.

References


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**About the Authors**

**Alexander Taylor** is Assistant Registrar for Communications at Elon University, where he has served since 2017. He has published articles on numerous topics, including dual enrollment, alternative credentialing, and strategic enrollment initiatives, among others.

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The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable
LENCIONI, P. 2002. SAN FRANCISCO: JOSSEY-BASS

Reviewed by LesLee Clauson Eicher

So begins Patrick Lencioni in his 2002 New York Times bestselling book The Five Dysfunctions of a Team. Teams are present in so many areas of our lives: the workplace, school, clubs, church, with children, adults, and everyone in between. This book thus has applicability for nearly everyone.

The Five Dysfunctions is a quick and pleasurable read. In fact, I read this book in the time it takes to fly from Seattle to Minneapolis. The author’s style is engaging and friendly. Lencioni structures his book around a “leadership fable”—otherwise known as...a story. He devotes about three-fourths of the book to the tale of a fictitious work team as its members falter and underperform, and of their experiences under the guidance of the consultant brought in to turn things around for them. I don’t think I’d be spoiling anything by revealing that despite some losses and some surprises along the way, the team emerged stronger in the end.

Lencioni couches his argument in the supposition that truly effective teamwork is one of the hardest goals for any organization to achieve. Humans are imperfect, with flaws, egos, insecurities, ambitions, baggage, distractions, personalities, pet peeves, and pet hurts. These imperfections make humans vulnerable to what the author calls “the five dysfunctions of a team.”

The Five Dysfunctions is clearly fiction. No empirical research was conducted, no double-blind studies were run, no texts were analyzed. Nothing was measured or tested. Rather, Lencioni drew from his own experience and successes as a manager as well as from his “people skills.”

Lencioni’s theory spoke to me as a reader and as a team member. From the start, I saw my own team in the author’s fictional team. Even more useful, or perhaps more disturbing, I saw myself.

The Five Dysfunctions are summarized below:

- Underpinning all of the dysfunctions is the absence of trust. In a trusting team, teammates feel comfortable being vulnerable with one another. Vulnerability is never punished, and peers believe their teammates’ intentions are good. When team leaders risk “losing face” in front of the team, they demonstrate their own vulnerability and encourage the team’s other members to do so, too.

In order to overcome a lack of trust within a team, the author believes that, first and foremost, time and shared experiences are necessary. But with intentionality and tools such as personality and behavior preference profiles and team-building exercises, trust can be learned.

- An absence of trust often leads to the next dysfunction: fear of conflict. Because conflict is so often and in so many situations considered taboo, teams often forgo the real benefit of healthy, productive conflict. Lencioni notes that destructive fighting and interpersonal politics are not productive conflict. Rather,
when teammates take part in passionate debates—even when fraught with emotion or frustration—they can come up with the best possible solutions in the shortest amounts of time. Differences are aired and addressed, which means fewer repressed resentments and passive-aggressive sabotage. The leader’s role is to help teammates learn how to have productive conflict by modeling it and by using tools to help “mine” for buried disagreements and bring sensitive topics to light. In this way, the team can address them and move on to its next challenge.

Creating an atmosphere in which peers can engage in healthy conflict allows a team to avoid the next dysfunction: lack of commitment.

Imagine that every time your team had to make a decision, it sought consensus and certainty. How long would that take? Hours? Days? Weeks? Longer? The author argues that great teams (1) “ensure that everyone’s ideas are genuinely considered” (207) and “find ways to achieve buy-in even when complete agreement is impossible” (207), and (2) “realize that it is better to make a decision boldly and be wrong—and then change direction with equal boldness—than it is to waffle” (208).

Any team that has problems committing to plans and goals invariably will also struggle with and exhibit an avoidance of accountability. This fourth dysfunction is the unwillingness of team members to call their peers out on performance or behavior that can hurt the team. When a team leader is seen as the ultimate disciplinarian, it’s easy for teammates to simply look away when they themselves or their teammates are not performing to agreed-upon standards. Each person waits for the leader to step in when behavior adjustments are needed because “it’s easier that way.” Teammates may not trust one another, they may fear conflict, or they may not be fully committed to the team’s plan of action.

Yet peer pressure can be a powerful way of ensuring that each team member does his or her part. It also takes the onus for discipline off the leader and fosters greater personal responsibility. No one wants to let one’s teammates down.

Lencioni says that structure—including published goals and standards, simple but regular employee reviews, and a system of team (not individual) rewards—can be a big part of achieving team accountability.

The final dysfunction, inattention to results, occurs as a natural byproduct of individuals’ tendency to be more concerned with their own interests than with the collective goals of the team. When a team isn’t focused on team results, it can easily stagnate and fail to achieve its goals. The author maintains that leaders have an important role to play in demonstrating a disciplined commitment to staying focused on the team’s goals and outcomes. Maintaining a schedule of publicly announced results, paired with results-based team rewards, can help keep the team focused.

This book is an easy and enjoyable read that offers common-sense advice to teams in all walks of life. I’ve found myself utilizing Lencioni’s suggestions in several teams in my own life, including in my own behavior as a teammate. Although this book was published nearly 20 years ago, its focus on human nature makes it relevant today. I recommend this book to the members of many types of teams, whether affiliated with work, school, sports or clubs, volunteer organizations, or any other endeavor.

Our Higher Calling: Rebuilding the Partnership between America and Its Colleges & Universities

THORP, H., AND B. GOLDSTEIN 2018. CHAPEL HILL, NC: UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS. 191 PP.

Reviewed by Wes K. Waggoner

Our Higher Calling offers readers a challenging but arguably hopeful outlook on issues facing higher education in the United States. Thorp, former provost at Washington University in St. Louis, and Goldstein, professor of economics at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, address head-on the public skepticism and institutions’ responsibilities regarding ensuring a strong, sustainable partnership between the United
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States and its higher education institutions. Given its rationale and recommendations, the book reads much like a strategic plan for higher education leaders seeking to rebuild the partnership. This is the second book from this team of authors; the first, *Engines of Innovation*, considers how colleges and universities can strengthen the U.S. economy, society, and culture.

**Introduction**

“The partnership,” as Thorp and Goldstein describe it, involves colleges and universities “educating a highly competitive workforce and providing leadership in the discovery of new knowledge applicable to matters of public interest” (3) in exchange for funding and the “freedom to both explore and espouse disparate and unpopular ideas as well as essentially manage their own affairs” (3). Citing measures of U.S. superiority in global higher education and its economic impact on individuals and society, the authors argue that over the long term, colleges and universities have held up their side of the bargain. Still, as they explain, many Americans believe the partnership is broken, and the conversation about fixing it has the potential to shape the future of the country.

In the introduction, Thorp and Goldstein identify eight public misconceptions about higher education that faculty and administration must address if they are to rebuild the partnership. These range from “a college degree is not worth the cost” to “the system of academic tenure is no way to run an institution.” Over the course of the ensuing twelve chapters, Thorp and Goldstein not only disprove these misconceptions but also point out where higher education faculty and leaders must take responsibility for rebuilding the partnership. The book ends with a possible framework for discussion among these leaders and a list of stakeholder recommendations for doing so.

**Using Strengths to Address Challenges**

In the first three chapters, Thorp and Goldstein discuss the diversity of institutions that on the one hand strengthens higher education in the United States while on the other presents impediments for addressing the challenges it faces. That diversity offers opportunity for students and faculty while fostering intellectual curiosity founded on principles of faculty autonomy and academic freedom. The authors point out, however, that those principles depend on public trust. Administrators must talk with faculty about a university’s duty to the partnership just as they talk with alumni and politicians. In turn, faculty should understand and embrace their role in establishing and maintaining public trust.

Thorp and Goldstein frame the challenges facing U.S. higher education in three categories: demographics, arithmetic, and technology. “New kinds of students are coming to universities (demographics) with lower ability to pay (arithmetic) while institutions are seriously behind in adapting to new technology” (27). They argue that too many schools are in the wrong location and focus on the wrong students. There is a population shift to urban centers, and while there are plenty of seats at colleges that focus on traditional students, non-traditional students are underserved. Further, costs are escalating in part due to an arms race that few institutions could win. The newspaper, retail, and music industries provide examples that argue that such forces would bring dramatic change in most industries. Universities, however, are slow to adopt new technology in ways that lead to fundamental change. Thorp and Goldstein are clear to explain, though, that while some business techniques are transferable to higher education, colleges and universities should not be run like a business.

These challenges should force institutions to make hard decisions, but Thorp and Goldstein point out that higher education is protected against many market forces by endowments, loyal alumni, government, and politics. That protection delays any crisis that would force a new, clear strategic direction. As they point out in other parts of the book, some of the greatest ideas and innovations come from higher education, yet colleges and universities are themselves resistant to significant change. Instead, institutions tend to mimic one another rather than engage in meaningful strategic change in response to challenge and uncertainty. Strategy is hard—for good reason, as Chapter 3 explains. But the forces of demographics, arithmetic, and technology on a diverse set of institutions make true strategies necessary.

**Defining Stakeholder Roles**

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 look at the roles of three key university stakeholders—students, faculty, and leader-
ship—and how they differ from comparable roles in a traditional business. Thorp and Goldstein argue that students are not customers due primarily to a cultural mythology around attending college (particularly a selective one) that makes a relationship between a student and a university more than merely transactional. They point out that institutions do not set tuition on the basis of the economic principle of supply and demand; moreover, “there is no better evidence that students are not customers and that undergraduate education is not a business than the rise and fall of for-profit higher education” (51).

Next, Thorp and Goldstein explain that faculty are not employees because as “members of an academic community who are expected to assume responsibilities for the public good in exchange for an unusual level of freedom and autonomy” (60), they are fundamental to the partnership. In addition to engaging in meaningful research, though, faculty must teach because educating students is why colleges exist. In turn, universities must support teaching through improved compensation and a commitment to developing good teachers who use technology to achieve better learning outcomes.

Thorp and Goldstein also make a strong case for tenure, arguing that while controversial, it is also essential. Tenure provides faculty with assurances and freedoms unlike those provided to employees in corporate America. That makes tenure a remarkably cost-efficient tool for recruiting and retaining faculty. “Without it, the economics of higher education would be in even more serious peril” (68).

For administrators and trustees, Thorp and Goldstein reason that a top-down, hierarchical style of leadership does not work well in a great university. Instead, presidents must negotiate the issues facing their institutions and develop consensus among stakeholders. The nature of a learning community demands this. Trustees bring an external and often corporate perspective to university leadership that sometimes conflicts with shared governance (a model uncommon in the business world but fundamental to higher education).

**Delivering on Public Expectations**

Having offered a discussion of the institutions, challenges, and players in U.S. higher education, Thorp and Goldstein then examine in Chapters 7 through 10 how colleges and universities can deliver on public expectations through “academic medicine,” economic development, innovation and entrepreneurship, and career readiness. They describe “academic medicine” as “the elephant in the room” and then explain its centrality to understanding higher education’s responsibility to the public. While not all institutions have medical schools, virtually every college and university contributes to academic medicine in some way. Thorp and Goldstein argue that academic medicine is central to meeting the public’s expectations of higher education for two reasons: First, the population supports and understands the value of medical research in fighting the war on disease, and second, a university medical center is often one of the only places to offer high-quality care in specialty fields where for-profit hospitals cannot “make the finances work.”

The book also addresses the impact of colleges and universities on their regional economies. Institutions can highlight their role as economic engines by conducting research that demonstrates public relevance. Thorp and Goldstein reason that university presidents must reconcile the story of economic growth that they tell politicians with the story of free inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge they tell faculty. Both are important, and one should not be emphasized at the expense of the other.

Thorp and Goldstein maintain that whereas the public now expects that a college degree will lead to a job and guarantee financial success, academia disagrees with the public as to how this should happen. The authors assert that resolving this disagreement is fundamental to rebuilding the partnership. In the second half of Chapter 10, they outline six components of a multidimensional approach to career readiness. First, be transparent about the credential because not all degrees provide equal short-term benefits. Second, involve non-traditional instructors who bring real-world experience into the curriculum and increase the impact of research. Third, develop innovative faculty enrichment so that teaching engages students in developing the skills employers want. Fourth, integrate internships and experiential learning throughout the curriculum across all programs. Fifth, address the career issue early by being proactive in talking with students about job readiness—the earlier the better. Finally, set goals and monitor results that will help track progress as well as help tell the story of preparedness and success. As Michael L. Lomax, president and CEO of the United Negro College Fund, contends, “The challenge is back on
the academy to be less defensive, less protective of the status quo” (126).

Framing the Discussion
In the concluding chapters, Thorp and Goldstein call on readers—primarily educational leaders—to accept responsibility for leading a conversation aimed at rebuilding the partnership. They describe a fictional but realistic meeting of faculty, administration, trustees, and politicians. The dialogue makes clear the perspective of each stakeholder. Its candor presents expectations that some readers may not like, but, true to the authors’ likely intent, need to hear. In fact, the authors point out that the conversation is already taking place but is being led by legislators rather than educators.

In the final chapter, Thorp and Goldstein propose actions for each of the key stakeholder groups: trustees and policy makers, administrators, faculty, and students. Each has a role and responsibility in rebuilding the partnership that may require breaking historical habits and beliefs. Their recommendations are real, practical, and derive clearly from the book’s arguments.

Conclusion
Thorp and Goldstein clearly intend Our Higher Calling for those who have leadership roles in higher education, including faculty, trustees, administrators, and politicians. Those who hold such roles and who aspire to them will benefit greatly from reading it. Readers are part of not just a profession but a higher calling, and the authors present a narrative that most higher education professionals will understand. Readers who have less experience of university governance, finances, and politics are likely to find the book both educational and fascinating. It does require appreciation for academia, though Thorp and Goldstein clearly demonstrate their viewpoint as faculty members. That seems appropriate given their argument for the central role of faculty in the partnership and its rebuilding. They clearly take that role seriously—and encourage others to, as well.

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