

## College and University Journal

**8111**  
VOLUME NO  
Summer 2005

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■ *College and University* is available on microfilm through UMI/Periodicals, P.O. Box 1346, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346; phone (734) 761-4700.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *College and University*, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20036-1135. Copyright © 2005 American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

*College and University* (USPS 121460) is published four times a year (summer, fall, winter, spring) by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20036-1135. The annual index appears in the summer issue. The cost of the publication is included in the AACRAO membership fee. For information on subscriptions and package rates, please visit [www.aacrao.org/publications/candu/](http://www.aacrao.org/publications/candu/). Back issues are \$30 each (price includes shipping). ISSN: 0010-0889.

**INDEXES:** *College and University* is indexed in Current Index to Journals in Education (ERIC), Education Index, Higher Education Abstracts and Contents Pages in Education.

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## Editor's Note

In recent years many institutions have struggled with the decision to create an integrated one-stop student services organization. Jim Wager, Pennsylvania State University, describes why Penn State opted to create a virtual organization to improve and unite the delivery of student services.

Latino peer groups have been shown to have a significant influence on the pre-college process. Kristan Venegas, University of Nevada, Reno and William G. Tierney, University of Southern California, use data from a study of Latino urban high school students who have participated in a college preparation program to demonstrate how peers can create a positive learning environment and develop a college-going microculture.

Geoffrey Alderman, American InterContinental University, London, examines the differences between accreditation in the United States and the United Kingdom including the role of specialized accrediting bodies, federal and state government, and regional and national commissions and considers how the strengths of both systems might be used to measure the quality of the student learning experience.

The role of the registrar has been transformed in recent years through the development of enterprise resource systems and data warehouses. Gregory Stewart, University of Cincinnati, and Dianne Wright, Florida Atlantic University—Davie Campus, have reviewed position descriptions for registrar positions in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to compile the responsibilities of today's registrar.

Travis Reindl, AACSCU, provides two policy articles. The first discusses student access and success, and the second examines the debate about the public good versus the private gain resulting from a college degree.

Olin Adams III and A.J. Guarino, Auburn University, offer a commentary on the historical development of a business model for intercollegiate athletics including expanded television coverage, elite bowl games, conference expansions and mergers, and active fundraising.

Kevin Sayers, Capital University, discusses the restructuring of governance models in public higher education.

Richard N. Meyer, Business Designs & Strategies, and J. Michael Thompson describe new methods of communicating with prospective students and other stakeholders who may now construct their own Student Information Gateway (SIG) to store and manage their information needs.

Leigh Anne Touzeau, Pellissippi State Technical Community College, offers a commentary about the practice of thinking of our students as customers.

Can advisement be enhanced by the use of technology? Jeff von Munkwitz-Smith, University of Connecticut, takes a look at current best practices and looks ahead to some potential futuristic applications.

Gaylea Wong and Lisa Collins, University of British Columbia, describe the University's recent experiences with structured organizational change methodologies including Business Process Redesign, which was used to implement a student information management plan, and Process Streamlining, which was used to simplify the curriculum approval process.

Allen Ezell, former FBI agent, defines and discusses accreditation mills, and steps to help eradicate them.

Finally, included is the index for Volume 80, compiled by Tricia Gabor, Lynch Graduate School of Education, Boston College.



## Write for *College and University*

What's the best way to share your ideas, innovations, and opinions with registrars, admissions officers, and enrollment managers nationwide? Contribute to AACRAO's prestigious *College and University (C&U)* quarterly journal.

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# Support Services for the Net Generation: The Penn State Approach

Although we often think of students and the classroom, an array of services and support are necessary to ensure that students succeed. Providing support services for the Net Generation describes how organizational boundaries facilitate the delivery of service and how student services professionals think of today's students and technology. Technology serves as the transformational tool to provide linkage between the services to be delivered and the expectations of students. Although the conclusion is that it is not about technology, technology has an important role to play in making services more convenient and in better integrating them into the campus experience.

*by* J. James Wager

Traditional-age, first-year freshmen entering college in the Fall of 2005 were most likely born in 1987, when the information age was well under way. These students, known as the Net Generation, have grown-up in an environment significantly different from the one most higher education faculty, staff, and administrators experienced during their developmental years. While previous generations either avoided technology or at best adapted to technology, information technology is woven through the lives of the Net Geners. IT is simply part of how things get done.

One of the most striking generational differences is that access to and use of technology is simply assumed by today's learners. Technology is invisible and intuitive; students don't "learn technology," nor do they think of it as separate from the activities it enables. For the Net Generation, just as television sets have "always" been in color with a remote control and a cable or satellite connection, the delivery of services has "always" been available on the Web or other relevant technology. Because of their background, the Net Generation has adopted a different set of premises and expectations that call for new—and sometimes challenging—responses from the academy.

Some have described changing colleges and universities as akin to turning an aircraft carrier. Unlike a small pleasure boat that can maneuver quickly and change course rapidly, the aircraft carrier requires a carefully planned maneuver and a large berth to complete its turn. While information technology has had a significant impact on the Net Generation, practices and expectations within the academy remain relatively unchanged. Classes continue to be taught by instructors in classrooms. Students are expected to navigate complex administrative processes. In many ways, the academy continues to be staff centric. Although some colleges and universities have demonstrated measurable progress in moving toward a student-centered philosophy, many have not. Their administrative structure, information systems, and approach to the delivery

of student services continue to represent the traditional hierarchy experienced by previous generations of students.

Nevertheless, the academy is changing. In addition to the Net Generation, external forces are influencing higher education.

- Tuition increases are exceeding standard measures of inflation due to the escalating fixed costs of health insurance for employees, utility costs for buildings, and competitive salaries.
- The growing belief that the cost of a college education should be paid for by students, not taxpayers, has shifted the balance and delivery of federal student aid programs.
- A recent Supreme Court decision in a case involving admissions at the University of Michigan prompted a national examination of both admission and financial aid practices.
- The Y2K phenomenon resulted in great angst among system administrators, often driving the replacement of administrative information systems.
- The rise of for-profit educational institutions has begun to change the delivery of both online and on-campus courses, as well as associated services.
- The rise of personal identity theft has forced colleges and universities to rethink their use of the Social Security Number as the primary record identifier.

Such environmental changes have caused the academy to examine its policies, practices, and more importantly, the application of information systems to create more efficient operations and more effective student services.

## **Students as Consumers**

The Net Generation expects good customer service. To many in higher education, using the term *customer* or *consumer* in the same sentence as *student* is akin to blasphemy. Yet, the Net Generation was raised in a customer-service culture.

Today's students often exhibit less altruistic goals as compared to past generations—they're primarily concerned with how their degree will affect lifelong salary potential and quality of life. In a very practical way, students want to see a relationship between the cost of their education and the delivery of quality services. For example, many institutions impose a required fee for information technology (IT) services. Students ask whether they are receiving the service for which they are required to pay—a reasonable question from the perspective of a consumer.

The Net Generation brings a special flavor of consumerism to basic student services. Three generations ago, the model for registering students was to conduct an "arena registration." Most, if not all, academic administrators packed their offices and moved to the campus convocation hall, invited each student to report to the registration site at a designated time, and proceeded to match the student with courses. While some have argued that this approach was reasonably efficient, few have asserted that it was an effective mode of delivering this critically important student service. The introduction of voice-response touch-tone telephone technology in the mid-1980s and the emergence of Web-based registration services in the early 1990s have typically replaced the arena-registration approach. It would be an interesting social experiment to require Net Geners to leave the convenience of anytime, anyplace registration to return to the arena-style registration.

### **Crossing Organizational Boundaries**

The Net Generation expects their problems to be solved—quickly and easily. Students are not intimidated by titles such as registrar and bursar. The actual process of registering for courses extends over many campus offices—academic advising, student aid, registration, student accounts, and often ancillary units that handle items such as student ID cards or health services. The process of applying for and receiving student aid is complex, involving federal and state regulations as well as a myriad of grant and loan programs. The student's ability to succeed academically and graduate involves working with numerous offices, faculty, staff, policies, and procedures. While employees often know the institution's administrative structure, students generally do not.

During the arena-registration era, these services were typically integrated through a predetermined set of signatures on student-processing forms. The intention was for students to meet with the appropriate student services personnel to ensure they would be properly advised and guided. When seen from the student perspective, more often than not this approach was an exercise in collecting a sufficient number of signatures from departmental assistants. A staff member in some obscure office would complete the requested transaction.

In the past decade, colleges and universities have improved the integration of student services through a "one stop" model. Common characteristics of this interorganizational approach are the physical construction of a student services

center that houses all appropriate student services offices and staff, as well as a student services desk staffed by trained student services personnel. In spirit, such a response is an improvement over the approach used during the arena-registration era; however, in practice this approach has serious limitations that stand in the way of true integration. It is expensive to build new buildings or to renovate existing buildings to physically establish a student service center. Complete integration of all student services into a single job description is not realistic—there is simply too much to learn, and such positions are generally delegated to the most junior staff.

Rather than this brick-and-mortar approach to improving and integrating the delivery of student services, a more robust approach is to capitalize on the power of information technology. Creating a seamless virtual organization specifically commissioned to exceeding the expectations of today's Net Generation students is a reachable objective.

### **It's Not About Technology**

The Net Generation cares about the activity technology enables, not the technology, *per se*. The use of technology to improve student services will be critical to the academy. Yet, it's not about technology. Technology is a tool—it represents the means, not the desired outcome. Students will use technology; in fact, they will expect services delivered through technology. But before focusing on technology, student service professionals must articulate a clear and unambiguous vision that provides the framework for the technology. IT staff are important contributors to the desired outcome and must be part of the process; however, the leadership for improved student services should not be expected to come from within the technology ranks. Rather, it must come from those charged with advising and registering students, administering student aid, admitting students, collecting tuition and fees, and so on.

### **IT SUPPORTS RATHER THAN LEADS**

Since every college and university is uniquely structured, specific student service offices vary in title and function. At the University of Kansas, the student affairs organization is called Student Success. During the past decade, offices or divisions of enrollment management have become common titles. Traditionally, titles such as registrar, admissions, student aid, student accounts, student affairs, and housing all identify units responsible for the delivery of specific student services. The availability and adoption of technology-driven applications does not change the focus or responsibility of these business units.

The units responsible for student services will not change, but their staffing levels, knowledge, and approach to the delivery of services will. Even though senior administrators anticipate staff reductions because of technology, in practice this is rarely the outcome. While administrative positions may decrease, typically the number of IT positions increases. In many cases, the growth of IT positions occurs in both the

central IT support office and the business units. IT becomes part of almost everyone's position; the remaining business unit nontechnical staff need to understand the new technological solutions and acquire new skills.

The institution's business units are faced with new issues as technology-based services grow. For example, properly developed Web applications should enable users to contact a business specialist if they encounter problems or have questions. Such questions are often e-mailed to a business unit drop box. It becomes imperative that the business unit has a plan to receive, read, and reply to this steady stream of incoming e-mail messages. Net Gen students are more inclined to e-mail requests than to ask for advice in person. In many cases, the business unit must reorganize its staff to shift from receiving walk-in traffic to replying to e-mail.

Another common change to staffing patterns within the business unit is to ensure the ability to "see what the student sees." Given the typical design architecture of secure Web services, only the designated individual (student) may access and modify his or her personal record. The staff member within the business unit may have the organizational authority to access and modify the student's record, but the technology may prevent staff access.

As student services are developed, they must continue to be the responsibility of the business unit. It can be tempting to rely on the IT staff when problems arise or when a student challenges the process or results. Similarly, technologists might want to assume responsibility for the business process because they "own" the hardware that stores the data and the business logic. Both of these approaches are inappropriate: the business unit must retain primary ownership of the process and the delivery of its set of student services, and the IT department should focus on infrastructure support issues such as networking, security, database management, backup and recovery, and other global issues.

#### FOR BOTH THE NET GENERATION AND NONTRADITIONAL LEARNERS

Students want customized and personalized services, not a one-size-fits-all approach. There is little question that the Net Generation has expectations that are more encompassing, and perhaps more demanding, than those of previous generations. At the same time, the landscape of higher education is changing in other ways. For example, the number of adult learners continues to increase at many colleges and universities.

Adult learners have a different set of support needs as compared to Net Geners. Beyond the obvious difference of age and time away from the classroom, adult learners may not have the same comfort level or familiarity with technology—and they may be the least advised on how to use it.

The difference in populations places a challenge on service developers to ensure that all students have equal access to services, which may require extended support to adult learners in order for them to gain a working knowledge of the systems and supporting tools (campus IT account, classroom

management systems, Web services, e-commerce). Serving adult learners might also require that student services continue to be delivered in an in-person, synchronous manner. The simple caution is that when it comes to the deployment of technology-based solutions to students, a one-size-fits-all solution may not be appropriate.

#### TECHNOLOGY AS A TRANSFORMATIONAL TOOL

For the Net Generation, quality of service matters. This requires more than automation; it requires transformation. Perhaps the single most interesting challenge to college and university administrators responsible for delivering student support services is the role technology plays in transforming the delivery of these services. While it is not about technology, it is about a symbiotic relationship between a basic need and the technology that delivers a response to that need.

A prime example of how technology has transformed basic student services is the National Student Clearinghouse. A decade ago there was a three-way exchange of paper documents between an enrolled student, the institution, and the financial lender. The lender required proof of enrollment for the student to retain a nonrepayment status on the loan. The student would receive a document from the lender for completion by the institution; the school would receive the document from the student, complete it, and return it to either the student or the lender. This process was inconvenient for the student, time-consuming for the institution, and difficult to schedule for the lender.

Technology enabled a transformation that is much better suited to Net Geners—or any busy student, regardless of age. Through the establishment of a central repository, colleges and universities can transfer the pertinent data to the clearinghouse; the lending institutions now make their enrollment status inquiries against this repository. The clearinghouse increased effectiveness for students and improved efficiencies for both lenders and institutions.

In this example, the goal—validation of student enrollment to ensure continuance of student aid borrower status—did not change. What changed significantly were the processes employed to achieve this outcome. Shifting from a manual to an automated system established new research capabilities and eliminated lost or misplaced documents and resulting delays or duplicate effort.

Pennsylvania State University's recent modification of placement testing for new students offers another example of using technology to transform processes. The purpose of administering a placement test (for example, in English, chemistry, or mathematics) is to ensure that students start these courses at the proper level. Some students are academically prepared for college-level work, some need remediation, and others are ready for more advanced levels.

Traditionally, students were invited to campus during the summer before their first year of study. The placement test was administered; the student was notified of the result.

Traveling to campus to take the placement test was often an inconvenience (or impossibility). Participation was lower than desired and timely feedback was impossible due to test grading. The process did not meet the Net Generation's need for convenience, customization, and immediate feedback. Thanks to technology, these placement tests are now administered through secure Web applications. Students can take these tests at their convenience and at their location. Although these are placement-level tests, not exams for academic credit, student cheating on these examinations was nevertheless a concern; however, the examination of placement recommendations compared to actual performance in the enrolled course of both pre- and post-Web populations indicates that cheating has not occurred. The unexpected, but positive, student response has been a feeling of trust. Many students have commented on their genuine appreciation that the University demonstrated trust early by allowing them to take these placement tests unmonitored.

Technology can also transform business processes by enabling them to become more efficient, effective, and student focused. Consider the process of informing students and their advisors of the courses that will be available for registration the upcoming semester. Traditionally, Penn State printed a booklet each semester containing timetables of course offerings, course descriptions, registration instructions, and other pertinent enrollment information. These booklets were prepared well in advance of the semester, and subsequent course changes were either unpublicized or a supplement was printed.

Through technology, this process changed in ways that are responsive to the Net Generation. The information is published on the Web rather than on paper. Rather than a one-time publication, the schedule is updated and republished in real time. The Web allows for the inclusion of additional information that was impossible in the paper format. Faculty can link to their course syllabus, the registrar can link to characteristics of the classroom and the course, and academic departments can link to descriptions that exceed the typical 30-word limit for course catalogs. In short, technology has enabled institutions to respond to student expectations in ways that were impossible before.

#### INTERRELATIONSHIP OF SERVICE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Net Gen expects convenient, safe, reliable, and flexible access. While the development of student services is not about technology, the support of today's extended and accessible services would be impossible without the presence of a robust technology infrastructure. Conceptually there is a clear distinction between application development and the "system" that allows these services to be delivered. In reality, the two issues are tightly coupled.

The constant and rapidly changing nature of technology requires those developing support services for the Net Generation to be aware of both the current technology

boundaries and the emerging promises. The following examples illustrate this important interconnectedness between the service and the technology used to deliver it.

- *Occasionally lateral steps that do not improve the nature of the service are required due to the shifting technology at the core of the process.* The half-life of software and hardware continues to decline; the period of time from acquisition to obsolescence keeps getting shorter. The latest laptop, desktop, or midtier server purchased today will likely be improved by the manufacturer within a year. The resulting machine will be less expensive (all other attributes held constant) with greater performance capabilities. While this does not necessarily make the original purchase an inappropriate decision, it does provide a warning that within a few years, hardware or software may need to be replaced. Constant, escalating change has a direct impact on student services.
- *Inappropriate uses of technology require that developers take a defensive posture to ensure the integrity and stability of their services.* Unfortunately, these preventive steps are expensive and represent a diversion of time and money from the business at hand—supporting our constituencies. As the adoption of Web-based services continues to expand, we are also experiencing the dark side of innovation—using technology to promote fraudulent services or disrupt legitimate services. The number and severity of Internet-spread viruses are on the rise, as are instances of fraudulent services that result in identity theft or credit card fraud. In direct response, many colleges and universities are expending huge resources to migrate away from using the Social Security Number as the primary identifier for students, faculty, and staff. Within the higher education sector, the number of diploma mill operations is on the rise. In response, new initiatives are emerging on college campuses to certify academic credentials using digital options rather than the traditional paper-based alternative.
- *A reliable, fast, and secure network—both wired and wireless—is necessary to deliver the developed support services.* Another critical infrastructure issue is networking. During the past decade, colleges and universities spent enormous sums of money wiring their campuses. The goal was to connect every residence hall room, classroom, and faculty office to the Internet. With much of this accomplished, these same institutions are now investing heavily in wireless networks. Although needed, these expenditures divert investment from new support services. In addition, they represent an ongoing commitment to maintenance and necessary upgrades.
- *The preferred solution, from a number of perspectives, is integrated and full-service support services.* As the number and extent of support services continue to grow, students want the university to provide a complete, full-service approach. Those who pay fees, as students do, expect services and convenience. These expectations result in the need to provide the infrastructure for e-commerce applications, for example.

■ *Support services must be reliable, consistent, and available.* Mistakes happen and hardware fails; as a result, data recovery and system recovery are important. Files or databases may be accidentally destroyed. A virus may penetrate the security perimeter and cause damage. A failed hard drive might result in the inability to access a file. Whatever the root cause, there must be a data backup service so that critical information is not lost permanently. Institutions also need to consider their ability to recover from a larger disaster—fire, hurricane, earthquake, terrorist attack, and so on. Disaster recovery represents yet another necessary diversion of resources from support service development. Without a robust and reliable technology infrastructure, however, the services cannot be delivered.

So, while not about technology, higher education cannot ignore technology support issues; they are critical as strategic services are developed for our constituents.

### Integration, Opportunity, and Service

The Net Generation wants integrated and convenient services. Technology has the power to integrate the delivery of support services, create new opportunities, and deliver world-class levels of service. Many colleges and universities now use the Web to organize, present, and deliver support services. The University of Michigan provides services through Wolverine Access. At the University of Texas, students access UT Direct. The University of Minnesota delivers services through One Stop, and the University of Maryland uses Testudo. At Penn State, students, faculty, and academic advisors use eLion (eLion.psu.edu).

#### OVERVIEW OF THE PENN STATE ELION SYSTEM

In the early 1990s, Penn State received an increasing number of student complaints that the academic advising system was lacking. Students felt they were not receiving good advice; many were not assigned an advisor, and assigned advisors were not available when needed. Students claimed that rather than seeking assistance from their advisors, they would turn to other students, friends, or parents for academic advice. The administration responded to these complaints by committing to improve the quality and accessibility of academic advising.

A cross-functional team was formed with representatives from key offices—academic advising, the registrar, and several colleges. Their charge was to develop an expert-based, empirically grounded advising and information system that will be delivered by the latest technologies to supplement the student/advisor relationship and engage students in inquiry for informed educational planning.

This charge was not about technology. It was about the development of a set of services that would improve student success. Technology would simply be the delivery vehicle. As the work of the team progressed, the following developmental principles emerged:

- **Expert interactive advising**—Use the knowledge base of the University’s best academic advisors to develop an expert system to extend this knowledge to the full array of students seeking advice.
- **Direct service to consumers**—Use of the services would not require an administrative staff member’s involvement.
- **Personalized to the student**—The services would be student specific, based on the student’s academic record and affiliations. The system would not use generalities to convey information and advice.
- **Secure Web-based delivery**—Accessibility would not be limited by place or time. Any student with access to the Web would have access to these services at any time.
- **Multiple development teams**—To grow the system as rapidly as possible, concurrent development teams were established to design, test, and implement specific services. These teams were sponsored by the primary business units (registrar, student aid, bursar, and academic advising) responsible for the support services.
- **Standards based**—by necessity, a multiple development team environment required both presentation and technical standards to ensure the end user experienced a seamless set of services.

### Eliminating the Stovepipe Approach to Student Services

This developmental approach dramatically changed Penn State’s overall design of support services both for eLion and more general services. While each application is owned by a business unit, all applications are branded using the eLion icon (see Figure 1). There is no attribution to the specific office that developed the application. From a student perspective, application ownership does not matter; what matters is that the service is fulfilling a need.



FIGURE 1: SCREEN CAPTURE OF ELION WEB PAGE

The early internal challenge, and to some extent a continuing one, was for the developers to think about a service from the student perspective rather than their own internal administrative perspective. For example, a student might not have been able to complete registration due to a delayed scholarship. This same student may be living in a residence hall and involved with a student organization. From the student's perspective, one issue cut across several administrative offices. One of the intended outcomes was for the developmental staff to think in a more horizontal mode—as a student would solve a problem—and not in a vertical, stovepipe mode. The approach has worked. When enrolled students were asked about their use of technology, they responded that their most often-used application was e-mail; a very close second was eLion. The popularity of eLion is due to the services it provides—services students need. A demonstration version of the eLion system is available at [eLion.psu.edu](http://eLion.psu.edu). Choose the category titled “eLion demo.”

#### LEADERSHIP AND VISION

The development of the Penn State eLion system did not follow a traditional development pattern; the development efforts were intentionally decentralized across many offices and the project leadership was highly integrated through the use of collaborative teams. The system was not the result of

incremental planning or change but of a strategic decision. The evolution of systems within colleges and universities is often driven by external forces. The articulated need at Penn State was to improve academic advising services; however, there was no specific vision of how to accomplish this. Through the creative and collaborative efforts of staff in leadership roles, the early model and design of eLion emerged.

The first models were virtual prototypes that described the intended function and result. The models were presented to senior university administrators who allocated development funds (\$50,000) to pursue the creation of a prototype. These funds were used to provide training for existing staff and to purchase specialized software. Following a successful proof-of-concept demonstration, several teams were organized. One was responsible for the design of application standards and presentation techniques. Two additional teams were tasked with the development of the first student service applications. A fourth team focused on technical architecture requirements.

For the first three years, progress was slow. During this time, Penn State leadership remained committed to the original vision and provided the fiscal and emotional support needed to keep the project moving forward. Today's system would not have been possible without this strong, top-down support and without a clear vision from the project team itself.

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A compilation of 29 articles, originally appearing in AACRAO's <i>SEM Monthly</i> , chronicling enrollment management concepts, challenges, and successes at campuses nationwide.	Experts reveal the evolution of enrollment strategies implemented at their institutions, the results, and the lessons learned.	Marketing techniques within the context of student marketing—from basic to advanced.	Translates research into practical advice on attracting, retaining, and guiding transfer students.	Identifies the seven core traits of “Millennials”, providing valuable insight into the needs and desires of higher education's newest generation of students.	Defines the theories behind enrollment management, considers their practical application, examines the architectural design of a SEM enterprise and explores the world of technology, the mainstay of any SEM operation.	Examines the critical issues facing colleges and universities as students from “Generation X” return to higher education.



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## DISCIPLINED DEVELOPMENT

An important part of the vision was to provide a set of services that would quickly scale to a very large (100,000+) population of users, which required that the system be standards based, uniform, self-documenting, and reliable. Further, users needed to be able to offer comments and suggestions and receive personalized help.

A standards document<sup>1</sup> was developed to provide guidance to all eLion developers. This document includes information on how to create a new application or modify an existing one, Web standards, and technical standards, as well as general information about the structure and governance of the eLion initiative.

Each eLion application has internal help documentation for users. Because the system is secure, a demonstration service provides a nonauthenticated view of typical applications. A statement in the standard footer of each page indicates that the page is maintained by eLion. Behind this link is a page-specific e-mail address that routes questions or inquiries to the appropriate developer.

Applications are also designed to be self-documenting. This is a difficult challenge, since every user is unique (personal background, Web familiarity, comfort level with technology). Nevertheless, the goal has been to design all applications so that specialized training, documentation manuals, and staff involvement are not required.

## Politics, Tradition, and Turf

The Net Generation's expectation is for immediacy; they don't understand why colleges are slow to change. Perhaps the most challenging issue in developing enhanced student support services has to do with the campus administrative climate. Ideally, there would be unanimous agreement regarding the services that are needed, how they should be deployed, and the support plan necessary to keep them robust and relevant. In reality, multiple issues and perspectives on campus do not converge into a single vision. One colleague described this effort as attempting to herd cats. Another described this management issue as akin to managing a cemetery—a lot of people are involved, but there's not much movement. Whatever the analogy, an administrative climate must be established that provides an enabling environment, focused on the academic support that fosters student success. Students do not attend an institution because it has the best registration system or the most complete self-service Web system. Rather, they attend because of the quality of academic programs, the reputation of faculty, and the perceived value of their degrees. While registration systems and other administrative applications are essential, they are secondary compared to the fundamental academic objective.

As stated earlier, establishing this climate is not about technology. More likely, it is about the on-campus political environment, institutional tradition, and the perception of whose

turf is being violated. The decision to develop technology-delivered student services should be both a top-down and bottom-up decision. The initiative must be supported by the institution's leadership to move in this direction. Fiscal support will also be needed to keep this initiative alive, as well as support, at times, to defend fundamental change. Many campus organizations will likely be involved, so establishing and promoting cross-functional project teams becomes critical.

Similarly, the initiative must have bottom-up support. What specific services or array of services will improve student satisfaction, academic retention, and administrative efficiency? The project objectives must be complementary and lead to a seamless, logical, and integrated set of services.

Beyond the campus political climate, tradition is an important factor in the development of student services. A classic argument is that if registration procedures are automated, the computer will replace the advisor, the quality of the advising system will decline, and students will make uninformed choices. Developing eLion challenged this traditional hierarchy. Does the advisor's signature on a student action form represent permission or consultation? Is it reasonable to conclude that all faculty advisors are fully aware of institutional policies and procedures? Do students know the name of their academic advisor? Is the advisor available for consultation? These questions must be addressed because they challenge traditional processes and assumptions.

## INTEGRATION DEPENDS ON THE ORGANIZATION

During the past decade, higher education has sought to become more student centered. One of the manifestations has been the establishment of one-stop student service centers that combine the front desks of multiple offices. The intention behind such centers has been to reduce the hassle for students and provide one comprehensive service center. This approach has met with varying degrees of success. In most cases it has required the construction—or extensive remodeling—of physical space, administrative reorganization, cross-training of staff, and a cultural change. Penn State and others have bypassed this physical approach and have concentrated instead on a virtual student service center. The virtual approach, exemplified by eLion, provides a richer opportunity to integrate services and allows greater extensibility by time and distance. This approach, however, requires a strong IT infrastructure.

Where does the institutional decision regarding support service reside, and what are the implications of implementation? Should the top-down approach prevail to ensure an integrated and systematic enterprise-wide approach to the development of student services? Should this initiative be championed by the chief academic officer, the IT director, student affairs, enrollment management, business services, or another senior executive? What role should the current IT organization play? Should existing campus information systems be retooled, should the mainframe be unplugged, or should an enterprise system be installed? Or, should the entire

<sup>1</sup> See [https://elion.oas.psu.edu/governance/eLionGov\\_9.pdf](https://elion.oas.psu.edu/governance/eLionGov_9.pdf)

IT operation be outsourced to an independent third party? These questions require a careful and open analysis. The answer will depend on the institution and a series of factors.

One of the leading factors will be the institution's ability to attract and retain a qualified IT workforce. In recent years the supply and demand for IT professionals has become more balanced, but in many areas it remains difficult to retain IT staff due to the compressed salary structures of colleges and universities. Further, recent graduates are unfamiliar with legacy programming languages. To close this gap of technical needs and available talent, some institutions have established internal development programs to ensure a steady supply of interested and trained IT professionals. Others have purchased packaged systems and rely on external consultants to lead implementation efforts.

Matching institutional practice with technical features is another decision point; most likely there will be a mismatch. Should institutional practice match the capabilities of the IT system, or should custom IT solutions be developed to meet the service needs? With the former, changing the institutional culture is at best difficult, and at worst divisive. With the latter, the institution loses the leverage of maximizing future system growth and enhancements unless corresponding modifications are made to custom software modifications. There are more than 3,600 colleges and universities in the United States. Even if grouped by similar size, mission, and objectives, perspectives on the delivery of student systems are diverse. Individual institutions differ on student expectations, learning environments, academic and administrative policies, academic advising, and the role of faculty governance. The combination results in a high degree of uniqueness among institutions. Well-designed vendor-supplied student services recognize these variables and make some provisions for flexibility. Yet, there are practical limitations on the flexibility of any software.

Another decision involves the current IT infrastructure including databases, enterprise-wide servers, midtier servers, authentication and authorization services, e-commerce support, Web development, data warehouse capabilities, and help desk availability. Are the multiple campus systems interfaced to greater or lesser degrees? Does the institution have common or varied business practices for admission, financial aid disbursement, and grade reporting? These business process and IT components combine to provide a launch point for the future development of student services.

#### SUCCESS DEPENDS ON PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Nearly a decade ago, Penn State began moving toward a new way of processing applications for admission. The traditional glossy viewbook and multipage paper application were replaced with electronic versions. This effort initially involved technologies that are now obsolete. As the Web emerged, the development process quickly migrated to its current technology base.

When this initiative began in the mid-1990s, the goal was to receive at least 80 percent of all applications electronically

before the year 2000. Although not reached by 2000, the goal has since been surpassed. The goal may have been too aggressive, but not from a technology perspective. Adequate technology was available, and the new application process was far superior to the traditional paper-based one. The reason the goal was not reached had little to do with technology, but it had a lot to do with people. When a Penn State prospect sought advice from a high school counselor, the counselor would advise the prospect to contact Penn State and request a copy of the admission application. When the prospect asked for parental advice, the response was to complete a traditional paper application. If an interested prospect called the admissions office and asked for an application, the response was that an application would be mailed. These responses reflected tradition. It took a concerted effort to change the culture away from a paper-based mentality, enabling the goal to be reached.

Technology provides the ability to dramatically improve the delivery of student services, yet it can be intimidating—a source of fear, uncertainty, resistance, and avoidance. Such emotions and responses cannot be ignored. To realize the effectiveness and efficiencies of technological change, attention must be focused on the larger context of these services and the constituents involved with the change. After all, it's not about technology!

#### Conclusion

The need to provide improved student support services has never been greater. In recent years, the cost of higher education has continued to increase, often outpacing other economic indicators. As tuition increases, external pressures from students, parents, legislators, and alumni to contain costs mount. At the same time, Net Generation students expect improved and comprehensive services from the academy.

The availability of technological solutions for student services has never been greater. The plethora of enterprise-wide solutions, outsourcing opportunities, and on-campus development tools provide a wide range of options for the design and deployment of responsive student services.

Although the delivery of student services is not about technology, it is about using technology wisely. The use of technology requires a strong partnership between service providers and technologists. The Net Generation's expectations for student services are high and rising. The opportunities for us to respond to—and even exceed—these expectations are equally boundless.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**J. James Wager** currently serves as Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Education and University Registrar at The Pennsylvania State University. He provides oversight for all academic record functions for the University's 80,000-plus student enrollment at 24 campuses. Wager teaches management courses and is a member of the University's faculty senate. He has been an active member of AACRAO and serves as a board chairman of the Registrars of the Association of American Universities. He has been an advocate for the delivery of student services using technology.



# Latino Peer Groups in College Preparation Programs

This article utilizes data from a two-year study of Latino urban high school students to understand more about the role of peers in college choice and access. Findings suggest that peers can support college goals.

 Kristan Venegas and  
William Tierney

Despite the growing number of Latinos in the K–12 school system, this student population continues to be one of the most underrepresented groups in postsecondary education (De Los Santos *et al.* 2005). Identifying effective ways to increase and sustain college-going among Latinos begins in the pre-college years (Gibson, Gándara, and Koyama 2005; Stanton-Salazar 2002). The level of preparation that students have prior to entering college impacts their chances of persistence and success in college. As such, the timing and implementation of many college-going practices such as rigorous academic preparation, appropriate counseling, and access to college admission and financial aid information are critical to college preparation (McDonough 2005; Tierney, Colyar, and Corwin 2005). However, environmental and contextual factors, such as community settings, social interaction with peers, and socioeconomic status also deserve attention (Haro, Rodriguez, and Gonzalez 1994; Perna 2005; Valenzuela 1999). An emphasis on peers and peer groups is useful because these relationships traverse the in-school and out-of-school environments, influencing students' educational goals (Bettie 2003; Stanton-Salazar 2002; Valenzuela 1999). While there is a significant body of literature on the role of peers in adolescents' lives (Bandura 1977; Hartup 1992; Tierney and Colyar 2005), the research on Latinos and peer influence is an emerging area of attention.

In this paper, we delve deeper into the role of peer influence on Latinos in the pre-college process. We utilize data from a two-year qualitative study of Latino urban high school students who have identified themselves as college-going and who have participated in a college preparation program. We briefly review the literature on Latinos and college-going and then outline a theoretical framework that supports the possibility of peers impacting choices about college-going. We then outline the research design and methods, and offer data from the study. We conclude with a

discussion of Latino peer groups, how they impact college-going within the framework of a college preparation program, and what this means in terms of Latinos' postsecondary access and persistence.

## Background

Our work is informed by the literature on Latino peer groups, and college preparation programs. In this section of the article, we discuss literature in each of these areas.

### LATINO PEER GROUPS

As noted, the significance of peer groups in adolescent development has been an area of investigation for some time (Hinde 1987; Piaget 1932). Peer groups are sometimes described as self-contained, closed systems (Tierney and Colyar 2005), while other definitions situate peers as close friends, classmates, or as a single reference group for making decisions and moving forward in action (Kemper 1968). Building on the notion of peers as reference groups, peers are influenced by a set of norms and values that are communicated explicitly and implicitly. Work on Latino peer groups suggests that such groupings are powerful influences that inspire or conspire against students going to college (Tierney and Venegas, in process; Valenzuela 1999). Studies of Latino peer groups have ranged from studies of gangs (Vigil 1997), of social and cultural assimilation (Bettie 2003; Valenzuela 1999), and more recently, of peer groups as college-going cohorts (Cooper 2002; Gándara, O'Hara, and Gutiérrez 2005; Gibson, Gándara, and Koyama 2005; Raley 2005; Stanton-Salazar 2002, 2005; Venegas and Corwin 2003).

Bettie's (2003) work with working-class Latinas in a central valley town in California compared White peer groups to Latina peer groups. She found that because of their racial identity, Latinas were limited in the types of peer groups in which they could participate. The young women in her study

primarily participated in low-status peer groups in their high school. The few Latinas who chose to participate in the high achieving or “prep” groups reported strong conflicts and awareness of the trade-offs they believe they made in adopting an academic identity that was categorized as “acting White.” Stanton-Salazar’s (2002) ethnographic work on Latinos and social networks found similar results. The students in his study also reported a sense of choice and isolation from their peers in some instances, substituting more “natural” peer relationships for more beneficial but less culturally comfortable social networks. Findings from a study of a Texas high school supports these conclusions as well (Valenzuela 1999). The study, which highlights the tight social circles that emerged in the high school, is punctuated with student accounts that demonstrate a lack of understanding about the college preparation process.

Research on Latinos in postsecondary education shows that peer relationships continue to shape choice and persistence. A recent national study of the current status of Latino student achievement found that Latinos are losing ground rather than progressing in degree attainment (De Los Santos *et al.* 2005). Based on these findings, authors suggest that postsecondary institutional climates should include mentoring and peer support networks that actively engage Latino students. Gándara, O’Hara, and Gutiérrez’s (1995) study of highly successful Latinos and their college-going experiences found that peers play a significant role in persistence and achievement. Peer influence was salient in two ways. First, peer competition and validation inspired students to persist. Second, peer groups served as dual reference groups. That is, Latino students often maintained more than one peer group throughout their college careers. One peer group served as a reference for academic achievement, while the other peer affiliations functioned to support similar cultural interests.

Similar findings emerge in more recent work on Latinos and peer influence in postsecondary education. A study of Black and Latino freshmen at a top four-year university found that peer groups played a vital role in the transition into university life (Colyar 2003). The Latino peer groups in the study were brought together through culturally themed housing, planned by university student affairs administrators. These peer support groups were instrumental as students negotiated their first year of college. Another study of Latino college sophomores also reiterates the value of peer relationships. Jun’s (2001) study of Latino students found that peers served as a safe resource to information about navigating college life as well as a place to share analogous experiences.

#### COLLEGE PREPARATION PROGRAMS

College preparation programs vary in content, delivery, and framework, but they all are complementary to the regular school day (Tierney, Colyar, and Corwin 2005). Many occur during the summer or after school; they may focus on academic skills, social activities, or counseling activities. A recent review of college preparation suggests that there are nine key

elements of college preparation (Tierney, Colyar, and Corwin 2005). Peers and peer groups are highlighted as one key element in most college prep programs. They have particular relevance in the schooling environments for most Latino students because there are few other students with college-going aspirations (Cooper *et al.* 1995) or, at least, who are actively seeking pathways to college (De Los Santos *et al.* 2005). Unlike academic preparation, for example, in which teachers shape the content and delivery of a class, the shape and culture of peer groups frequently exist before a class or college preparation program ever begins. Although educators may have a great deal of input about the creation and function of formalized peer groups, informal peer groups are bound to form. Acknowledging and capitalizing on the connections of preexisting peer cohorts is one way for college preparation programs to foster a college-going culture (Tierney *et al.* 2003).

Villalpando and Solorzano (2005) suggest that culture should be a vital part of the college preparation program experience. Their work argues that attention to one’s own culture helps individual students be aware of the social and historical contexts that affect their decisions, and provides an opportunity for students to understand more about their personal history. Cooper’s (2002) work with a college preparation program that emphasizes Latino culture found that ethnic culture and peer groups were two “bridges” that crossed each other to positively affect students’ college preparation, enrollment, and retention. Stanton-Salazar, Chávez, and Tai’s (2001) critical-sociological investigation of Latino and non-Latino high school students found that students created help-seeking orientations mediated by the role of peers and self-perception. For example, male students who were expected to engage in traditionally reinforced “machismo” were less likely to seek the advice of counselors and teachers in pursuing an academic career. This finding points toward a more analytical understanding of what it means to maintain an identity that is ethnic by Latino standards and academic by White standards. In this case, opportunities for students to share college-going information may be most successful among peers in both formal and informal settings (Tierney and Venegas [in progress]).

#### Theoretical Framework

Lee, Spencer, and Harpalani (2003) state, “routine activities in which youth engage are couched in a developmental envelope” (p.6). Taking this as our starting point, we oriented our work toward a theoretical approach that considers varying types of impacts on students’ individual development, with particular attention to the unique ways in which low-income students engage in multiple social roles (Osyerman 2003; Stanton-Salazar, Chávez, and Tai 2001). An ecological model that relies on the notion that development is a matter of the person-environment fit and active interaction (Bronfenbrenner 1993) is appropriate for a study of peers. We concur with the recent work of Renn and Arnold (2003) and others (Renn

2004; Tierney and Colyar 2005) who note that although a great deal of studies have looked at the interaction of peers, there has been a shortage of useful theoretical frameworks. As Renn and Arnold (2003) argue, “an ecological model of student development that places the student at the center of concentric rings of environments” (p.261) can be quite useful in helping explain peer culture. As such, we utilized Bronfenbrenner’s (1979; 1993) model of ecological development, which proposes a set of nested spheres of influence as one way to think about individual development. Bronfenbrenner posits a dynamic relationship between the individual and his or her environment. Within this model, he describes four types of individual orientations that affect the ways in which students interact with their environment. These characteristics include:

- the ability to inhibit or invite relationships with peers and others;
- an awareness of one’s reactions to, and explorations of, one’s own social environments;
- the ability or inability to engage and persist through increasingly complex activities; and,
- the ways in which an individual views agency in relation to his or her perceived environment.

These four individual characteristics reflect Bronfenbrenner’s belief that developmental attributes cannot be examined outside of the life, time, and society of the individual (1979; 1993). Person and process cannot be separated from each other. Bronfenbrenner’s model is similar to other involvement theories (Astin 1984; Tinto 1987) because it considers the effects of involvement at the microsystem level. However, the model extends those theories to include the effects of multiple and interacting environments at the same time. One of the main tenets of this ecology model of development is an understanding that individuals and groups “cannot be defined without reference to the other” (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p.225). Peer relationships help to shape an understanding of the meanings of the complex interactions that impact peer group relationships on a day-to-day basis.

## Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design that focused on gathering thick descriptions of peer interactions among students in a college preparation program (Geertz 1979). The study sought to provide a greater understanding of the Latino pre-college student experience at large urban high schools that do not support a common college-going culture. The data employed here are based on a two-year study of college preparation programs with predominately Latino students at six large, urban public schools in California. We gathered data using focus groups, individual interviews, and classroom observations ranging from one to three hours in length. This methodology provides opportunities for the researchers to observe peers and peer groups in different environments (Lofland and Lofland 1995; Patton 1987), and thus be able to

view the multiple practices and identities of college-going students of color (Osyerman 2003).

The selected institutions for this study included six southern California high schools with Latino populations that ranged from 42 percent to 89 percent. The majority of the student population at all of these high schools were minority students. If the main student population was not Latino, it was Black. For the purposes of this article, we have focused exclusively on the Latino population. The student population at each site ranged from 1,200 to 5,400. Four of the nine high schools had student populations of more than 2,000. The reported average class size for the six campuses was 26. The average teacher/student ratio was 1:23.3. The average counselor to student ratio was 1:776. Each campus had at least two college preparation programs; the largest school had six. The data for this study included over 50 students who participated in focus groups and/or one-on-one interviews. We observed approximately 500 students in the classroom, at school sites, and at regional college preparation program events. All student participants were in high school and took part in a particular college prep program. Their participation in the study was voluntary, and was secured with parent approval. College preparation program staff participation was also voluntary.

The data analysis process for this project began with a review of the initial study proposal, which was used to help formulate a research strategy. We then revisited the original research questions and expanded them to create a focus group and interview protocol. Researchers met regularly to discuss the research plan and initial results. While data were gathered and formulated into field notes and transcriptions, researchers identified commonalities, patterns, and differences at each site. This process aided researchers in identifying key categories to guide data analysis. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, four members of the research team reviewed all data and met regularly to discuss findings in open-ended meetings.

## Findings

### PEERS CREATE POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

“If she’s in [the program], she’s smart.” Opportunities for interaction with like-minded peers was a significant draw for students who participated in college preparation programs. The chance to learn in a positive environment appealed to students; they often self-selected to be in college preparation programs. Students iterated that their desire to join this type of program was based on an assumption that they would be interacting with the students who “were the more involved kids.” At one high school, a student said that he had made friends through his program involvement, and that “they [the students] have identified themselves with students that will not drop out of school.” A student from another campus said: “Students who are in [the program] I have seen, they do better in school

because they learn how to interact with kids more, because in school you are isolated.” This sense of isolation is evident at this student’s school site, where out of over 2,000 students, less than 100 participate in a college prep program, and there was no college or academic advisor available on staff during the second year of the study.

Within the structure of the college preparation program we investigated, peer learning was emphasized formally and informally. Primarily, advisors and center staff helped to create these learning opportunities by directing students to interact with one another in various ways. At all of the college preparation program sites that we observed, advisors utilized hands-on activities and off-campus trips as ways to encourage students to work together. Most of these interactions were built around group situations that required students to complete a task and get a sense of working with one another to learn. While observing the informal “hanging out” during the evening of a college essay writing workshop, a researcher recorded peer interaction in which students shared college knowledge with one another and created a running list of questions to approach their program advisor with during the next day’s breakfast meeting.

Parents had affirmative assessments of the value of college preparation programs. In all of the parent focus groups and interviews, parents expressed satisfaction that their children participated in a college prep program, because they saw it as a chance to interact with other potential college-going students. One parent said that he “approved of the company” that his daughter found in her college preparation program. Another parent said that her son would not have met such focused friends if he were not part of the program. During a back-to-school meeting, a family who had moved out of the school district attempted to find a way to keep their child in the college preparation program: “We want to make sure that she stays with her college [hopeful] friends.” It was important to this parent that her daughter stay in contact with a group of other students from whom she could learn and who had similar college goals.

At sites where the college preparation program existed as an after-school club, club officers worked with one another and program staff to plan activities for other club members, rather than relying on the program mandated curriculum. One college preparation program site used peer group learning to help students “practice what will be like when you work together in college.” A college prep program staff member explained to students in one interaction: “Working together is very relevant and important to college life. When I studied electrical engineering, I worked in groups a lot.” Overall, the hoped-for result of peer group interaction in program settings was to encourage students “to challenge themselves and be competitive with their peers.”

“

*Although [the ‘schoolies’] weren’t the nerds, they also weren’t the jocks. It seemed as if they traveled in parallel universes—they stayed away from the problematic kids because they were the ‘smart kids.’*

—PROGRAM RESEARCHER

## DEVELOPING A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE: “WE’RE THE SCHOOLIES.”

Students who participated in the college preparation program can be described as individuals who are interested in doing well in school and going to college. For some students, this drive to attend college became part of their identity at school. In the overall context of the school settings, appreciation for and interest in these types of activities was not always valued and encouraged. When asked to describe college preparation program participants, advisors and center staff gave similar responses. One advisor said that the program provided peer support and comfort-

able learning opportunities for students who “were not the coolest kids on campus.” Upon arriving at yet another campus to conduct a parent focus group, a researcher was told “you’re here to see the parents of the smart kids.” Program participants seemed to have an awareness of this “schoolie” status, and consistently described themselves as unique in comparison to other students in their schools. A student at one school said: “I was kinda like, I didn’t fit in because it was like when you are in 9th grade...you feel rejected because you have the older classes and...when I joined [the program] I found people were friendly. They would talk to you...” Another student participating in the same focus group believed that her peers in the program were alike because “they are more mature, everyone has something in common. They all want to go to college.”

During an observation that took place at an after-school biology tutoring session, students quietly organized themselves as a group and began working. They waited for their teacher while he stopped a loud fight that was occurring outside of the classroom. (The fight was so heated that one of the combatants left with a broken bone.) When asked about this group’s decision to remain on task rather than run out of the classroom to see the altercation, a program staff member replied: “Yeah, these are the good kids, they know how to deal with that stuff and still stay focused.” Another researcher, based on observations at one school, summarized the college prep program students: “Although they weren’t the nerds, they also weren’t the jocks. It seemed as if they traveled in parallel universes—they stayed away from the problematic kids because they were the ‘smart kids.’”

## CREATING COHORTS: “A LITTLE MICROCULTURE.”

While the nerd-like “schoolie” image is seemingly negative, many students were eager to display their college preparation program membership status around campus. Many of the classrooms we observed has some type of prep program advertising on bulletin boards or elsewhere in the room. At

one high school, students often wore college prep program names on T-shirts, headbands, wristbands, and backpacks. They used college prep program pens and folders and used ink to trace the program logo and name onto shoes, jeans, arms and legs. The college prep program name and identity provided a highly stylized way to show commitment to the program, as well as an affiliation with the peer group.

Because of the emphasis on peer learning, and because of the individual traits that the college prep program students possessed, there were strong cohorts of students at each school site. Students on each campus envisioned themselves as part of a small elite student group, who were linked together within the overall school setting. One student who said that she had very few friends at school described her peer connections: "I hang out with these two people and sometimes her [the student points to girls in the focus group] and her sister. But most of the time when I am not in a program meeting, I hang out with just one person." In other words, for this student, involvement in her college preparation program represented some of her most intense peer interaction at school.

At three of the high school sites we visited, students interacted with their college prep program peers frequently throughout the school day. When asked during a focus group about the importance of this interaction, one student commented, "We've bonded like a family." Another student, reflecting on this comment, agreed: "We know each other; we're in the same classes. I mean, it's just important that you know each other and you have like a group that you feel comfortable with...I think it's very important." Students used the college preparation program group setting as a trusted organization to mediate their peer interactions and express their sense of closeness to one another. In all focus groups, when students were asked if they would recommend their cousin or other relative to join their college prep program, they responded, "Yes!"

## Discussion and Conclusion

Although it can be argued that learning and college-going are embedded in the culture of high schools irrespective of peer groups, unfortunately, we have not found that to be the case in our study. Our work, and the work discussed in the review of literature reiterate the reality that Latino students in low-income urban high schools do not experience college-going cultures. In the data findings, we shared three themes that assist Latino high school students in pursuing their postsecondary plans: building a positive learning environment, developing a college-going culture, and creating cohorts. These themes link and overlap with one another, and provide discrete strengths that derive from college prep pro-

“  
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—STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

gram peer interactions. Each theme involves some aspect crucial for first-generation Latino students who wish to go to, and succeed in, college. The themes that emerge in this data are related to what has been found in studies of Latino peers in postsecondary education. Peer relationships amongst Latino students enhance the transition to college and persistence in college-going activities.

By using an ecological model of development, we are suggesting that the more significant and sustained the peer interactions, the more likely a student is going to be equipped with the skills necessary for college. In effect, the peer culture of the college preparation program affords stu-

dents not only immediate benefits in gaining the cultural capital necessary to get into college, but it also provides anticipatory socialization about how to function when one arrives in college. Rather than assume that college is an alien world where the individual has to struggle to fit in, the college preparation programs we studied encourage students to think of themselves as bonded within a peer group of similar individuals who can transition and succeed in postsecondary education. Thus, peer groups such as the ones that developed within the structure of a college preparation program do not so much create "peer pressure" to act in one way or another; rather, they enable one to do what is necessary to get into and succeed in college.

As institutions identify strategies for attracting and retaining Latino students, understanding the pre-college climate of peer relationships is valuable. We highlight two primary areas of improvement to endorse college-going connections between Latino peer groups and postsecondary institutions. First, promoting the collaborative nature of the postsecondary institutional climate empowers Latino students to have the expectation to work with others, including peers. Students are often told "college will be different." Institutions that reach out to Latino students with an accurate message of collaboration can demystify the image of the lone first-year student unable to find the library or their new classroom. Second, circulate college requirements and financial aid information specifically targeted towards peer sharing, rather than parent or counselor use. A recent study of financial aid and college-going found that students work amongst themselves to interpret their aid and enrollment processes (Venegas 2005). Institutions that reach out to high school students and provide peer counseling training not only sponsor the learning of one pre-college student, but they enable that student to appropriately advise and support his or her own contemporaries. By understanding the streams of support and information used by Latino pre-college students, proactive outreach should be informed by the impact of peers on college-going for Latinos.

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# Compliance or Quality?

## American and British Approaches to the Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions

The globalization of higher education has resulted in a number of British institutions applying for American accreditation. In 2002, the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education admitted its first American member. All these institutions must therefore confront the need to satisfy two very different approaches to the assurance of quality and the maintenance of academic standards. This paper explores these two systems, and the very different philosophies that underpin them. Can these two approaches be reconciled? Can they be merged into one system embracing higher-education institutions in both countries?

*by* Geoffrey Alderman

The summer of 2004 witnessed a determined attempt by the United States Congress to probe the secretive world of accreditation in American higher education. Representative Howard P. McKeon (R-Calif.) used the opportunity provided by the tabling of legislation to renew the Higher Education Act to launch a series of Congressional hearings into accreditation—a rare event made rarer still by the ferocity of the ensuing attack on the accreditation industry. Congressman McKeon, who chairs the leading higher education sub-committee in the House of Representatives, demanded that in the furtherance of consumer power and choice, prospective students, and the parents who fund them, be given far more information about the quality of accredited universities and colleges.

At present, accrediting agencies' reports on institutions are for the most part confidential. Critics of this system want summaries of accreditors' findings to be published whenever an institution's status is under scrutiny—even when it is nothing more than a periodic and quite routine reaffirmation exercise. Sponsors of the bill to renew the Higher Education Act also want accreditors to be required to publish the names of those who carry out such inspections on their behalf.

These demands not only triggered a lively debate, they also provoked an attack on the entire system of higher education accreditation in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> For some time, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni had been lobbying Congress to cut the link between accreditation and the ability to award federal financial aid. Jerry L. Martin, the Council's president, had told a Senate Committee in February 2004 that the link deserved to be broken because accreditation simply did not

guarantee “a quality education.” “There is massive evidence [he charged] for the fact that, under the current accrediting system... colleges have experienced runaway grade inflation... [and]...curricular disintegration.”<sup>2</sup>

This attack was adamantly dismissed by (amongst others) Senators Hillary Clinton, a Democrat, and Republican Lamar Alexander (a former U.S. secretary of education). Both pointed to the alleged superiority of the American system of higher education and to the supposed institutional autonomy through which that alleged superiority was underpinned. But what was most striking about this debate, and about the House debate the following July, was the unwillingness of the accreditation establishment either to examine in depth the criticisms that had been made of the current U.S. accreditation model, or to consider any alternative accreditation model.

### Background

The globalization of higher education has resulted in a number of British institutions applying for American regional accreditation, for example, the UK Open University, which in 2005 obtained accreditation from the Middle States Commission. These initiatives have been market-driven. By obtaining U.S. accreditation, these academies hope to attract a larger cohort of North American students, lured by the prospect of being able to pursue, in the UK, an education that will be fully recognized in the United States.

Such institutions are of course already fully ‘accredited’ in Great Britain. That is to say, they are recognized as legitimate institutions of higher education either by virtue of the possession of a Royal Charter (as with the Open University) or through the provisions of an Act of Parliament. As publicly-funded institutions they must subscribe to and submit themselves to periodic inspection by the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The QAA publishes in full and posts on its Web site the texts of all the Institutional

<sup>1</sup> The debate is summarized in Burton Bollag's article, 'Opening the Door on Accreditation,' *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 16 July 2004, A22-24.

<sup>2</sup> *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 27 February 2004 [online edition]: report by Stephen Burd.

Audits (formerly termed 'Institutional Reviews') that it carries out; these include the names of individual review-team members. The few legitimate higher education institutions that are not publicly funded need not subscribe to the QAA. But in practice the most eminent of them (notably the privately-funded University of Buckingham, established by Royal Charter on the initiative of Margaret Thatcher) do so.

At the same time, over the past several years a number of London-based American institutions have applied for, and been granted, subject-based accreditation (termed 'validation' in UK parlance) by a variety of UK universities. The students at these London-based U.S. academies therefore have the opportunity to gain both American and British degrees for the same program of study.

In December 2002, the QAA announced a ground-breaking decision—namely that it had decided to accept an application for membership from the London campus of a fully-accredited U.S. university—American InterContinental University (AIU)—licensed by the State of Georgia and accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The QAA thus admitted its first non-British member, its first American member, and indeed its first for-profit member.<sup>3</sup> In May 2005, AIU-London thus underwent the first QAA Institutional Audit ever undertaken of an American-accredited university. This audit will be published in due course.

Most of AIU-London's degrees already enjoy British 'validation' through the Open University, and the campus itself therefore adheres to no less than four sets of quality-assurance protocols simultaneously: the state of Georgia; the Southern Association; the Open University, and the QAA. The experience of AIU-London therefore presents us with a unique opportunity to compare the theory and practice of accreditation and inspection arrangements as they currently exist for universities on both sides of the Atlantic.

What must be emphasized at the outset is that, for AIU-London, as for the UK institutions that are seeking U.S. accreditation, the paramount challenge is to satisfy two very different approaches to the assurance of quality and the maintenance of academic standards. This paper explores these two systems, and the very different philosophies that underpin them. Can these two approaches be reconciled? How might they be merged into one system embracing higher education institutions in both countries?

### **American Model of Accreditation**

Accreditation in the U.S. has a long and not always edifying history. The authority to award degree-conferring powers is vested in state governments, which historically have bestowed charters or other forms of license on institutions at the time of their establishment. But the states themselves are not

accrediting bodies: their major interests are in assuring themselves that state money injected into an institution is used only for the purposes intended; that students, as consumers, are protected from fraudulent practices; and that each chartered institution orders its affairs with probity and diligence. They do not involve themselves in academic matters. Although the power to license degree-granting institutions rests with the states, the formal 'accreditation' of these institutions, evidencing their adherence to minimum thresholds relating to a wide range of matters (from governance to faculty credentials and even levels of remuneration) is the province of a number of regional accrediting commissions. Each of these commissions is autonomous, and is composed of the institutions that are granted membership.

In the American model we may further distinguish two major types of academic accreditation. Specialized accrediting bodies approve the teaching and delivery of certain types of vocational subjects, such as medicine and accounting. In this respect there is a broad similarity between American and British practice. However, general institutional accreditation is carried out by the regional and national commissions. These commissions work only at the level of the institution: as they themselves stress *ad nauseam*, they accredit institutions, not programs of study. Their work is designed to offer public reassurance as to the quality of the institutions they accredit. But their work is wedded also to the notion of institutional autonomy. Their reports might be shared with federal and state government agencies; but these reports are not published, and are not publicly available. Typically, an accreditation, once granted, will last for a decade. That is to say, most American universities and degree-awarding colleges will only face a general accreditation visit once every ten years.

The American system is therefore true self-regulation, based (it is said) on peer review. Senior members of each institution 'inspect' each other, using for this purpose a set of rules, principles, or 'characteristics' they themselves have drawn up and agreed to. Strictly speaking, no university or degree-awarding college in the U.S. is obliged to put itself through an institutional accreditation process. However, if it chooses not to do so, it will find itself excluded from federal funding opportunities, and students attending it will discover that they are not eligible for federal financial aid. Additionally, we should note that in the United States (and elsewhere) there are a number of accrediting agencies with exotic and pretentious titles but of doubtful legitimacy, whose activities are not recognized by state and federal agencies. The work of the legitimate regional, national, and specialized accrediting commissions is very loosely coordinated by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CHEA advises accrediting commissions on aspects of their work, and will offer its services in cases of dispute between a commission and a member institution—a useful function that is not replicated in the British system.

CHEA is wholly comprised of the commissions that hold membership in it. But it sometimes acts as a conduit through

<sup>3</sup> All existing British universities (including Buckingham) are not-for-profit entities.

which concerns of the federal government are made known to the commissions and, through them, to the institutions they accredit. For example, in January 2000, CHEA held a one-day private seminar for commission representatives to discuss a number of concerns, including alleged laxities in the quality assurance of overseas programs run by American universities and colleges.

The six regional associations that accredit the 3,000 or so legitimate universities and colleges in the U.S. are also represented by and through the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. The Council has done some useful work in encouraging consistency across the United States in some specialty accreditation—most notably through its *Statement of Commitment by the Regional Accrediting Commissions for the Evaluation of Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs and its Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs*.

In May 2003, the Council endorsed a most pretentious document entitled *Regional Accreditation and Student Learning: Principles for Good Practices*. In that document guidance is given as to the sorts of evidence that regional accrediting commissions might want to examine for the purposes of evaluating the quality of student learning. The list includes student learning outcomes; data on the attainment of student learning goals; the appropriateness and sufficiency of teaching, learning, and assessment resources; and what are termed “effective teaching and learning practices.” Nowhere, however, is it suggested—explicitly—that the quality of student learning might be judged through the direct observation of that learning in the laboratory and the classroom, or that assessed student work might be scrutinized by an accrediting team. More seriously, the entire document is skewed towards ‘fitness for purpose’ rather than ‘fitness of purpose.’ That is to say, the document leaves it to the institution to define its mission, its purpose, and its standards. Whether that mission, that purpose, and those standards are indeed academically appropriate to an institution calling itself a university is apparently not for an accrediting commission to question. Academic standards, then, appear to the Council to be beyond the remit of a regional accreditor. They are certainly not the focus of state-licensing applications.

Institutional accreditation is an intensive process, based on a self-study document backed up by a great deal of supporting documentation. Following receipt of an institutional self-study, a commission will appoint a panel to peruse the documentation and to visit the institution, where facilities will be inspected and dialogues conducted with faculty and

staff, and perhaps students. A series of judgments will then be made, benchmarked against the published policies of the commission, which amount to statements of good practice. Finally, a report, embodying a number of recommendations, is made confidentially to the commission and the institution.

There are a number of dimensions to this process that are worthy of comment. In the first place, since accreditation is only at the level of the institution, accreditation cannot be taken as, in any sense, the quality approval of a program of study, even indirectly. And when a program has received no specialized accreditation—history, for example, or English, or biology—a prospective student will be able to infer nothing from a statement of institutional accreditation about the worth and value of such a program of study. We might note, in this connection, that institutional accreditation visits do not include inspections of teaching quality. Indeed, it is probable that any such effort—to inspect teaching quality—might be greeted with cries of censorship from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) or, more dramatically, with allegations that such practices represent an incursion upon academic freedom.

Secondly, the statements of good practice published by the accrediting commissions are very often extraordinarily lacking in detail. I invite those who doubt this statement to peruse for themselves some of the policy declarations put out by the commissions and available on and through their Web sites. In their quest for a golden mean between intrusive regulation and respect for institutional autonomy, the commissions seem to me to have produced sets of vacuous generalizations capable of a multitude of interpretations.

The American approach—despite several decades of criticism by those in America who favor output-based measures—is still preoccupied with inputs.<sup>4</sup> It is compliance-based—that is to say, it concerns itself primarily with adherence to a set of protocols and benchmarks. Are faculty credentialed at a (pre-determined) appropriate level? Is the library space commensurate with a (usually pre-determined) algorithm? Are faculty and staff compensated appropriately (whatever that might mean)? Is institutional research carried out, and does it result in improvement? The assumption underpinning the American system is that if a set of compliance-based criteria are adhered to, a good quality education will result.

Very little is left to the sound academic sense of the accreditation team. Take faculty credentials. The Southern Association has a set of criteria (downgraded in 2004 to ‘guidelines’) relating to the level at which faculty can teach, and the academic preparation that they must have undergone before such teaching can be undertaken. In general, only those with master’s qualifications can teach at the bachelor’s level, and only those with earned doctorates can teach at the master’s level.

There is simply no academic rationale for these *diktats*. Possession of a doctorate does not, necessarily, make me a good teacher. I have met plenty of excellent teachers, whom I would happily put in charge of Level 400 classes, who have no formal qualification beyond their bachelor’s degrees, but who

<sup>4</sup> A point stressed anew in a recent short critique of American practice commissioned and published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE): Tony Clark & Nigel Brown, *How the public interest in teaching quality and standards is secured in U.S. higher education* (HEFCE, Bristol, 2005), especially at paragraph 27, quoting Professor David Dill of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

are first-rate academic communicators.<sup>5</sup> When the Southern Association's Reaffirmation Team visited AIU-London in 2002, they ruled out the use of a teacher of mathematics at the bachelor's level despite the fact that he possessed a bachelor's degree in Pure and Applied Mathematics from Cambridge (England) and a master's degree in Electronic Engineering from a prestigious American university. It appeared not to have occurred to the team to observe him teaching a Level 100 Math class, and (thus) to judge for themselves whether or not his teaching, and the resulting student learning experience, were apposite and appropriate.

In some important respects the regional commissions take a tough line that actually inhibits innovation and stifles creativity. The commissions explicitly forbid the franchising of degree programs by their accredited institutions. The justification for this (as explained to me) is that they do not want their accredited institutions to become 'degree mills.' But of course, as British experience has shown, franchising in higher education can lead to modes of academic enrichment (as well as financial reward) which would be otherwise unattainable, without any loss of quality or lowering of standards.<sup>6</sup> In terms of global education and the need for training for industry, the United States continues to be a major player but is losing market share. It is my view that, in taking the stand that they do against franchising, the American accrediting commissions reflect an ultra-conservative attitude that is partly to blame for this downward trend.

There are, however, certain other features of the American accreditation process that deserve emulation in the UK. An important part of becoming accredited in the U.S. is the attention paid to fiscal and budgetary matters. An American accrediting commission will want to inform itself as to the financial soundness of the institution it is being asked to accredit or re-accredit, and will form judgments as to the effectiveness of its budgetary policies. The reason for this is quite simply—and quite rightly—that these matters impinge directly on the quality of the education provided, and on the prospects of that quality being preserved in the future. For the same reason, an American accrediting commission will not hesitate to comment critically on the salary levels of faculty and on their conditions of service.

### British Model of Accreditation

These are matters on which the QAA has never dared to pass judgment in relation to a British university.<sup>7</sup> But I can see no good reason for this self-denying ordinance. As a matter of

fact, British higher education institutions in receipt of government grants are routinely audited by the appropriate Funding Council. These internal management audits look at matters of general governance and internal arrangements relating to financial control. The Funding Councils in any case undertake more or less continuous detailed surveillance of revenue and expenditure of each institution for which they are responsible. There is in my view a case for merging the functions of institutional review carried out at present by the QAA with management audit carried out by the Funding Councils.

The British system, which has experienced major upheavals in recent years, is not true self-regulation.<sup>8</sup> Although the QAA is legally autonomous, most of its funding comes directly or indirectly from the government, whose preoccupations naturally have a major influence on its policies and procedures. Nonetheless institutional audit teams are composed of peers from within the sector. An institutional audit report results in a public judgment, which can influence the future public funding of that institution.

The British system of quality management in higher education represents a mixture of accreditation and quality assurance. Accreditation is theoretically voluntary, but in practice compulsory. Some academic programs offered by British universities are formally accredited by specialist bodies, for example, the General Medical Council, which accredits the training of medical practitioners, or the Law Society, which accredits the training of lawyers. A British university is perfectly free to offer a law degree that is not accredited by the Law Society; but it is doubtful whether such a degree program would attract many students. However, quality assurance, carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Councils (which distribute taxpayers' money), is regarded as more or less compulsory in theory and practice. The QAA is not a statutory body. Publicly-funded institutions of higher education could theoretically decline to be inspected by the QAA, and there might be some interesting legal arguments should any of them take this route. None has in fact done so, and periodic threats of rebellion have so far failed to materialize.

Any objective analysis of the history of quality management in British higher education must acknowledge that over the past decade or so, quality assurance has become much more intrusive and directive.<sup>9</sup> Institutional autonomy has been—in my judgment—very seriously eroded in the process. Space does not permit me to fully deploy here arguments I have used elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> The current arrangements

<sup>5</sup> My own doctoral supervisor at Oxford had no formal qualification beyond his Oxford M.A.—which is in fact an honorary degree conferred a set number of years after the bachelor's degree. Neither of my doctoral examiners was qualified at the doctoral level.

<sup>6</sup> See G. Alderman, 'The Globalisation of Higher Education: Some Observations on the Free Market and the National Interest', *Higher Education in Europe* XXVI No. 1 (2001), 47–52

<sup>7</sup> Though we might note that in the case of an institution applying for degree-awarding powers, the QAA will undertake (on behalf of the British

government) an extensive evaluation that will include an examination of the institution's financial base.

<sup>8</sup> By far the best account of these upheavals is the frank and provocative monograph by Professor Roger Brown (onetime chief executive of the Higher Education Quality Council, the forerunner of the QAA) entitled *Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (Routledge/Falmer, 2004). See also G. Alderman, 'Audit, Assessment and Academic Autonomy', *Higher Education Quarterly*, 50 (3), July 1996, 178–92.

employed by the QAA involve multiple layers of inspection—at the level of the subject and of the institution—by an army of inspectors ('auditors') using a veritable arsenal of national qualifications frameworks, program specification templates, and subject-specific academic standards benchmarks.<sup>11</sup> I am not at all impressed by the argument that since this arsenal derives in part from the work of subject-specialists, it merely represents and reflects a new type of 'self-regulation' through a species of shared autonomy. In my view, autonomy shared is autonomy lost. The truth and gravity of this conclusion is in no way lessened or modified by the fact that the universities and colleges have been willing participants in the erosion of the freedoms they once held and still profess to hold so dear.

It might of course be argued that such erosion is justified if it results in better quality academic programs delivered to higher standards. So far as the new methodology (inaugurated in 2002 and described more fully below) is concerned, we shall have to wait and see. But in relation to the system previously in force, the evidence is far from conclusive.

Under the previous system, the QAA inspected institutions on a subject-by-subject basis, and awarded scores for six 'aspects of provision.' The maximum aggregate score that could be awarded was 24 points. A number of commentators—including the QAA itself—pointed out that over the years the average aggregate scores climbed relentlessly. In June 1999, *The Times Higher Education Supplement* revealed that of the 262 subject review reports completed thus far using the scoring methodology, over half disclosed a score of at least 22 points. In the subsequent round of reviews (1998–2000) over 50 percent disclosed scores of 22 points or higher. The average departmental score, calculated by the Professional Courses Unit at the University of Lancaster, had risen from 20.5 in 1995–96 to 21.8.<sup>12</sup>

The QAA suggested that these increases in aggregate scores reflected real improvements in quality, and the agency implied that such improvements came about at least in part because of the agency and its work.<sup>13</sup> I very much doubt that this is in fact what has happened. I suspect, rather, that higher education institutions simply got better at 'playing the game,' and I am afraid that I have to agree that the prophesy contained in Lord Dearing's 1997 report on higher education did indeed

come true, namely that in relation to subject review, institutions simply learned how to beat the system.<sup>14</sup> Those of us inside the sector know that before each inspection there was exhausting, exhaustive, and rigorous preparation, to the extent that some institutions attempted to 'script' the entire inspection visit, for example by carefully choosing and rehearsing the students whom the inspectors were to meet. Indeed, it is a well known fact that subject review gave rise to a whole new industry—the higher education quality assurance industry—in which individuals and corporate entities (such as the Professional Courses Unit at the University of Lancaster) developed exciting new income streams by acting as consultants to universities and colleges subject to the inspection process. University chief executives liked impressive subject review scores, and they were, literally, prepared to invest heavily to achieve high marks. But what happened after the inspectors had departed? The short answer is that no one ever had the courage to find out.<sup>15</sup>

Then there is the cost to consider. In 1999, partly in response to concerns raised by the sector, the Higher Education Funding Council for England commissioned a study of the actual cost, to institutions, of each QAA subject-review and academic audit visit. The investigation concluded that the cost of a single subject review varied from £40,000 to £200,000 [say \$77,000 to \$384,000], while the cost of an institution-wide audit carried out by the QAA could amount to as much as £80,000 [say \$154,000].<sup>16</sup> An average-sized university might face three subject reviews a year and an audit every five to six years. Thus, over a six-year period such an institution might have incurred costs of around £100,000 [\$192,000] per annum just in complying with QAA inspection requirements. In terms of value-for-money, the entire exercise was open to serious question.

In 2001, this system of subject-based inspection—resulting in numerical judgments—and institution-based audit—resulting in qualitative judgments—was replaced by a single system of 'Institutional Review' [now Audit], which incorporates some subject-level inspection [termed 'Discipline Audit Trails'] and which results in a qualitative judgment of 'broad confidence,' 'limited confidence,' or 'no confidence.' To date there have been no verdicts of 'no confidence,' and only a handful of 'limited confidence' judgments.

<sup>9</sup> See G. Alderman, 'Die Debatte über die Qualität der britischen Hochschul-ausbildung: Selbstregelung, Regelung durch den Staat und die Suche nach Normen', in D. V. Hoyningen-Huene et al (eds), *Auf dem Wege zur gläsernen Fachhochschule* (Bonn, 1995), 39–45.

<sup>10</sup> See G. Alderman, 'From elitist self-regulation to a marketable commodity: British universities and the illusions of academic autonomy in a democratic society', in K. D. Wolff (ed), *Autonomy and External Control: The University in search of the Golden Mean* (Munich, 1997), 129–146.

<sup>11</sup> There is a full description of the new system at the QAA Web site: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk), under 'Academic Infrastructure'

<sup>12</sup> *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 11 June 1999, 3.

<sup>13</sup> See the QAA's Evidence to the Inquiry into Higher Education by the Education Sub-Committee of the Education and Employment Committee of the

House of Commons, especially paragraph 73. This evidence is available at the QAA Web site.

<sup>14</sup> National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (London, 1997), Main Report, paragraph 10.68.

<sup>15</sup> See G. Alderman, 'Quality in British Higher Education: A Comedy of Very Avoidable Errors' in Hochschul Rektoren Konferenz, *Evaluation und Akkreditierung: bluffen - vereinheitlichen - proliferieren?* (Bonn, 2004), 33–38.

<sup>16</sup> *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 4 August 2000, 1. The report of this study, by PA Consulting, is available at the Web site of the Higher Education Funding Council for England: [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk); the report concludes that the cost of conforming to the demands of the QAA amounts to some £40 millions per annum at a conservative estimate.

The British approach is less concerned with inputs than with outputs. QAA audit teams are preoccupied much less with faculty credentials than with the ability of faculty—however credentialed—to teach at a level and in a manner appropriate to a degree-granting institution. If an institution fails to employ high-quality faculty, a high-quality education is unlikely to result. QAA auditors do not measure library capacity. Rather, they form a qualitative judgment as to the appropriateness of the totality of learning resources available to students. QAA auditors spend very little time checking faculty files and equipment inventories. They spend a great deal of time talking to students (who will have made their own pre-audit written submission) and inspecting the quality of teaching by sitting-in on classes.

### Which Model Measures Quality Best?

Thus far, the AIU-London experience suggests that while both sets of arrangements have their strengths, they also display systemic weaknesses. In crude terms, as already suggested, American regional accreditation procedures do not test quality *per se*. Nor does the American approach guarantee minimum academic standards (especially of assessment) even within the confines of one regional commission. The British system claims to test quality, and sometimes does so. But its refusal to confront several crucial areas of university management (for instance, levels of remuneration and terms and conditions of employment) means that its approach is half-hearted.

And it should be added that neither system, British or American, is foolproof. Both can be manipulated and are open to abuse (there are some infamous British examples of this over the past decade). On neither side of the Atlantic are there currently adequate arrangements to ‘inspect the inspectors.’ No one ‘accredits’ the QAA, while the American regionals seem to me to be beyond any external accountability other than by federal regulation of the most superficial kind or the threat of legal action.<sup>17</sup>

However, the experience of AIU-London also suggests that the two systems can co-exist, and derive strength from each other, provided some crucial compromises are made. Chief amongst these is that in order to provide a reliable and transparent means of assuring academic standards, the American

insistence on the absolute autonomy of the instructor must be abandoned so as to allow for (a) the internal peer assessment of grades (‘double internal grading’ in UK parlance) and (b) the benchmarking of internally-moderated grades against a set of external indicators, achieved in the UK through the external-examiner system.<sup>18</sup> Whether external examiners should have ‘the last word’ in relation to a student’s grades, or should merely act as ‘another voice’ is itself a matter of debate, which I do not intend to pursue here. I do believe, however, that this model, with all its flaws, does provide a measure of public reassurance that is absent in the American system.<sup>19</sup> It also acts as a powerful deterrent against the aggressive culture of pursuing essentially nonsensical grade appeals, which seem to have infected the American student body.

American accreditation claims to take a holistic approach, looking at virtually every aspect of an institution’s machinery for securing quality and standards. This approach is certainly more comprehensive than that of British audit as currently practiced—most notably through its embrace of financial and resourcing issues. It is, however, a secret compliance-based system, whereas British practice results in a very public evidence-based judgment, or series of judgments, on the quality and totality of the student learning experience.

Those judgments cannot be properly or fairly arrived at through a list of tick- or check-boxes (the American approach), nor through a matrix of numbers on a score-chart (the British approach abandoned in 2001). They can be expressed through a series of simply articulated qualitative judgments, accessible to all who seek reliable information but who are not, for the most part, themselves expert practitioners.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Geoffrey Alderman**, Senior Vice President of American InterContinental University’s London campus, is a doctoral graduate of Oxford University. A much-published historian and political scientist, he has wide-ranging experience of measuring institutional effectiveness in higher education, and has written extensively on this theme.

**Note:** I am grateful to Dr. C. Ronald Kimberling (Assistant Director for Post-secondary Education under the late President Reagan, 1985–89) and to Professor Roger Brown (Principal of Southampton Institute, England and Chief Executive of the Higher Education Quality Council, 1992–97) both of whom read an early draft of this paper and made a number of invaluable suggestions and corrections.

<sup>17</sup> Reporting on federal lawsuits brought by two colleges against the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association in 2005, Burton Bollag commented on the increasing attraction of legal process for institutions faced with high-handed actions by otherwise unaccountable accrediting authorities: *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 8 April 2005, A25.

<sup>18</sup> The operation of this system is covered in section 4 of the QAA’s *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality & Standards in Higher Education*, available at the QAA’s Web site.

<sup>19</sup> I say this with all the more conviction as a practitioner who has been, and remains, severely critical of many aspects of external examining. See for instance my opinion piece in the [London] *Guardian Education* supplement, 2 October 2001, 15.



# The American Registrar: A View of the Profession

This article examines the qualifications, characteristics, and responsibilities of the American registrar. The College and University Personnel Association (CUPA) describes the registrar as the administrative official with principal responsibility for student registrations and records. Functions of the registrar typically include registration, classroom scheduling, maintenance of student records, and graduation clearance. As a source of data for this article, content analysis was used in reviewing registrar position advertisements. Related research is presented, as well as tables reflecting the analysis of data.

by Gregory Stewart and Dianne Wright

The registrar is a critical administrator in the functioning of any American higher education institution. The registrar plays an integral role in enrollment management by providing support and services for students. The authors have reviewed the literature on registrars and present the following findings.

In the u.s., the registrar's academic record-keeping function was designated as a part-time faculty function well into the mid-nineteenth century (Quann 1979). For example, during the 1820s, Dr. Henry Ware, Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard University, supplemented his professor's salary by \$150 a year for his work as the university registrar. By the end of the nineteenth century, the registrar's position had developed into one that was full-time, administrative, professional, and specialized. The need for a full-time and professional registrar to keep records and maintain efficient enrollment procedures surfaced in the twentieth century as institutions grew in size and their curricular offerings and electives expanded (Quann 1979).

In addition to registering students and providing informational and clerical services, the registrar's office assumed responsibility for a variety of other student personnel services. The registrar often corresponded with prospective students, conducted high school visitations, sent and received application forms, oversaw scholarship and financial aid awards, greeted freshman and transfer students, responded to questionnaires, conducted other institutional research, suggested curriculum revisions to the faculty, signed diplomas, and even shook hands with graduating seniors at commencement. With the growth and development of other professional student services offices—specifically those of admissions, counseling, placement, and academic advising—many of the duties originally performed by the registrar have been assumed by others. Today's registrar is principally the university's manager of data (Quann 1979).

The overall responsibilities of the registrar vary depending on the mission of the institution served. Henderson (1990), with assistance from AACRAO's Professional Development Committee, presented a list of twelve competencies for admissions and records professionals: personal characteristics, oral communication, interpersonal communication, written communication, employee relations, administration, research, technology, business practices, enrollment management, publications, and counseling. The set of competencies included descriptions of basic and advanced skills as well as resources for skill development.

## Methodology

The authors (1996), reviewed registrar position advertisements appearing in the January to July 1995 editions of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. These advertisements—from over 80 institutions in 26 states—were reviewed using content analysis to glean the competencies higher education institutions seek in their applicants. Factors such as credentials, compensation, staffing, and reporting lines were also examined. In 2004, the authors assessed the current status of the registrar role by looking at position advertisements appearing in the August to December 2004 issues of *The Chronicle*.

## Findings

### 1995 AND 2004 DATA COMPARED

When looking at the data from both 1995 and 2004, 85 percent of the institutions advertised “master's degree preferred,” “master's degree required,” or “doctorate degree preferred” with regards to the level of education desired for the ideal candidate. Fifty percent of the institutions sought a leader with a minimum of five years of experience working in the office of the registrar. Further comparisons over this nine-year period revealed the following:

In 1995, registrar position advertisements for state-assisted higher education institutions sought student-oriented, decisive, dynamic, organized individuals with high energy and new ideas. Independent higher education institutions sought ambitious, resourceful, courteous individuals with compassion, integrity, and a quality service manner. Both state-assisted and independent institutions sought articulate individuals with organizational and leadership abilities. Further, in 1995, a variety of institutions advertised that the registrar be computer literate and competent in the use of technology for computerized data systems and student record systems. Hired registrars were expected to be knowledgeable in the implementation of touch-tone telephone/voice response registration, degree audit, image-processing/document management, and electronic transfer of student transcripts.

In 2004, American higher education institutions were serving a more ethnic and international student population, and as such, a number of institutions required the demonstrated ability to successfully work with a diverse student body. Other top qualities in a candidate included supervisory experiences in a registrar's office, excellent communication skills, excellent interpersonal skills, and budget management experience. Today, higher education institutions are also seeking registrars who can demonstrate successful experience with the management of large and complex computerized databases for storing and maintaining student academic records; experience with classroom scheduling software; leadership experience in planning, implementing, and augmenting technology-based solutions; and experience implementing or maintaining online applications. The registrar's office has become the institutional leader in implementing institution-wide technology applications such as online registration, grading, and degree audit, which are used by students, faculty, and staff.

A combination of sixteen state-assisted and independent institutions reported the role of the registrar as a member or chair of institutional committees such as academic standards, commencement, curriculum development, persistence, and registration. The study information also found that the registrar at independent institutions most often reported to academic affairs, and registrars at state-assisted institutions most often reported to student affairs leadership. This trend continued in 2004.

Listed below are the registrar's responsibilities, as outlined in the job description in force in 1995, that still held true in 2004:

- Budgetary management
- Certify National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic eligibility
- Classroom scheduling
- Commencement/graduation
- Compose enrollment reports/projections
- Coordination of registrar policies and procedures among all academic units
- Enrollment verification
- Ensuring integrity of data issued from the registrar's office

- Initiating and coordinating changes to the student information system
- Issuance of transcripts
- Maintenance of student academic records
- Monitoring satisfactory student process
- Performance of degree audits
- Performance of final degree certifications and diplomas
- Processing grades
- Professional organization affiliations
- Proposal/development of the academic calendar
- Publication of catalog/bulletin
- Registration
- Scheduling classes & publication of class schedule
- Supervising academic advising
- Transfer credit evaluation
- Veterans affairs

### Registrar and Other Responsibilities

In addition to registrar, some institutions wanted to fill a position that incorporated another role and responsibility. In 1995, three institutions sought to fill a position of registrar/director of institutional research. Two of the three institutions were specific about necessary skills needed in addition to those of just registrar, *i.e.*, responsibility for data collection and analysis including cohort studies, and leadership in collecting, organizing, and analyzing wide varieties of data to facilitate the continued growth and development of the college. One institution advertised for a somewhat similar position of registrar/director of student information systems. Requirements were fluency in the use and understanding of information technology, and the ability to analyze systems solutions to administrative problems. Finally, two institutions sought a registrar/financial aid director, two others advertised for a registrar/enrollment manager, and the one remaining institution sought a registrar/assistant to the director of academic affairs. In analyzing the 2004 data, it was found that none of the job announcements combined the registrar position with other responsibilities.

### Compensation

Registrar and enrollment professionals' salary figures are based on 1,500 survey responses compiled by CUPA's annual survey of higher education salaries in Fall 2003 (see Table 1). The figures are meant to provide a broad overview of registrar salaries in American higher education institutions. The institutions are broken down into the following categories:

- **Doctoral institutions**—characterized by a significant level of activity in doctoral-level education
- **Master's institutions**—have diverse postbaccalaureate programs but are not engaged in significant doctoral-level education
- **Baccalaureate colleges**—have primary emphasis on bachelor's-level education
- **Two-year institutions**—confer mostly associate degrees.

**Table 1: Median Salaries of Registrar and Enrollment Professionals, By Type of Institution (2005) \***

Position Title	Doctoral	Master's	Baccalaureate	Two-Year	All Institutions
Chief, Enrollment Management	\$119,719	\$98,204	\$91,865	\$62,868	\$96,250
Director, Admissions and Registrar	\$95,730	\$70,594	\$51,481	\$60,000	\$ 62,899
Registrar	\$84,997	\$63,205	\$54,981	\$51,875	\$61,953
Associate Registrar	\$59,268	\$43,331	\$41,208	\$40,482	\$46,889
Assistant Registrar	\$46,247	\$36,098	\$33,824	\$42,867	\$37,359

\* SOURCE: College and University Personnel Association, 2004–05 Administrative Compensation Survey

It should be noted that the chief enrollment management position was included in this table because it is a possible promotion route from registrar.

### Conclusion and Potential for Future Research

Little has been written to educate the higher education community as to the critical role of the registrar. More needs to be written about the contributions and challenges of the registrar position. The need for accurate and relevant data in planning and evaluation in today's information age makes the registrar even more of a critical player in the life of a higher education institution.

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**Dr. Dianne Wright** is currently an Associate Professor at Florida Atlantic University-Davie Campus, where she teaches courses in educational leadership and higher education. She received her bachelor's degree in Psychology, master's degree in Counseling and Human Systems, and doctorate in Higher Education Administration and Management, with a sub-speciality in Policy, Planning, and Analysis from Florida State University. Dr. Wright has 25 years of combined experience at the university and state governance levels. She is the author of numerous articles, publications, and funded grants, and presents her research both nationally and internationally.



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## Viewing the Postsecondary Pipeline from the Inside

by Travis Reindl

As higher education attainment becomes more of a universal expectation, a growing amount of research and analysis is focusing on the factors that help more students get to—and through—college. However, a relatively limited amount of our insight regarding the postsecondary pipeline is drawn from the perspective of those actually inside that pipeline—the students. To the extent that they exist, these gaps limit the ability of campus leaders and state and federal policymakers to identify and remedy problem areas in student access and success.

A new survey of current, former, and prospective students by Public Agenda helps to fill in some of the blanks about perceptions of college opportunity. While some of the findings in *Life After High School: Young People Talk About Their Hopes and Prospects* may not surprise seasoned higher education analysts and observers, they point to persistent weak spots in our human capital infrastructure. For example, students' explanations for why they don't make it to college and why they don't stay demand close attention, especially differences according to race/ethnicity and gender. Additionally, discussions of college-going expectations and perceptions of college graduates also underscore lingering disparities in educational opportunity.

The survey's major findings include:

■ **A significant racial/ethnic gap exists with respect to expectations of attending college and perceptions of college graduates.** More than half (54 percent) of White students surveyed indicated that “virtually all” of their circle of friends are going to college or have gone to college, as compared with 37 percent of Asian-American respondents, 30 percent of African-American respondents, and just 20 percent of Hispanic respondents. Similarly, when asked how most in their circle of friends

think about graduating from college, 70 percent of Asian-American respondents stated that it is seen as “something routine and expected,” as compared with 68 percent of White respondents, 46 percent of African-American respondents, and just 41 percent of Hispanic respondents.

■ **Affordability remains a key barrier to college participation, but ranks comparably with other considerations.** Just under half (46 percent) of respondents that never attended college or dropped out cited affordability as a primary reason for their action. Interestingly, a similar number indicated that the desire to work and make money or having too many other responsibilities influenced their decision. (See Figure 1 on the following page.)

■ **Perceived adequacy of college preparation also reveals racial/ethnic disparities.** Among students who have attended college, more than half (51 percent) of African-American respondents indicated that their high school teachers and classes could have done more to prepare them for college-level work, as compared with 48 percent of Hispanic respondents, 44 percent of Asian-American respondents, and just 39 percent of White respondents.

■ **Reasons for leaving college reveal significant gender differences.** Among students dropping out of college, 32 percent of young men stated that they left because they had had enough of school and didn't want to go any more, versus 22 percent of young women. Similarly, more than half (56 percent) of young men dropping out cited a desire to work and make money as a reason for discontinuing their studies, as compared with just 42 percent of female dropouts.

■ **The home environment plays a crucial role in the decision to attend college.** Two-thirds (67 percent) of respondents with a degree said that their parents strongly expected them to go to college, as compared with just one-third (32 percent) of respondents without degrees.

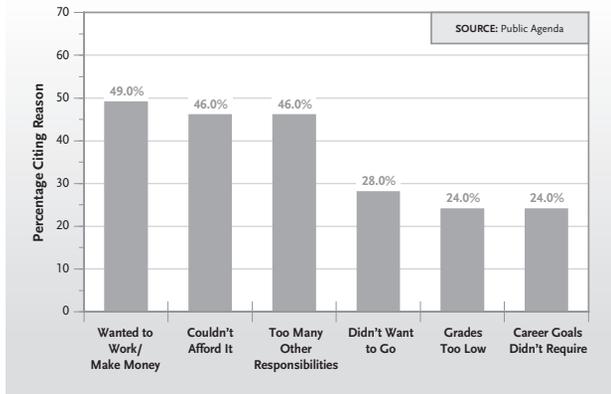


FIGURE 1: REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING OR REMAINING IN COLLEGE, 2005

In the economy that is unfolding, the nation's ability to cultivate its human capital will greatly affect its competitiveness in the global marketplace. The survey results cited above, as well as other research and analysis, serve as pointed reminders that our educational pipeline continues to leak, and that efforts to patch through policy and practice have not been entirely successful. This is an important caution for campus leaders and state and federal policymakers as resource priorities are developed and debated amid improving fiscal conditions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Who Pays? Who Benefits? New Voices in Higher Education's Enduring Argument

by Travis Reindl

One of the most persistent policy debates in American higher education centers around the public good versus private gain resulting from a college degree, and what that means for how those degrees are financed. One school of thought maintains that the positive economic and social effects of having an educated citizenry provide an ample return on the public's financial commitment and thus justify significant higher education funding at all levels. The other worldview, however, contends that individual gains from higher education (especially financial) far outweigh any public good provided by the enterprise, thereby suggesting that individuals, rather than taxpayers, should shoulder the primary responsibility (if not the entire responsibility) for funding. The contention between these schools of thought is becoming more than just a battle of rhetoric, as policymakers increasingly focus on outcomes and added value in weighing competing fiscal priorities.

The latest iteration of this continuing debate has emerged against the backdrop of the reauthorization of the federal Higher Education Act (HEA). The House Committee on Education and the Workforce recently spotlighted the issue in a hearing entitled "College Access: Is Government Part of the Solution, or Part of the Problem?" One of the witnesses, Professor Richard Vedder of Ohio University, author of *Going Broke by Degrees: Why College Costs Too Much*, offered a stinging critique of public financial support for higher education. In his testimony, Vedder offered the following arguments against public investment in postsecondary education:

■ *The presence of public subsidy and the absence of profit motive leads to inefficiency and thus cost/price escalation at not-for-profit institutions.* By contrast, Vedder states, for-profit providers' focus on maximum return to investors makes that sector inherently more efficient and productive. To the extent that any public subsidy to higher education is offered,

Vedder argues, it should be directed to the student so that institutions would be forced to be more competitive and thus efficient. He goes on to cite the voucher-based funding system recently adopted in Colorado as an example of policy that should be promoted.

- *The positive externalities (i.e., the "public good") associated with higher education are not sufficiently compelling and are offset by negative externalities such as lavish spending by university administrators, poor behavior by students receiving publicly funded aid, and the like.* Vedder declares: "The alleged positive spillover effects of higher education are more rhetorical and theoretical than real, in my judgment."
- *Public higher education funding is negatively associated with economic growth, all other factors being held equal.* To support this, Vedder performs a historical correlation analysis of state higher education appropriations and economic growth rates.

While Dr. Vedder's assertions may seem plausible in the theoretical realm, they simply don't pass muster when subjected to the reality test. Flaws in his argument against public financing and the public good of higher education include the following:

- *The for-profit sector in American higher education does not solely depend on the market, and survives competitively in large part due to government subsidies and other third party payments.* Billions of dollars in federal student aid flows to proprietary institutions every year, and their advocates are lobbying aggressively on Capitol Hill for statutory and regulatory changes that would provide them even more of Uncle Sam's largesse. Additionally, third-party payments such as employer tuition assistance provide a significant source of institutional revenue for the for-profits—in fact, the University of Phoenix brags that nearly half of their

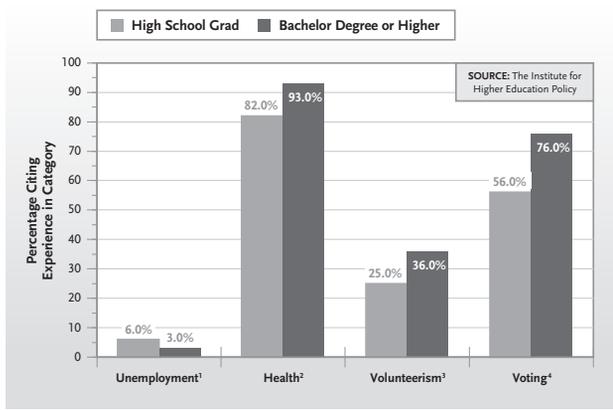


FIGURE 1: PUBLIC GOOD DIFFERENTIALS: HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE GRADUATES, 2004

students (46 percent) have some or all of their tuition paid by their employers. In short, proprietary institutions are not pure creatures of the market, and an argument can be made that their subsidies may make them less price sensitive. A look at prevailing tuition rates suggests that this might be the case—a look at the University of Phoenix and DeVry University finds tuition rates averaging about \$400 per credit hour, compared with in-state public university tuition averaging about \$175 per credit hour.

Additionally, proponents of voucher-based funding for public higher education should recognize why Colorado really pursued its program. Frank conversations with university leaders reveal that adopting such an approach was more about shielding higher education from draconian cuts demanded by the state's Taxpayer Bill of Rights than about the virtues of the market. Were the state's coffers not being bled to death by mandated taxpayer rebates and annual K-12 funding increases, it is hard to imagine a scenario under which a voucher system would have survived the legislative process. (In fact, the proposal failed a year earlier, before the brunt of the economic downturn and fiscal squeeze were felt.)

- *The positive externalities associated with higher education are real, not theoretical, and they are substantial.* A recent analysis by the Institute for Higher Education Policy found that in 2004, 25 percent of the U.S. population age 25 and older with a high school diploma reported ever volunteering, as compared with 36 percent of those with a bachelor's degree or higher. Similarly, 56 percent of citizens 25 and older with a high school diploma reported that they voted in the 2000 presidential elections, as compared with 76 percent of those possessing at least a bachelor's degree. Moreover, the positive connection between higher education and these two indicators, as well as on indicators such as health and unemployment, can be observed in each state. (See Figure 1.) Finally, Dr. Vedder's characterization of the negative externalities presented by higher education are grossly exaggerated in proportion to their actual occurrence (e.g., number of campus riots, instances of unjustifiable administrative expense).
- The correlation of public higher education spending with lower economic growth is questionable, bordering on specious. According to experts such as Professor Don Heller at Pennsylvania State University, Vedder's choice of metrics for his analysis artificially limits the estimated impact of public investment, and is also limited in its focus on a single time period. Moreover, the inverse pattern observed by Vedder in his analysis can also be explained by the familiar dynamic of increased demand for higher education and training during economic downturns.

The simple fact is that higher education in the United States is both a public and a private good. In an economy increasingly driven by and dependent on human capital, investment from all sectors is essential. In such an environment, policymakers should be appropriately skeptical of theoreticians peddling solutions that call for disinvestment in education by any party, particularly when they are beneficiaries of the very system they are seeking to dismantle.

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Notes from Figure 1 Above:

<sup>1</sup> **Unemployment** = Adults 25 and older in the labor force but not working, March 2004.

<sup>2</sup> **Health** = Adults 25 and older that report being in "good, very good, or excellent" health, March 2004.

<sup>3</sup> **Volunteerism** = Adults 25 and older that report ever volunteering, September 2004.

<sup>4</sup> **Voting** = Adults 25 and older that reported voting in the 2000 presidential election.

## Hold That Bottom Line: The Development of the Business Model in Intercollegiate Athletics

by Olin Adams III and A.J. Guarino

### The Rise of Commercialism

Intercollegiate athletics began as one dimension of the extra-curriculum, but has evolved at some large universities into a substantially autonomous, for-profit entity. It was the construction of large football stadiums during the early twentieth century that provided the first intimation of athletics representing more than a vehicle for student physical and social development. In 1914, Yale University built the Yale Bowl, with a seating capacity of more than 70,000 (Yale University n.d.). Eight years later, The Ohio State University opened Ohio Stadium, the largest stadium west of the Yale Bowl, which initially accommodated 66,210 fans (Ohio State University n.d.).

Post-season football competition started in 1902 when the Pasadena Tournament of Roses added to its parade a game between the University of Michigan and Stanford University. That first game was called in the third quarter, with Michigan leading 49–0. After a fourteen-year hiatus in which the Tournament staged chariot races for entertainment, football resumed in Pasadena. By 1920, William L. Leishman, president of the Tournament, concluded that a stadium larger than Tournament Park was needed for the growing crowd. The Tournament financed the new stadium, which came to be known as the “Rose Bowl,” by selling ten-year subscription tickets for \$100 each. The stadium opened for the game on January 1, 1923 (Pasadena Tournament of Roses 2003).

The inhospitable economic conditions of the Depression did not stop the advance of post-season play. The Orange and Sugar Bowls were first played in 1935, while the Sun Bowl began a year later and the Cotton Bowl started in 1937. Basketball, still in its infancy as compared to football, likewise saw the origins of post-season competition during this time period. The National Invitation Tournament (NIT) began in 1938, with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) tournament starting the year after (World Almanac 2002).

In the 1950s, television presented new revenue opportunities for college football, but the NCAA limited the number of appearances an institution could make. Another signpost to commercialism was the NCAA rule change in 1965 that permitted unlimited substitution after each play in Division I football. This would engender an era of specialization and large rosters in football.

### Legitimacy for Commercialism: Gender Equity

Commercialism in athletics preceded the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which stated that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” However, if universities needed legitimacy for commercializing athletics, it came from the legally imposed costs of providing women with athletic opportunities. The provision of athletic opportunities for women was implemented with deliberate speed for twenty years, but the pace quickened with the landmark case of *Cohen v. Brown University* (1992). The United States District Court for the district of Rhode Island construed a three-prong test established by Office of Civil Rights regulations to determine whether Brown had complied with Title IX. Brown failed to demonstrate compliance with any of the three prongs: (1) providing athletic participation opportunities for women “substantially proportionate” to their enrollment in the institution, (2) practicing “program expansion” for the underrepresented gender, or (3) full and effective accommodation of the athletic interests of the underrepresented gender. Accordingly, the court enjoined Brown to restore to varsity status two women’s teams—gymnastics and volleyball—which had been demoted to club status.

The decision sent shock waves through intercollegiate athletics. The most common institutional response has been to drop men's teams that do not generate revenue and to maximize revenue from football and men's basketball in order to absorb the costs of gender equity (Suggs 2001a, 2003a; Conniff 2003). Georgia Tech developed the "Responsibility Center Approach" to reporting and budgeting, in which indirect costs of athletic operations are allocated to the various sports teams. Athletic department officials insisted that this profit center approach to each sport was not initiated to stigmatize sports that lost money, but to ascertain the subsidies needed for certain sports and to encourage entrepreneurial behavior among coaches (Strupeck, Milani, and Murphy 1993). The University of Virginia stratified and prioritized its athletic teams into four tiers. The first tier, comprised of football and men's and women's basketball, is expected to compete for national championships. A second tier, including lacrosse, receives nearly as much institutional support. All women's teams not in the first two tiers constitute tier three, while the fourth tier includes all remaining men's teams (Suggs 2001a).

### **Evidence of the Business Model**

The requirement for new revenue streams to cover the costs of gender equity has been manifest in various institutional initiatives. Television coverage of athletics moved from select games to saturation in the 1980s. In 1951, the NCAA had limited television appearances of member institutions to two per regular season. By 1982, the College Football Association (CFA)—comprised of universities in the Atlantic Coast, Big Eight, Southwest, and Southeastern conferences—sought to change the NCAA policy on television (Suggs 2000). The universities of Oklahoma and Georgia, both CFA members, sued the NCAA, and the Supreme Court held that the NCAA television policy was a restraint of trade in violation of the Sherman Act (*National Collegiate Athletic Association v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma et al.*, 1984).

The flood gates opened. Regular season appearances by an institution were unlimited. The University of Notre Dame struck a deal with NBC in 1991 that gave the network exclusive rights to Notre Dame's home football games. As the CFA unraveled, conferences negotiated independently. In 1994, the Southeastern Conference entered into a television contract with CBS (Suggs 2000). The same network had brought college basketball big money when it gained the rights to cover the NCAA men's basketball tournament in 1982. However, colleges derived their greatest television exposure in football and basketball from a rising cable network—ESPN—which was launched in 1979 (ESPN n.d.)

Universities expanded football stadiums and sought to maximize revenue from season tickets. Many institutions now require, as a condition of purchasing those tickets, a donation in the nature of a "right of first refusal." The Internal Revenue Code permits a tax deduction for 80 percent of the donation, regarding the remainder as an imputed purchase

price. The institutions with the highest athletic revenues appear to be those that have availed themselves of this tax treatment. The largest athletic budget is found at The Ohio State University, which has an edge of nearly \$20 million on the next institution, the University of Michigan (Johnson 1999). In fact Ohio State's budget grew from \$64.9 million in fiscal year 1999 (Johnson 1999) to \$79 million in fiscal year 2003 (Suggs 2002)

Within athletic departments, staffs multiplied in order to deal with an increasingly complex environment. Zemsky and Massy (1990) had observed this pattern in academic administration and termed it "the administrative lattice." The University of Tennessee now employs 23 associate and assistant athletic directors with a total compensation of \$1.7 million. In 1985, Tennessee had only two associate and assistant athletic directors (Lundy 2003). Johnson (1999) noted strong parallels between the functional responsibilities of managers in large corporations and the administrative structure of large university athletic departments.

The business model is also evident in the self-sufficiency and autonomy with which athletic departments operate. The high water mark of the business model has been reached at the Universities of Florida and Georgia, which have incorporated their athletic departments.

Finally, the last decade has witnessed expansions and mergers of conferences. In 1992, the Southeastern Conference added two new members, the University of Arkansas, a past member of the Southwest Conference, and the University of South Carolina, an independent. Having reached the twelve-team membership required by the NCAA for a conference championship football game, the expanded Southeastern Conference thus derived additional revenue from the extra game. When the Southwest Conference crumbled in 1994, four of its members—the University of Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, and Baylor University—joined with the institutions of the Big Eight Conference to form a new conference, the Big Twelve. This league also staged a revenue-generating championship game. In July 2003, the University of Miami and Virginia Tech left the Big East and joined the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) effective the 2004–05 academic year (Suggs 2003b). The conference attained the requisite dozen for a football championship game by adding Boston College to its roster in October 2003 (Glenn and Gose 2003).

### **Voices of Reform and Restraint**

Many voices have called for academic reform and fiscal constraints in athletics. Concern over emphasis on athletics is not new. In 1961, The Ohio State University won the Big Ten football championship and an automatic bid to the Rose Bowl. However, the University declined the bowl bid amid fears that athletics had usurped academics as the institutional priority.

The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, which previously met in 1991 and 2001, was reconvened in fall 2003. The commission is "credited with helping college presidents gain more control over athletics, both on

their own campuses and within the National Collegiate Athletic Association” (Suggs 2003c, p.A33). The 2001 commission report called for conditioning institutional participation in championship competition on achievement of a 50 percent graduation rate (Suggs 2001b). New NCAA rules require more college preparatory courses for incoming freshman student-athletes, but remove the cutoff score on the SAT or ACT required for admission.

Critics of the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) allege that the system of selecting teams operates to exclude members of conferences other than those entitled to automatic bid (Atlantic Coast, Big East, Big Ten, Big Twelve, Pacific Ten, and Southeastern). The House Judiciary Committee convened on the matter of a possible antitrust violation on September 4, 2003, and the Senate Judiciary Committee considered this issue on October 29, 2003. The BCS responded by adding a bowl game to its current four games, with the new game created to accommodate teams from “mid-major conferences.”

E. Gordon Gee, chancellor of Vanderbilt University, captured the attention of the nation in September 2003, when he announced a restructuring of athletics at his institution that placed responsibility for athletics under student affairs and eliminated the position of athletics director. Although some hailed Gee’s action as the vanguard of needed reform, many saw the move as merely a symbolic gesture.

In January 2005, the NCAA formed a panel of college presidents to address the rising costs of intercollegiate athletics. Yet some realists assert that institutions should acknowledge commercialism and provide compensation for athletes beyond the traditional tuition, room, and board (Atwell 2001). What is beyond dispute is that intercollegiate athletics has become a multibillion dollar industry that will be very difficult to restrain.

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## Failed Attempts: Planning for State System Restructuring

*by* Kevin W. Sayers

Recent popularity of restructuring public higher education governance models, as seen in the most recent case in Arizona, stems from several developments. There is a heightened public awareness of system functionality and its effect on state economies. The everyday taxpayer demands the removal of duplication in academic programs and expects student access and outcomes to be linked to workforce training. Simultaneously, many of those working within systems sometimes feel that there is inadequate coordination or poor leadership. Dramatic shifts in institutional or system leadership and legislative majority can also spur talks on restructuring. All the while, state funding levels remain nominal, forming the emergent dichotomy facing public systems of becoming more entrepreneurial and developing niche specialties while also serving a public mission. This presents the most difficult question: Are systems serving their public mission? Some systems, often with the critical eye of the public, evolve to the point of heavy inter-institutional conflict over mission and structure. Subsequently, radical proposals or conceptual discussions on campus mergers instigate restructuring talks (MacTaggart 1998; MacTaggart and Crist 1996; McGuinness 1994). But as can be seen in many recent failed attempts at restructuring, that is only the beginning.

### **Planning for Restructuring**

Accepting that planning is a primary mechanism for change and that public higher education will continue to be constrained by its environment, the state governance restructuring issue will increasingly pop up on planning agendas across the nation. Still, rarely will planning be guided by material or operational concerns more than political or symbolic representations. Those most closely involved in restructuring planning must be made aware of the political conditions that grow from the interaction of restructuring issue opponents

and proponents and the constraints that are placed on the effectiveness of planning outcomes. If systems ignore the political and power roles inherent in planning, they guarantee the failure of future restructuring efforts.

Planning exercises are fundamentally a battle for control; a battle for what group's interpretation will guide future decision-making. The mobilization of resources by counteracting groups tends to determine outcomes. Those with higher legitimacy, a deeper supply of resources, and stronger political power usually win out to dictate the identity of planning outcomes. As a result, the process of restructuring planning most likely serves political uses as a symbol more than it initiates significant shifts in structure for effectiveness or efficiency. Simply put, change surrounding restructuring planning is not necessarily linked to the technological aspects of planning activities.

Although democratic symbols and technologies are routinely adopted in planning, there is hardly agreement over whose interpretation is to be used in decision-making. As an example, both proponents and opponents to restructuring typically agree that the evaluation of restructuring planning should involve communication with the much broader community of faculty, staff, students, and civic leaders. It can also be agreed that restructuring planning should entail the evaluation of a long list of possible restructuring options. However, planning processes often fail to recognize that stakeholders hold differing meanings over what involvement may be. This is commonly referred to as failures in communication. When no consensus can be achieved to resolve an issue, it then makes sense for it to be diffused and replaced by another less controversial symbol that may be able to reach more of a consensus. Planning participants are quick to lose attention, seldom taking the time to diagnose and assign the level of attention that issues require.

Another reason as to why so many states turn away from the restructuring issue lies in the incrementalism that is increasingly pervasive in planning processes and outcomes. Institutional planners must recognize that the political conditions propagated in restructuring planning and the practice of incrementalism in decision-making are linked and severely limit the probability of structural reform. Throughout history, American higher education has been a social institution that has evolved incrementally. Similarly, public higher education governance of the past 50 years has rarely been reactive and fast changing. Instead, it has been a progressive process where opportunities are identified as they come along. In relation to planning for restructuring, information is typically collected only to the point at which it substantiates a course of action. Satisficing appears in decision-making to make expedient the degree of change surrounding restructuring planning no matter the cost (Lindblom 1979). Incrementalism shapes planning into merely a process of “muddling through” (Lindblom 1979, p.517).

Repositioning in lieu of restructuring does little to solve the systemic problems facing public higher education today. Given the constrained resources facing state governance, funds would be better spent in the trenches than spent on symbolic planning processes that serve only the substantiation of opponent groups. Even worse, in a case where planning issues have been controlled and redefined by opponents, planning for restructuring can do little to improve the actual governance of a system’s constituents because the process and its outcomes are built upon a foundation of secrecy, narrowed interpretations, and rhetoric that does not reflect the values of the system and state.

## Market Forces

The expanding presence of market forces in public higher education interjects a very troublesome variable for state governance and calls for the significant restructuring of current models. Competition will rise. Affordability will become more problematic. Participation will become fragmented and discriminatory. Academic quality will become ambiguous. For planners, what is most important is an understanding that “market forces are antithetical to centralized planning” (Richardson 2002, p.14). Thus, planning for restructuring must be decentralized to not only involve and gauge important market actors, but to empower internal members to think differently. “The challenge, of course, is to operationalize that vision in a way that continues to serve what is valued in the past, present, and future” (Gumport 2001, pp. 105-106). A collective effort at planning and governance is required. The trends are clear but the know-how and attention level required are lacking. More decentralized approaches to planning, along with the recognition of market forces may result in more effective restructuring planning in the future.

It is critical to maintain focus that public higher education systems remain institutions that provide a social service

and produce a public good. As society and its markets dictate expectations, public systems are required to answer. Only through effective planning can systems respond in a manner that is demonstrable and reflected in structural arrangements. Market forces are inevitable. Incremental responses to demands, which only symbolically demonstrate alternatives to restructuring, will not succeed. MacTaggart and Crist (1996) warned that if restructuring approaches “suffer from inept leadership, a desire to reposition rather than improve, or thoughtless or merely politically expedient solutions, the result will be reduced effectiveness and diminished public confidence, and our society will be worse off” (p.xii).

There are many strategic responses to the challenges facing American public higher education. The restructuring of governance models is one of them. Can internally instigated restructuring efforts guided by decentralized planning initiatives work? Answers are unclear. “What separates successful from failed innovations is not the merit of the original idea for change or reform—there are plenty of good ideas . . . but rather the conditions of the organizational soil in which the idea is placed” (MacTaggart 1996, p.244). What is known is that states must adequately plan for restructuring in a manner that is reflective of its market environment and public constituency. After a decade of marginal, incremental change in state governance models, systems must design sound planning opportunities as a means to engage in substantive debate on the structural weaknesses of contemporary public higher education governance models in an increasingly market-oriented sector. Only when this is done will the credibility of public higher education governance restructuring discussions improve.

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## From Post Box to Postmodern: An Epiphany on the Journey to Meaning

*by* J. Michael Thompson and  
Richard N. Meyer

Imagine yourself as a high school student of today, seeking to attend college and sorting through the blizzard of information available, in print or electronically, about the thousands of schools from which you might choose. Then, overlay your own personal interests, skills, and aspirations to that blizzard of information and define your “short list” of schools that might be a fit for you and your family. This is the daunting task which all of us in Enrollment Management ask millions of prospective students and their families to undertake every year.

All of the over 4,000<sup>1</sup> institutions of higher education in the U.S. compete for “mind share” as well as market share of the prospective student population. Moreover, each and every one of our institutions seeks to admit and enroll “Prime” students; those who have performed well academically, on standardized tests and outside their classrooms. With pride and enthusiasm, we all present our vast arrays of curricula, programs, faculty, campuses, social settings, and other opportunities.

Yet, here we stop to imagine ourselves in the shoes of a prospective student; one for whom research tells us there are very specific and subjective interests, desires, and concerns. Then, how do we redact, reconstruct, and define for ourselves the most important, value-added elements of each available institutional option?

### The Old Way

Whether at a major research university, a liberal arts college, a two-year technical program, or even among the Ivy League, schools have sought historically to deliver as much informa-

tion as possible, in as many printed or electronic forms as possible to as many qualified students as possible.

The “View Book” or catalog a school sends out is meant to capture and summarize the benefits of that institution in interesting and engaging ways. While this may well serve to inventory a school’s strengths in a graphic and captivating way, it does not speak to those individual, very personal interests of the students with whom we seek to communicate.

Rather, universities and schools across the country spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year to differentiate ourselves from each other in the minds of prospective students and families. From mailing lists and data files which give us only vague indicators of program and extracurricular interests, we fashion and deploy a tactical onslaught of materials, admission and financial aid representatives, alumni, and faculty most often at myriad, expensively facilitated events.

To reach increasing numbers of prospective students and families, we have built Web sites, portals, and other electronic delivery mechanisms that showcase our schools’ academic strengths, campuses, faculty, social settings, and alumni communities. Yet even in our electronic delivery, we have chosen to deliver resources weighed down with the sheer volume and girth of our institutions’ prolific messages.

To provide an example of this “Old Way,” here is a summary of the scope of traditional search and recruitment activities:

- 325,000 Names
- 500,000 Contacts
- 35,000 Inquirers
- 30,000 Applicants
- 8,000 Interviews
- 2,750 Enrolled Freshman

To accomplish this volume of activity, a university can spend over \$3 million annually in communication costs alone.

<sup>1</sup> *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Almanac Issue 2003–04—This number includes: public and private two- and four-year as well as nonprofit and for profit institutions in both two- and four-year categories.

Thus, we began to ask ourselves: “Why not develop and deliver to the student, and her or his family, a personalized resource whereby they may define for themselves which of and what in our offerings is most important, fits their needs, and thereby is most meaningful?”

### **Prelude to a Different Way**

The old saw of “If it works, why fix it?” might prevail here. Yet, shifting population dynamics, a.k.a. the diminishing “Baby Boom Echo,” and the pressures of increasing costs, both for recruitment as well as school operations, necessitate that we be more nimble and thoughtful in our outreach to prospective student groups. Furthermore, studies of the communications expectations of our own customers—the population of prospective students—tell us that we must adapt our communications to their expectations.

In 1997, 97 percent of all communications with prospective students were conducted by phone or in person; with 2 percent by e-mail and 1 percent on the Web. In 2002, only 5 percent of these communications were conducted in person or over the phone; with 56 percent conducted on the Web, 30 percent by e-mail, and 9 percent across the various channels.<sup>2</sup>

This trend might augur that we redirect the bulk of our communication emphasis to e-mail, and thereby the Web, exclusively. However, these channels too are fraught with pitfalls:

- Students may, and often do, regard such messages as SPAM.
- Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have built-in blocks against even the most benign broadcast messages.
- E-mail boxes have capacity limitations.
- Recipients often change or maintain multiple e-mail addresses.

### **Postmodern Deconstruction**

“Postmodern art (and thought) favors reflexivity and self consciousness, fragmentation and discontinuity (especially in narrative structures), ambiguity, simultaneity, and an emphasis on the deconstructed, decentered, dehumanized subject.”<sup>3</sup>

All of our institutions, both centrally and through our academic units, departments, schools, and administrative units, produce and distribute vast amounts of information in extraordinarily diverse ways. Yet, we do not mine nor use these storehouses to the benefit of our customers: students and their families. Rather, we present them as we understand

<sup>2</sup> Source: Forrester Research

<sup>3</sup> Professor Mary Klages, University of Colorado, English Department

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Goldstein

“*Our ineptitude in getting at the record is largely caused by the artificiality of systems of indexing... The human mind does not work that way. It operates by association. With one item in its grasp, it snaps instantly to the next that is suggested by the association of thoughts, in accordance with some intricate web of trails carried by the cells of the brain.*”

(VANNEVAR BUSH 1945)

them to be meaningful, not in ways that have meaning to the individual.

Postmodernist thought might suggest that we should deconstruct the vast array of meanings held within our publications, Web sites, portals and other storehouses of information. Yet, how do we facilitate the reassembly of that information to be meaningful in the personalized and subjective context of our student and family audience?

“In deconstruction, the critic claims there is no meaning to be found in the actual text, but only in the various, often mutually irreconcilable, ‘virtual texts’ constructed by readers in their search for meaning.”<sup>4</sup>

The notions of postmodernism and deconstruction theory may well seem better discussed in a philosophy department than used as admission or recruitment discipline. Yet, a simple question might help to demonstrate why such theory is appropriate to both settings: What is the difference between data and information?

### **Object-Oriented Thinking and Programming**

In order to fully consider an object-oriented approach to how we as enrollment management professionals can best deliver personalized and fully flexible content to our audience/market, a basic computer science Q&A might serve us well:

- ▶ **What Is an Object?** An object is a software bundle of related variables and methods. Software objects are often used to model real-world objects you find in everyday life.
- ▶ **What Is a Message?** Software objects interact and communicate with each other using messages.
- ▶ **What Is a Class?** A class is a blueprint or prototype that defines the variables and the methods common to all objects of a certain kind.
- ▶ **What Is Inheritance?** A class inherits state and behavior from its superclass. Inheritance provides a powerful and natural mechanism for organizing and structuring software programs.

These definitions provide an insight into the near-infinite number of pathways to meaning, not a single meaning itself. Here we do not mean to suggest that we have to deconstruct all our printed collateral materials, Web sites, portals, e-mail content, and campaigns and then reconstruct them in the millions of formats or views that have meaning for the millions of students and families with whom we wish to communicate.

Instead, we have learned that by drawing upon the incredibly large volume of information that already exists about our institutions and making it accessible as a resource for pro-

spective students and families, they are allowed to create their own meaning.

An example: At the University of Southern California, a “Student Information Gateway” or SIG was recently launched. To illustrate how SIG works, and how it reflects the theories that have been outlined here, consider the following student profile:

Take a female student about whom we know the following: She has academic interests in mathematics, biology, auto shop; co-curricular interests in band (saxophone) and volleyball; extracurricular interest in a faith-based, elder daycare center.

With these indicators, we *deconstruct* (i.e., segment and provide content from and links to) existing information/publications from the mathematics and biology departments, as well as engineering and music schools. We also include information/links dealing with religious life on campus and community service opportunities.

This student is sent an e-mail or letter in which a URL to her own SIG and a unique identification number with which to access it are provided. When she arrives at her SIG, she is greeted by name and can view the array of information in which the staff understood her to be interested (see Figure 1). More importantly, at that point, she can delete or add and store her choices of information about the university, as she

“  
*A frog in a well says, ‘The sky is no bigger than the mouth of the well.’ That is untrue, for the sky is not just the size of the mouth of the well. If it said, ‘A part of the sky is the size of the mouth of the well’, that would be true, for it tallies with the facts.”*  
 CHAIRMAN MAO TSE TUNG

wants and in the way which has most meaning for her (see Figure 2).

Additionally, extensive financial aid information and resources are provided as integral components of the SIG; thereby striving to address what is increasingly perceived as an insurmountable obstruction even to application: cost.

In the near future there are also plans to launch personalized information gateways targeted at parents and college admission counselors. Here again, the content and links are derived from those elements that already exist throughout the campus and academic units, as well as through outside sources.

In short, through this approach to electronic customer relationship management (eCRM), products and services are delivered as customers need, want, and value them.

The guiding principles of this postmodern/deconstructionist approach to enrollment management are:

- Students *do* create their own meaning.
- We need to facilitate that process electronically.
- Students need a place to store and manage their findings and meanings.

This modality of communication provides opportunities for all of us in higher education and enrollment management



FIGURE 1: SAMPLE STUDENT INFORMATION GATEWAY (SIG) PERSONAL PAGE



FIGURE 2: SAMPLE STUDENT INFORMATION GATEWAY (SIG) WELCOME PAGE

as we seek to fulfill our shared mission: higher educational access for all students and families who seek it.

### An Even Larger Picture

How do we apply the concepts of postmodern thought and object-oriented database theory to our institutional missions beyond enrollment management? The preceding quotation from Mao Tse Tung illustrates what at many schools, including USC, is often characterized as a “silo” mindset. Academic and administrative units, like frogs in a well, view their part of the institutional mission as distinctly separate from those of other schools and departments.

However, if we step back and look at the larger array of constituencies which an institution serves, we can see broad applications for the CRM approach to communication with and in support of all our stakeholders. A prospective student becomes an applicant; the applicant if admitted becomes an enrolled student. That student matriculates and becomes an alumna or alumnus. The alumni community aggregates to support the various units and activities of the school. The neighborhoods and region surrounding the school become stakeholders in a shared community. The school and its units are part of the global community.

As with the enrollment management paradigm, CRM can serve to deliver access to the wealth of content and information a college or university possesses and do so in a way that allows the stakeholder to form his or her own meaning. Key principles to this new approach dictate that we seek to broadly define our challenges and opportunities, and concurrently think about other stakeholders on campus with similar challenges and opportunities. To wit, we need to think institutionally, not functionally.

Other offices on campus—including those of the president and provost—seek, among many other things, to communicate with, sponsor events for, and support diverse communities of alumni, researchers, governmental entities, etc. The economies of scale and overlapping constituencies involved are shared by many other parts of the organization. CRM enables us to communicate with greater efficiency and more fully coordinate our approach to stakeholder groups of all descriptions, in local as well as distant locations.

Via this approach, the larger infrastructure of a CRM database and the suites of electronic and other tools the institution maintains become a resource toolbox from which each unit

“

*The significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.*

ALBERT EINSTEIN

within the institution may fashion its own strategic and tactical plans and activities. Yet, through this new approach, strategic missions can be fulfilled without necessitating that each unit “reinvent the wheel” of publications and electronic content, stakeholder list management, travel management, and event support systems, etc.

### Conclusion

Proprietary organizational thinking is not the exclusive domain of academic institutions. Governments, corporations, and

other complex human groupings all fall prey to seeing their internal missions as inherently separate from those of their internal institutional partners. Yet, given the market dynamic and economic challenges that colleges and universities all face and will continue to encounter, we need to think in collaboratively different ways.

Colleges and universities have made large investments in information systems, portals, publications of all types, not to mention the brick and mortar of our campuses. Such levels of investment demand collaborative, institutional thinking. If we do not so adapt, we risk failing our institutional missions, as well as the growing number of stakeholders we are dedicated to serve.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**J. Michael Thompson** was the Vice Provost for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admission and Financial Aid at the University of Southern California from 2002 until June 2005. J. Michael has worked in higher education for more than 30 years in a variety of roles—in registrar’s offices, admission offices, and computer centers. For more than ten years, he has led groups of functional people and programmers to develop high touch through high tech systems, including Pathways, one of the earliest Web-based electronic college application systems. His group won an IBM Best Practices in Student Services award for UC Gateways. At USC, J. Michael led the development of cutting edge systems for worldwide educational outreach: Preparing for College, now available in eight different languages, and the Student Information Gateway, a postmodern communication tool for students interested in USC.

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## Should We Treat Our Students Like Customers?

by Leigh Anne Touzeau

A common debate on most college campuses today is how to view our students—should they be treated like customers or not? Having worked in higher education for the past fifteen years, and encountering this issue at numerous institutions, I can attest that this is a difficult question to posit and resolve. I have also broached the subject with friends and acquaintances outside of higher education. They like to point out that we should be running our colleges and universities more like businesses, and thus, treating our students more like customers. Living in such a commercialized society, it is logical for students and others to think, that because money is changing hands, students should be considered customers and treated like customers.

Before analyzing the question at hand, we should first define the word *customer*. The dictionary defines a customer as a person who buys goods or services, especially on a regular basis. This definition would lead us to believe that as students are paying the college for services, they are indeed customers. But we must take a closer look, and also define the goods or services that the students are buying.

Some common goods and services associated with college easily come to mind: parking, food, books, housing, and recreational services, just to name a few. These items have a much more clearly defined function for the student, and thus are easier to group into consumer products or services. However, what about the central function of higher education? What is the primary reason that students attend college? In most instances, students come to gain an education and to learn. The main focus of every institution of higher education is student learning. So, if students come to learn, is that something that can be bought?

As youngsters, we do not have a choice as to whether or not we attend school. In America today, it is expected that students will attend approximately twelve years of primary

education. However, when a student graduates from high school, it becomes his choice to obtain additional education. He is not required to continue his formal education, but may choose to avail himself of higher learning at any time, choose to work, or choose to further his learning in an informal way, such as checking out books at the library and studying on his own. At this point one could argue that the student is more a customer now—than in elementary, middle, and high school—because a conscious choice is involved. The student is now making a decision about where to go next to further his learning, or if he will go on to college at all. He is shopping around for higher education. The student is thinking of many things that other traditional customers have to think about: price, convenience, reputation, services offered, and value.

Colleges and universities treat these potential students very much like other businesses treat potential customers. We market to students through several sources: radio and television advertisements, billboards, direct mail, the Internet, and marketing at fairs and trade shows. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent on recruiting students to our campuses. The competition is fierce. College recruiters act as the “sales team” and “sell” their institution to the prospective student. These recruiters highlight what makes their institution the best for the student, what makes their institution stand out from the competition, and what their institution can do for that prospective student. Colleges and universities will also spotlight their value, reputation, rankings, and programs to try to gain as many customers as they need to meet their enrollment goals. From the highly competitive enterprise that higher education has become, it looks very much like students are customers.

Colleges even adopt business practices like Customer Relationship Management (CRM), which is a relatively new field that follows the relationship-selling trajectory between

customers and merchants. In this model, both buyers and sellers exhibit specific behavior patterns as they establish, maintain, and enhance a mutually profitable, long-term relationship. According to the model, all of these relationships—both personal and professional—go through four stages: exploration, expansion, commitment, and dissolution. I recently received a letter from a company selling CRM software. The ad declared that, “We can enable your institution to proactively develop tailored programs to help recruit, retain, and create long-term trusted relationships with students, companies, and alumni.” Doesn’t this make the student sound like a customer?

In addition, colleges have begun to look a lot more like businesses. They have spent more time developing and improving their customer service models. In the recent past, students had to stand in lines for hours to register for classes; now everything can be done online with virtually no waiting. The same goes for changing one’s schedule, and requesting transcripts. Most services in general have been made easier with new technology and more of a focus on the student-as-customer. Bookstores are friendlier, residence halls have gotten bigger and more aesthetically pleasing, and students have abundant choices about where to live, both on and off campus. For an outsider looking in, the college can appear a business, and the student its customer.

Another development, which supports the student-as-customer argument, is the proliferation of different delivery methods for courses. To attract working adults, colleges have started offering courses at night, courses on the weekends, Web courses, courses at multiple sites, and courses of varying lengths. All of these different methods are in response to consumer demand and in response to competition. We also listen closely to the demands of our community in general. If business and industry leaders tell us that we need more technical engineering students, we make sure that we develop programs in those fields. One can look at the proliferation of business schools over the past ten years to see that colleges and universities do respond to customer demand.

It could also be argued that students are like customers because they evaluate the services that they are receiving. How many times have we been asked to fill out a survey for a product or a service that we have purchased? At colleges and universities, students take national satisfaction surveys, fill out comment cards, evaluate recruiting events, and complete a host of other surveys. We do attempt to listen to our students and make changes on their behalf. Also, we offer students the opportunity to evaluate their professors and to evaluate the courses that they take. However, this activity could be a dangerous one if not used properly.

Finally, another similarity that our students have to traditional customers is that we attempt to retain them. We need our students to have fulfilling experiences at our institutions because we hope that they will promote our services to their family and friends. We also want them to be supportive alumni. We strive to continue our customer relationship after

graduation. We try diligently to keep in touch with our alumni and ask that they provide support in the way of time and money for their alma mater. Remember the CRM model—we want to keep continuous profitable relationships with our customers. However, we also need to be wary of considering our students as customers.

One reason we should be cautious about calling our students customers is that not everyone can even become a customer. In purchasing regular consumer products and services, anyone who has enough money to pay for the goods can become a customer. However, in higher education, some students can never become customers to the particular college or university of their choice. One must meet certain standards before being accepted as a customer at some colleges and universities, regardless of the ability to pay. There is a limited supply of certain types of education. This is something that would never happen with traditional consumer products. If Wal-Mart runs out of toasters, some other vendor will continue to create more. Supply will keep up with demand. This is not true for higher education. The United States has worked hard to provide improved access to higher education, but the fact remains that not everyone who would like to go to college will go, or will get into the college that they would like to attend. Only certain customers (students) can purchase certain products (education). Obviously, this does not happen with generic consumer products. One does not have to meet certain requirements to purchase a product; he only has to have the ability to pay the money required.

Higher education is not just a commodity to be purchased; rather, it is a privilege to be earned. Students who want to purchase an education must first show that they meet specific requirements before making this transaction. Since one must prove his worthiness to become a student in a higher education institution, education cannot be equated with other simple products and services. Our society believes that education is the great equalizer. Education can offer individuals a better way of life. We have done a good job preserving this distinction, even though we have commercialized it a great deal. Many Americans believe strongly that higher education is a wonderful privilege and a freedom, which should not to be taken for granted. Unfortunately, though, there are some who believe that an education can be bought and they do so through diploma mills and fraudulent documents. However, a true education is one that cannot be bought. It must be earned.

Similarly, a traditional customer can continue a relationship with a vendor for as long as the service or product is needed and as long as the customer is willing to pay. This is not the case in higher education. Students must continue to show that they are making satisfactory progress while attaining their education. Students will be dismissed or put on probation for not fulfilling the specific academic requirements of the college. Financial aid and/or scholarship money will be taken away from students who cannot perform at a certain level. Even though we might try to provide excellent

customer service, the colleges and universities of value will not forfeit certain standards to make a student happy and to keep a customer. This is a primary reason why I do not endorse referring to our students as customers. We require and expect a great deal out of our college students. We ask our students to leave if they do not perform well enough. Sometimes we will allow them to return, but again, we will set certain standards regarding their re-admission. I do not expect Wal-Mart to ever tell its customers not to come back.

Another reason that we must not be hasty in our assertion that students are customers is that students are the products that we provide to society. Our students reflect upon our institutions, both positively and negatively. If we do not produce successful products, it can negatively impact the school's reputation and hinder future enrollments. We must balance our hopes that students will be happy graduates and supportive alumni with our responsibility to facilitate true learning in the students we teach. This is an integral consideration when examining faculty and course evaluations. If we become so customer oriented that we focus on keeping our customers happy, then we may have failed at our central objective. If we do not challenge our students in their coursework or cause them to stretch and grow, we are doing a major disservice to the student and to our society. I believe that the best teachers are those who help students achieve their personal best, not the ones that have a reputation of giving an easy 'A.' I suspect that if we researched the "best faculty" as rated by the students, we would find those teachers who push their students to strive and reach their potential at the top of the list. I do not believe the "easy" teachers are the ones who are winning the respect of the students. If you are fortunate enough to have had a teacher inspire you, you will most likely never forget him.

Unfortunately, all too often we have students who will try to take the easy way out of college. Students will take certain classes because the teacher only requires minimal reading, or the teacher provides all the answers in a study group before the test. However, I do not think that these students are the norm. I believe that most students (most people for that matter) want to be stretched, prodded, and encouraged to become the best that they can be. Teachers who cause this type of change are special. I have been lucky to know some of these teachers professionally and as a student. They are the reasons

that students should not be called customers. What they do cannot be bought; it must be experienced. I have seen firsthand how students grow and change while in college and this is something that is truly priceless.

In sum, we may treat our students like customers in several different situations, which is acceptable. We must stay competitive with other institutions and we must continue to create better environments for our students to work. However, in the most precious aspect of higher education—the dynamic of learning—it is wrong to treat them as such. Students can only get an education by putting forth the effort required by their professors. The student's success is in direct proportion to the amount of work he puts toward his goal and to the faith he puts in his instructor. For this reason we must not call our students customers. If we must call them something, I think the word client would be a better fit. The word client implies more of a partnership, with both sides working together toward a common goal.

No matter what the views on this debate might be, one thing is for certain—we must treat our students with dignity. We need to recognize that most importantly, they are distinctive individuals with different backgrounds and unique learning styles. We must understand our enormous responsibility to our students and take our responsibilities very seriously. We must challenge our students to take responsibility for their own learning and to become life-long learners. We must create a change in their day-to-day habits so they do not stop the learning process once our time together is over. We must challenge our students to become the best that they can be. For those of us in higher education administration, we hope that what is taught will be remembered and makes a difference in the lives of our students and the society in which they function. When we accomplish this, our enrollments will not be our primary focus; rather we will be mostly concerned with how we are affecting the students we have at the present moment. The enrollments will follow.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## Applying Technology to Academic Advising

by Jeffrey von Munkwitz-Smith

Surveys can reflect a general consensus about student satisfaction in the higher education environment. Alexander Astin (1993) described the results of a national survey, which found that only 40 percent of students reported that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the quality of academic advising at their institution. Besides the things you might expect—provide accurate information, get to know students as individuals, provide both major and career information, be available and approachable—students expect advisors to know about majors outside of their own program, provide frequent feedback, and assist with personal as well as academic issues.

Advising affects student success, as measured by retention and graduation rates. In a 2003 paper, “Academic Advisement and Student Retention: Empirical Connections & Systematic Interventions,” Joe Cuseo reported on a number of national studies that indicated a significant correlation between satisfaction with advising and student persistence. One survey of 944 institutions found that inadequate advising was seen as the number one characteristic linked to student attrition.

### **What’s wrong with academic advising, anyway? And why should we care?**

By recognizing that poor academic advising can have an adverse impact on students, it’s important to look at advising from a number of perspectives. Let’s start with how advisors are often assigned to students. In a large political science department for example, when a student declares the major, the department secretary is notified. The secretary looks to see who has fewer advisees than other faculty and assigns that person as the student’s advisor. The problem is that a

student interested in foreign relations, with a specific interest in South Asia, might be assigned to a specialist in constitutional law, rather than to the expert in South Asian nuclear policy. The chance of the student making a good connection with her advisor would be much less than if they shared an academic interest.

However, matched with the right student, an advisor can have a profound effect on the student’s life. Pinky McNamara was a football player at the University of Minnesota in the 1950s. He struggled to decide on the right major before being helped by two academic advisors. After graduation he went on to have a very successful business career. In 1998, he gave the University \$10 million. He said at the time: “If I lived five lifetimes, I couldn’t repay the University of Minnesota for what it has meant in my life and my career. I had academic advisors who guided me and saved my academic life with their dedication. I hope that what I am doing will encourage other alumni to consider giving back to the University, which has made such a difference not only in our individual lives but in the collective life of the state.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Where We Are and Where We Ought to be Going**

In the 1980s, computerized degree audit programs, either homegrown or commercially available productions like Miami University’s DARS or Georgia State University’s PACE systems, started to appear. In the 1990s, as these programs became much more widely used and as more alternatives were developed, Student Information System vendors began to include degree audit software as an integral part of their systems. This software allowed prospective transfer students to see how their work would meet requirements at another institution.

The early days of the Web also allowed great advances in providing information to students, such as lists of open

<sup>1</sup> Brief, Rich Broderick, (ed.), University of Minnesota, The article is available at [www.umn.edu/urelate/brief/1998-10-28.html](http://www.umn.edu/urelate/brief/1998-10-28.html)

classes and degree requirements. Later, the Web permitted students to process transactions, register themselves for classes, update their own addresses, and apply to graduate. I believe the next step is to support student decision-making, either on their own or in informed conversations with their academic advisors. We are beginning to see some promising steps in this direction. I'll highlight a few of them.

#### UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT ADVISING CONTOURS

For many years, the University of Connecticut gave incoming freshmen a "Q" test for placement in math and science courses that required quantitative skills. Several years ago the paper test was migrated to the Web. A number of faculty questioned whether putting the test on the Web would encourage cheating; thus the University Senate appointed a committee to investigate. What they found was that the test, in paper or electronic form, was a poor predictor of success in these courses. The committee wondered what might be a better predictor. Someone suggested looking at the performance of previous students to see what did make a difference. Looking at several years of data on the performance of first-semester students in Q courses, they found that there was a very strong correlation between SAT I Math score and high school class rank and student success—as measured by a grade of C or higher—in quantitative courses taken in a student's first semester at the University.

Line plots showing the estimated probability of success were developed and the Web site, [www.placement.uconn.edu/contours.html](http://www.placement.uconn.edu/contours.html), was created for students and advisors to use to determine the probability of success in particular Q courses. They can choose the course, enter the SAT score and high school rank—or the SAT alone, which is a slightly less accurate predictor—and get a predicted probability of success. The student and advisor might look at several courses that could be appropriate for the student's intended major and choose the right one for the student to take. For some students, the two-semester calculus sequence might be most appropriate. For others, the three-semester sequence, which covers the same material, might be a better choice. Some students are advised to wait a semester before taking a particular quantitative course. Sometimes students do choose to ignore the prediction and select a course in which their probability of success is not so high. In those cases, the advisor might suggest getting help early in the semester—using tutoring, study groups, and supplemental instruction to improve the chance of success.

#### PENN STATE UNIVERSITY ELION SYSTEM

Penn State describes its eLion system as "an expert-based, empirically-grounded interactive system that is delivered by

the latest technologies to supplement student-advisor relationships and engage students in interactive inquiry for informed educational planning." While some aspects of eLion are found in many institutions' student access systems, it also has some innovative features to assist students with academic decision-making. For me, these are the features that make the system exciting.

- The **Academic Success** application uses a short survey and a list of potential obstacles to help students identify factors that may hinder academic success. This leads students to information and strategies to help them achieve their potential.
- **Advising Preparation** helps prepare students for a meeting with their academic advisor. It offers steps to take and provides issues to think about when preparing for the meeting, and gives students the opportunity to e-mail information to their advisor about the issues they plan to discuss at the meeting.
- **Exploring Majors** provides students with information on choosing a major and things to consider in the choice, including personal characteristics, the characteristics of the various majors, and how those mesh.
- **Course Preferences** allows students to identify majors that do not require particular courses they'd like to avoid.
- **Major Themes** helps students create a list of majors that match their interests and helps them refine the list by walking them through four steps: 1. identifying their interests; 2. selecting themes, or groups of majors, related to their interests; 3. selecting campus locations; and 4. viewing a list of majors that match their interests.

#### THE FUTURE? OR SCIENCE FICTION?

Several years ago I wrote a short story about the use of software agents in providing services to students.<sup>2</sup> The goal was to get a committee at the University of Minnesota to think about student services in a different way. The software agent, Harvey, helped a student make decisions about attending the University, choosing a major, selecting courses, getting tutoring assistance for a calculus class, finding a scholarship and a student job, applying for graduation, becoming a lifelong learner, and donating to the University.

When the story was written, it sounded more like science fiction than the future, but that may be changing. Consider the *Educause Quarterly* article describing a pilot program at the Open University of Hong Kong using software agents as teaching assistants for distance learning courses (Choy, Ng, and Tsang 2005). The agent handles routine tasks, such as sending reminder e-mails to students about upcoming face-to-face meetings, assignment due dates, and the availability of new course materials. The agent also informs the course coordinators of the status of assignment submissions. This frees the course coordinators from some of the routine tasks of course management, saving them time. The student perception was that the teacher was closely monitoring their progress in the course. They also appreciated the frequent

<sup>2</sup> The story and a discussion of software agents is contained in a paper presented at the 1997 CUMREC Conference, *Thinking About the Future: The Application of Intelligent Agents in Student Services*. The paper is available at <http://www.educause.edu/jir/library/pdf/CMR9738.pdf>

communication from the instructor, which was handled, of course, by the agent.

## Conclusions and Items To Work On

In the early days of the Web, we made great advances in providing information to students. Now the next step is to support student decision-making. The following are suggestions to consider:

### ADVISING CONTOURS FOR ALL

Getting entering freshmen into the appropriate quantitative courses was the impetus for the development of the Advising Contours, but I can see the potential application for other students and other types of courses. How about for the senior chemistry or electrical engineering major who needs to take a literature course in order to meet a graduation requirement? Advising Contours are an example of what we can do with the data we already have in our student systems. We should continue to look for ways to use the data to benefit students.

### IMPROVING THE ADVISOR ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

Earlier I discussed the problem of advisor assignment. How do you best connect students with faculty who share their academic interests? David Yakof, a political science faculty member at the University of Connecticut, has proposed a system to collect information on faculty interests and allow students to use a series of pull-down menus to find faculty whose academic interests match their own. The secretary in the Political Science Department could also use the system to match a student to an appropriate advisor.

### PERSONALIZED DEGREE AUDIT PLANS

Most of our institutions have degree requirements that can be met by a multitude of courses, sometimes hundreds of them. Why shouldn't a student be able to specify the courses she is considering and when she would like to graduate? And why can't the system keep track of them and give her a plan of action, taking into consideration prerequisites, when courses are going to be offered, likely course availability, and other factors?

### BUILDING REGISTRATION AROUND DEGREE AUDIT

If we had these personalized degree audits, why couldn't we use them in registration? At the student's registration time, the system could reserve spots in the courses needed for that semester and allow the student to confirm or modify those selections. Even without a personalized degree audit, why not have the registration system make course recommendations

based on the requirements that are still outstanding, perhaps suggesting courses like Amazon suggests books? The "Recommended Classes" feature of the Web-based Interactive Advisement system at the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff does something like this.<sup>3</sup> Degree audit systems are wonderful, but we need to make sure that we don't stop there.

### EXPERT SYSTEMS

An expert system is a computer system that emulates the decision-making of a human expert in a narrow domain. Building on the expertise of real human advisors, one might construct a system that helped students solve certain problems—like choosing a major—on their own. Penn State's eLion system is a very good start in this direction. Expert systems and software agents are just two of the new tools that we ought to be looking at to employ in the future.

### SUPPLEMENT AND ENHANCE THE INTERACTION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND ADVISORS

Studies show that the connection with a faculty member, advisor, or staff member makes a tremendous difference in student attitudes towards an institution. We don't want to replace the interaction between students and advisors, but we do want to enhance and supplement those interactions.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Web-based Interactive Student Advisement (WISA)*, Zaiyong Tang, John Fluker, Xiaohu Zeng, Proceedings of the 1999 North America Web-Based Learning Conference, University of New Brunswick. <http://naweb.unb.ca/99/proceedings/tang/>

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## Two Methodologies for Structured Organizational Change: Lessons from the University of British Columbia

*by* Gaylea Wong and Lisa Collins

The University of British Columbia (UBC) has experienced tremendous growth since its establishment in 1917, but it has become clear that some of its business practices have needed modification to meet with the new demands of expansion and technological change. In addition to ongoing renewal efforts, UBC has successfully employed structured organizational change methodologies, including Business Process Redesign and Process Streamlining. This article gives an overview of our experience with structured change methodologies.

### Process Streamlining and Business Process Redesign

Hammer and Stanton (1995) define Business Process Redesign (BPR) as “the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business processes to bring about dramatic improvements in performance.” The key to the BPR methodology lies in three defining words: *fundamental*, *radical*, and *dramatic*. Redesign, or reengineering, by definition, is not glorified downsizing, job restructuring, reorganization, automation, or even a traditional business project. Rather, it deals with the fundamental questions about why we do what we do, and focuses not on what is, but what should be. It is about reinventing, not improving, enhancing, or modifying. The optimum outcome of reengineering is found in “quantum leaps in performance.” It is essential to discard the old ways and introduce a totally new approach (Hammer and Champy 1993).

Though the prospect of dramatic and radical change is often daunting, the BPR methodology is designed not just to change, but to dramatically improve processes by reorganizing and restructuring how tasks are combined and completed. Redesign of processes naturally leads to further improvement within the rest of the organization.

Process Streamlining (PS) may also result in dramatic changes and improvements in performance. Assessing which

methodology is best to apply in a given situation is not always easy, so it helps to understand the differences between a BPR and a PS project. The degree of radical change expected and the timeline for implementation are two distinguishing features, as exemplified in Table 1.

	Business Process Redesign	Process Streamlining
<b>Degree of Resulting Change</b>	Very High	Medium-High
<b>Primary Assumption</b>	The organization may need to add or discard a certain process or set of processes. Asks: “Do we have the right set of processes in place?”	The organization is generally doing the right things. Asks: “How well do we execute the processes in place and can we improve them?”
<b>Design Time</b>	Up to 8 Weeks	8–10 Days
<b>Implementation Time</b>	Up to Several Years	6 Months

Both methodologies rely on a “*Case for Action*” document that is developed by a planning body before the team begins its work. A key feature of the Case for Action is the careful articulation of the desired end result, *i.e.*, in very specific terms, what it is that the team is set out to accomplish. The Case for Action also specifies the scope of the project and identifies any particular constraints, such as legislation that is not easily changed or a deadline that absolutely cannot be avoided. The importance of the Case for Action should not be underestimated, as a team will refer to this document repeatedly as they undertake their work.

One other critical element for success is a commitment from senior management to accept the team’s solutions as long as they fall within any specified constraints and work

towards a satisfactory end result. This commitment empowers team members to explore the most creative solutions and set aside preconceptions of what would likely be acceptable to senior management.

### **UBC's Student Information Management Plan BPR Project Summary**

In 2000, Enrollment Services sought to improve its general operations, and focused its attention on interactions with new and prospective students. Providing excellent service to students is a key goal for UBC—mentioned both in the V-P Students Strategic Plan and in *Trek 2010*, the University's Strategic Plan. Despite a very strong commitment to excellent service, staff members often experienced frustration at being unable to serve increasing numbers of students—some of whom needed help to navigate complex processes and systems—because of inadequate resources. To improve our processes and service, we applied BPR principles in order to make radical changes in the way we recruited and admitted undergraduate students. The project, known as the Student Information Management Plan (SIMPL), is described below.

A nine-member BPR team, which included six staff, an emeritus faculty member, an undergraduate student, and the partner of a graduate student, met four (sometimes five) days a week between September and November 2000 to develop the new design. During this time, the team followed an adaptation of Hammer's highly structured BPR approach designed for higher education. The methodology used by the team included an examination of the current processes; extensive external research; more than 80 interviews with students, parents, high school counselors, faculty, staff and others; brainstorming; and development of the new design. The team analyzed the problem, researched possible solutions, designed new processes, interviewed prospective users to validate the design, and then verified and documented the design and presented it to the project's steering committee, demonstrating that it would achieve the end goal.

The following reengineering principles may further explain the intended outcome of the BPR methodology. They were the fundamental guidelines used throughout the redesign project.

- Organize work around results, not tasks.
- Capture data only once—when it is created.
- Allow decisions to be made where work is performed.
- Incorporate controls into information processing.
- Allow people who use a process to do the work.
- Work in parallel instead of in sequence.
- Treat geographically dispersed resources as one.

Other important objectives that guided the team during the redesign include the elimination of duplication within processes, provision of value-added services to all clients, simplification of processes for both staff and clients, and the elimination of bureaucracy where possible.

### **THE END RESULT**

The objective for the project was as follows:

- ▶ Create a solution that integrates all activities prospective and admitted students undertake—both student requested and institutionally required—to begin their first undergraduate degree program at UBC.
- ▶ The new solution should be easy-to-use, efficient, effective, and timely, and reflect student needs, meet their requirements, and exceed their expectations.
- ▶ The solution will anticipate student needs, eliminate unnecessary tasks and processes, and preclude a student's need to know the University's organization. It will be a one-stop, anytime, anyplace solution that is easy for all students to understand and use.

The steering committee, chaired by the University's vice president of students, made a commitment that if the BPR team designed a solution that achieved this end result, they would do everything they could to ensure it was implemented. In December of 2000, the team presented its report to the steering committee, which enthusiastically accepted the proposed design. The steering committee also supported detailed feasibility testing and the development of several pilots.

### **THE NEW DESIGN**

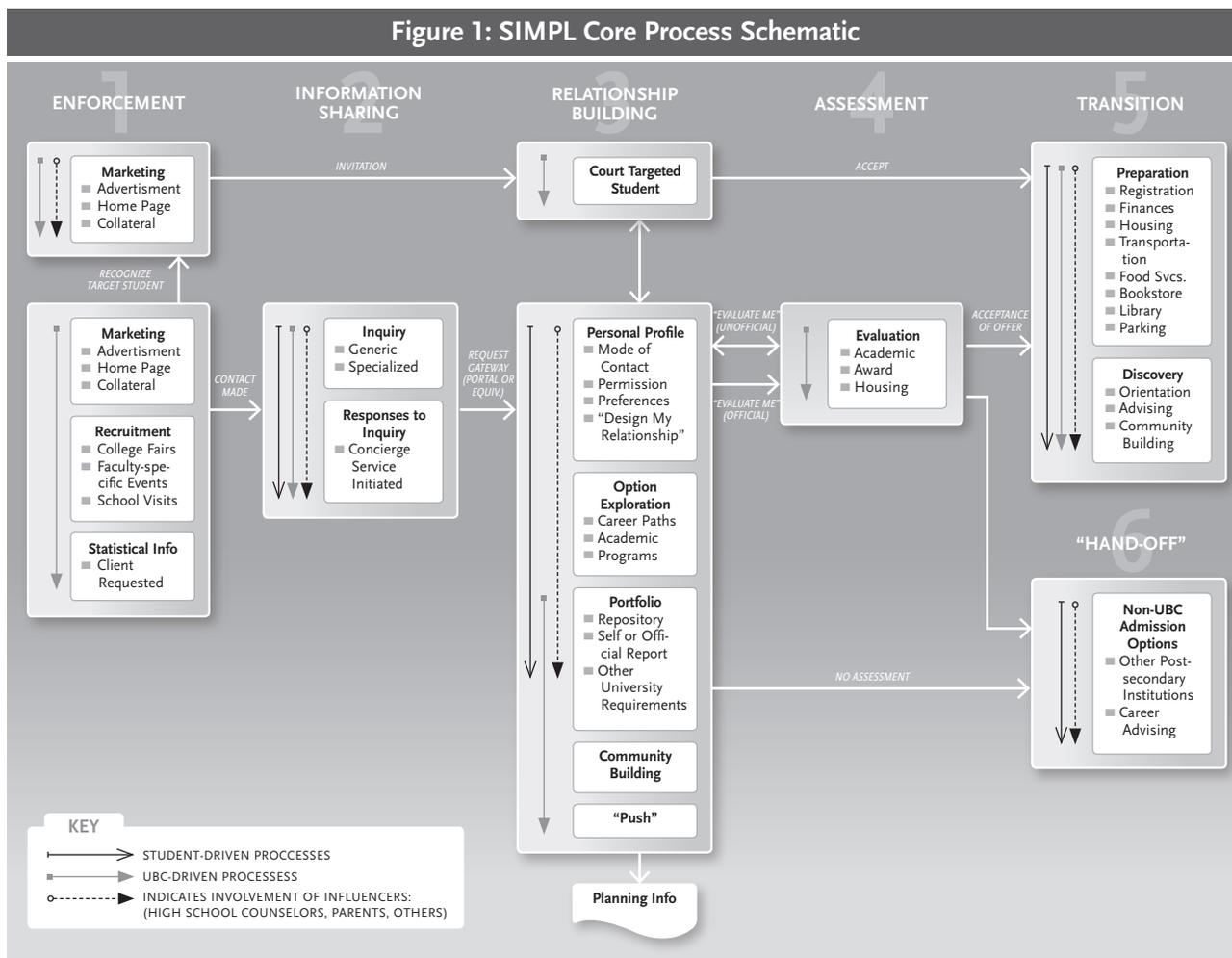
The new design rested on five fundamental concepts:

- 1 Establishment of a client care philosophy at UBC
- 2 Implementation of a Client Relationship Management System
- 3 Gathering information from students
- 4 Improved staff support, training, and development
- 5 Commitment to quality control

These formed an essential framework (see Figure 1) for the following six new core processes:

- **Enticement** includes recruitment and marketing. The new processes commence when students begin to “stream” into their academic track, typically in Grade 10. Marketing is focused on developing relationships with these students, with their high school counselors, with parents, and with others who have influence over the student's decision to attend college. Truly exceptional students are targeted and offered age-appropriate rewards.
- **Information Sharing** supplements the current inquiry and response processes. The new design requires the provision of tools for UBC staff to ensure consistent, client-focused, and personalized service. UBC applies industry standards to client care, making the institution seem smaller and friendlier.
- **Relationship Building** is a major focus of the new design. UBC aims to provide value-added services for prospective students that encourage them to build an early and strong relationship with UBC. These services are meant to help students make decisions about postsecondary options. We encourage future students to provide information—to be

Figure 1: SIMPL Core Process Schematic



collected in an electronic portfolio—which will be used both for admissions assessment and institutional planning.

- **Assessment** replaces the current admissions evaluation process, focusing instead on the admission of pre-qualified students to ensure that those students accept UBC's offer. This, with other process and system changes, frees staff to provide more support to individual students, and help them resolve any problems or difficulties.
- **Hand Off** is a brand new process, the goal of which is to find the best match between the student and his or her abilities. Instead of rejecting applicants, they will be guided to other postsecondary choices.
- **Transition** involves the improvement, integration, and streamlining of existing processes with a client-centered view. Bureaucracy is reduced so students can focus on personal transitions and academic programs, rather than on meeting University requirements.

#### OUTCOMES OF THE SIMPL PROJECT

The BPR team arrived at a solution that was student-centered and supported the key goals articulated in the University's

mission. The new processes were easy-to-use, efficient, and effective. They allowed staff to provide excellent service and focused on student needs, and the new design was able to meet student requirements and exceed their expectations.

We have been delivering modules of the SIMPL solution each year since 2000. It has radically changed how we do business in the areas of recruitment and admissions. Below are just some of the deliverables coming out of the SIMPL project.

#### Client Care Training Program (CCTP)

The CCTP addresses the client culture of Enrollment Services and helps support a client care philosophy in easy, consistent ways.

#### Personal Relationship Management System (PRM)

We continue to develop the PRM functionality in our custom Student Information System. We purchased the IntelliResponse (IR) system to give students Web access to basic information about admissions, programs, housing, fees, etc. using a natural language query interface. At present, the IR database is handling 97 percent of the requests automatically.

### Self Service and Single Point of Service Systems

It is the highest priority that students have the capability to access services through a single interface, and to receive “one-stop service” at many places.

### Web Information Support System— Knowledge Management

The deployment of the latest version of WISE—the vice president of students’ portal—together with the development of guidelines for the maintenance of the knowledge base by departments, has achieved many of the goals of this project.

- Remaining goals include a more powerful content management system, and more consistent practices in all departments for making knowledge accessible and keeping it current.
- We have begun to implement an internal knowledge management version of IntelliResponse designed to be useful to staff for training and succession management purposes.

### Consolidated Billing and Payment

Our consolidated billing application is in production, and comprises Admissions, Tuition Fee Payment, Housing, Food Services, and the Library. Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) was implemented in December 2003.

### Student Portfolio

The director of eLearning is overseeing the implementation of six pilot projects, including those in Education, Pharmacy, Agricultural Sciences, Biological Sciences, and Student Development. For the purpose of the pilots, we have contracted with Nuventive to provide a hosted solution for this year.

### Advising and Career Exploration

Careers and Communication Services have undertaken a project to redesign their Web site to enable some elements of career advising to be available online. Information for employers was available on January 31; information for students was available on February 7.

### Assessment and Admissions

The stage of self assessment and self admission has been implemented for British Columbia high school students, and proved to be very successful. Auto-acknowledging of applications was implemented for the last admission cycle, as was the ability to collect Broader Based Admission (BBA) documents. Faculty transfer and re-admission forms are also available online. Further functionality is still being developed in areas such as International Baccalaureate, college and university transfer students, and open access to the self evaluation function.

### Curriculum Approval and Implementation Process Streamline Project Summary

In May 2004, a cross-functional team of UBC faculty and staff came together for three weeks to redesign the University’s curriculum approval and implementation processes. The team

used a custom hybrid of the Business Process Redesign and Process Streamline methodologies to approach the process redesign.

The project was conceived in response to feedback from faculty that the current processes were confusing and labor intensive—they were difficult to follow, took too long, and required too much manual form-filling and proposal-chasing.

The team’s goal was to address these concerns and find ways to facilitate the academic review of new curricula. The team undertook significant internal consultation and external research to determine and test its process design ideas.

The main elements of the redesigned processes are:

- **Pilot Courses First, Approve Them Later:** This adds an unprecedented level of agility to our curriculum processes, and reflects support for revising courses in response to instructor, peer, student, and other feedback. Once the required data elements are entered into an integrated system, departments will be able to immediately offer new and revised courses for a sixteen-month pilot period. To continue offering the course after the sixteen-month pilot period, departments will have to submit the course for full approval by governing bodies.

- **Dynamically Implement New Programs and Program Changes:** Approval bodies currently devote significant amounts of their time to approving minor program changes. Removing this processing burden allows approval bodies to concentrate on reviewing and approving new programs and major program changes. Minor changes will be implemented upon approval by the department head. Such approval will include any necessary consultation.

Full review and final approval of minor program changes will happen as part of the Five-Year Curriculum Review (see below). New programs and major program changes will be submitted for full approval at the department, faculty, graduate council (if graduate), senate, and board levels. This approval process will be greatly enhanced and expedited through the use of technology.

- **Implement a Five-Year Departmental Curriculum Review:** Current unit reviews do not usually include detailed scrutiny of curriculum as it naturally evolves. Departments, with assistance from the appropriate standing committee of Senate, should review their own curricula once every five years. Minor changes to courses and programs would be considered part of this review, rather than approved individually prior to implementation. This ongoing review process would aid in the accurate representation of department programs and course offerings in university publications.

- **Systems Integration and Development: The Technology Boost:** This Technology Boost is a large scale, resource intensive project that will require:

- ▶ The integration of existing UBC systems and the development of new ones, such that the system houses all the necessary attributes about courses and programs and so that the various parts of the system all “talk” to each other;

- ▶ The development of customized reporting functionality and user interfaces;
- ▶ The addition of workflow technology that would allow proposals to move through approval processes in an automated fashion;
- ▶ The modification of system security to support distributed access and recognize distinct user groups;
- ▶ The development of wizards, templates, examples, pick lists, decision support tools, etc.

#### PS IMPLEMENTATION STATUS TO DATE

The Curriculum Process Streamline Team's solutions have been met with widespread support throughout the University. The team report was finalized in November 2004, and team members began a series of presentations to senior administrators and approval bodies. Feedback from these presentations demonstrated that the approval process changes are even more tightly linked to the Technology Boost than the team originally envisioned. Although early suggestions were that some of the process changes could be implemented prior to the development of the technological support systems, there has been a growing recognition that we cannot do one without the other.

The report has been endorsed by the Vice President–Academic & Provost, the Vice President–Students, the UBC Committee of Deans, and the Senate Curriculum Committee. The academic principles of the report were granted full Senate approval in May of 2005.

Enrollment Services, in consultation with our faculty partners, will now prepare a plan to implement the Technology Boost. Student Systems staff will work with team members and senior administrators to secure the necessary resources and phase in the various technological pieces. Full implementation will likely take more than two years, with one or two faculties volunteering to pilot the new technology and processes prior to full rollout across campus. As with all structured organizational change projects, the work truly begins with implementation.

## Looking Forward

The two projects described in this article are but two of at least four BPR and PS projects undertaken at UBC to date. Other projects have included the streamlining of research grant application management and a complete redesign of human resources processes, including benefits sign-on and payroll.

Participants from earlier structured change projects are much sought after as team leaders and consultants on upcoming BPR and PS projects, and a train-the-trainer culture has developed. As successful implementation of each team's solutions proceeds, most of the critics are being won over.

Structured change methodologies are definitely labor intensive and require teamwork and high levels of commitment, but these investments have paid out huge dividends in organizational performance at UBC. If your institution is in need of a fundamental change, and “dramatic improvements in performance” sound appealing, Business Process Redesign or Process Streamlining may be worthy of consideration.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Gaylea Wong** is Associate Registrar and Director for Records and Registration at the University of British Columbia. She has more than 20 years of experience in higher education administration and has held leadership roles in various professional associations both in Canada and the U.S. Gaylea served as PACRAO Vice President for Professional Development from 2000 to 2002. She was the SIMPL project coordinator during the planning and team activity phases, a member of the implementation planning committee, and currently sits on the advisory committee for SIMPL.

**Lisa Collins** is the Assistant Registrar, Senate & Curriculum Services at the University of British Columbia. Lisa recently completed a Master of Library and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia, focusing on information-seeking behavior and information architecture. Lisa's professional interests lie in the governance of postsecondary educational institutions in their political, cultural, and legislative contexts, as well as in the development of sound institutional policy. Lisa is also currently working toward certification as a Registered Parliamentarian.

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## Accreditation Mills

*by* Allen Ezell

In the Winter 2002 issue of *C&U*, I authored the article, “Diploma Mills—Past, Present, and Future.” In this article, a diploma mill was defined as “an organization that awards degrees without requiring students to meet educational standards for such degrees; it either receives fees from its so-called students on the basis of fraudulent misrepresentation, or it makes it possible for the recipients of its degrees to perpetrate a fraud on the public.”

Diploma mills (degree mills) do not operate in a vacuum. To buttress their alleged legitimacy, they require support from:

- purported independent academic referral entities
- accreditation mills
- transcript and records storage facilities
- graduate verification entities
- credential evaluation companies.

Dr. Judith Eaton, president, Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), described the negative impact of diploma mills. “Degree mills are a disservice to society. They undermine confidence in higher education. They undermine confidence in credentials.” The same can be reiterated for accreditation mills, but more importantly, it should be noted that they devalue the entire legitimate accreditation process. Degree mills and accreditation mills cast a shadow on higher education. (For more information, see CHEA Fact Sheet #6, “Important Questions About ‘Diploma Mills’ and ‘Accreditation Mills,’” available at [www.chea.org/pdf/fact\\_sheet\\_6\\_diploma\\_mills.pdf](http://www.chea.org/pdf/fact_sheet_6_diploma_mills.pdf)).

### Accreditation

Accreditation is defined by Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary as “to give official authorization to or approval of; to provide with credentials; to recognize or vouch for as conforming with a standard; to recognize (as an educational

institution) as maintaining standards that qualify the graduates for admission to higher or more specialized institutions or for professional practice; to consider or recognize as outstanding.” Others simply define accreditation as “the act of granting credit or recognition, especially with regard to an educational institution that maintains suitable standards.”

According to [CollegeDegreeGuide.com](http://CollegeDegreeGuide.com), accreditation has two basic fundamental purposes:

- 1 to assure the quality of the institution or program, and
- 2 to assist in the improvement of the institution or program.

Accreditation also establishes a benchmark, which then eases the transition or move from one accredited school to another, and the acceptance of academic records from each. It also provides a legitimate base for graduates to enter the workforce. Accreditation does not, however, provide automatic acceptance by an institution of credit earned at another institution, nor does it give assurance that employers will accept graduates. It is always the responsibility of the receiving institution or employer to verify the applicant’s credentials.

The United States government does not accredit colleges, unlike many foreign countries. Similarly, the federal government does not accredit or conduct academic evaluation of foreign colleges. Generally, this is left to the discretion of the respective Ministries of Education or other appropriate bodies. The United States Department of Education (DOE) recognizes eight regional, eleven national, and 66 specialized and professional accrediting organizations. For a complete listing, visit <http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html>.

### Accreditation Mills

No standard definition of an accreditation mill exists. However, I believe it can be defined as:

An organization—not recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, nor by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation—that grants “accreditation” without requiring the purported college or university to meet generally accepted standards for such “accreditation.” It has no concern over the quality of instruction, nor with improvement at the entity which it “accredits.” It either receives fees from its so-called “accredited” institutions on the basis of fraudulent misrepresentations, or it makes it possible for the purported college or university receiving such “accreditation” (or its “graduates”) to perpetrate a fraud on the public.

Further, an accreditation mill:

- is a purported accrediting entity that is not recognized by the U. S. Department of Education, CHEA, nor by any recognized regional or specialized accrediting association.
- has no official recognition, and cannot impart the same on others.
- offers “accreditation status” to institutions in a short amount of time.
- offers permanent or lifetime accreditation status without requirement for subsequent reviews.
- has few, or any of its standards for accreditation published.
- has no rigid standards relating to academics or staff (also has no procedures in place to measure the level of quality of instruction to ensure that it is maintained at a level acceptable to the body that issues the degree granting right).
- sometimes “accredits” schools without their knowledge (in an effort to give itself credibility).
- does not perform onsite inspections prior to (or after) it “accredits” a school.
- only communicates by mail and telephone.
- does not operate at “arm’s length” to the institutions it “accredits.”
- frequently makes false statements regarding its address, ownership, staff, length of time in business, and schools that it “accredits,” recognizes, and with which it is associated.
- sells its worthless “accreditation” for a flat up-front fee, with a stated amount for renewals.
- sometimes uses addresses in Washington, D.C., in an effort to imply a government affiliation or national image.
- may even select a name for itself that is similar to other legitimate entities, such as: The International Distance Education and Training Council (IDETC) vs. The Distance and Education Training Council (DETC) [legitimate entity].
- misleads or defrauds “graduates” of institutions that it “accredits.”
- by engaging in all the above, makes it possible for “graduates” of institutions it “accredits” to defraud third parties, and others who rely on the degree/transcript/accreditation process.

As stated earlier, the fundamental purposes of legitimate accreditation are to assure the quality of the institution or program, and to assist in the improvement of the institution or program. Accreditation mills, on the other hand, are certainly not concerned with either of these goals. Accreditation mills are not interested in quality, institutions, or programs. The sole purpose of an accreditation mill is to help sell the wares of the degree mill. An accreditation mill is strictly a marketing tool used by a degree mill. This is part of their deception and camouflage, all designed to hide the true worthlessness of the school.

Degree mill operators know that the legitimate accreditation process is lengthy, expensive, and detailed, and that it involves a comparison of a school’s curriculum, faculty, and administrative practices against strict standards. They fully realize their entity will never obtain legitimate accreditation by a recognized accrediting entity, and thus they subvert the accreditation process, by either creating their own accrediting entity or obtaining accreditation from an unrecognized entity, which may have low or no standards.

For example, Bircham University ([www.bircham.edu](http://www.bircham.edu)) depicts the logos of seventeen different entities on its ‘recognition and affiliations’ page. Six of these “accredit” distance learning institutions. I thought having one “accreditor” was enough for a school; it is interesting to think how many people will fall victim to this display.

In a recent article by Jane Knight, University of Toronto, she states that the problem of accreditation mills is all the more confusing to potential students in this age of cross-border accreditation providers. In her article, “International Race for Accreditation Stars in Cross-Border Education,” she notes that education is becoming “stateless.” The challenge is to distinguish between the bona fide (those we know we can trust), and the rogue accreditors. (This article is available at [www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/ihe\\_pdf/ihe40.pdf](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/ihe_pdf/ihe40.pdf).)

Our export of degree mills and accreditation mills casts doubt on the reliability of legitimate degrees conferred in the United States and of accreditation itself. Students outside the United States are particularly vulnerable since they have limited access to information. The “American” approach may be especially confusing to a student in a country where a Ministry of Education prevails. To students outside of the u.s., the mere fact that the school and accrediting entity are “American” may be the most significant reason to accept them as genuine. Coupled with the “right” name or address, a student can be convinced of their legitimacy.

### Examples

Both degree mills and accreditation mills use Washington, D.C. addresses to add perceived “legitimacy” to their entities. The University of Berkley, formerly of Berkley, Michigan (now operated from a garage in Erie, Pennsylvania) uses a telephone answering service near Chicago, and touts a large number of school teachers and school district administrators, along with numerous military personnel, among its gradu-

ates. University of Berkley sells “honorary degrees” via its Web site, “University of Berkley Online” (www.uofb.com). University of Berkley is “accredited” by NAPFEW (New Millennium Accrediting Partnership for Educators Worldwide), 2020 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., #750, Washington, D.C. 20006. On July 8, 2005, the Attorney General of Pennsylvania filed suit against Dennis J. Globosky, dba The University of Berkley, indicating that when Globosky rented the above Washington, D.C. mail drop address for NAPFEW, he indicated this acronym stood for “National Association of Police, Firefighters and Emergency Workers.”

Another example is Americus University, located at 611 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, Washington, D.C. [this is actually the address of a UPS Store]. It claims to be “accredited” by the International Distance Learning Council (address was unknown, but it shared a telephone number with Americus University). Americus University even advertised that degrees could be obtained in 20 days. Why do you think Americus University selected a Washington, D.C. address, with a name similar to a legitimate, accredited university, with name recognition, (American University) in the same city?

### Items to Be Aware—and Wary—of Regarding Degree Mills And Accreditation

- ▶ Accreditation is claimed from a fake or unrecognized agency.
- ▶ The fake or unrecognized accreditor also accredits legitimate schools.
- ▶ The accreditor offers a confirming telephone service or hotline for reassurance.
- ▶ As a global or international university, they don't need government approval.
- ▶ Explaining at length why accreditation is not important.\*
- ▶ Claiming that Harvard and Oxford aren't accredited either.
- ▶ Accreditation claimed from a place where the word is used differently.
- ▶ Claiming accreditation is impossible because of church-state separation.
- ▶ Approval or accreditation from a fake or unrecognized country.
- ▶ Fake accreditation claimed from a real country or national agency.
- ▶ The right to confer degrees comes from wording in their articles of incorporation.

\* Some of these mills state institutional accreditation is unnecessary, since they are in fact “accredited” by the good deeds of their graduates.

On September 11, 2003, American University sued Americus University for adopting the American University design mark on their Web site, having diplomas similar in design, and using a domain name that was “confusingly similar.” On October 30, 2003, the National Arbitration Forum panel ruled that the respondent registered and used the domain name www.americusuniversity.com in bad faith, and the domain name was ordered to be transferred from the respondent to the complainant. Although American



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University prevailed in this litigation, Americus University had operated from June 8, 2001 until October 30, 2003. Who knows how many degrees and transcripts were issued in that period. Those fake degrees and transcripts will continue to surface for years.

We have seen the use of Washington, D.C. addresses to denote government affiliation in many education frauds, including both degree mills, accreditation mills, along with academic records storage entities. Everyone wants a Washington, D.C. address and postmark to add support to their criminal enterprise.

### **Magnitude of the Problem**

In our recently published book, *Degree Mills: The Billion Dollar Industry That Has Sold Over a Million Fake Diplomas*, Dr. John Bear and I list over 200 fake, unrecognized, and dubious accreditation agencies. Table 1 (on the following page) lists some of the more egregious accreditation mills we most often encounter (and some of the schools they “accredit”).

When taking a close look at the names used by these accreditation mills, the use of the words American, Association, Council, Distance, International, National, United States, World, and Worldwide are designed to convey a broad-based image of legitimacy for their entity, if not government affiliation, and a national or international character to their mill. This deception is by design.

### **Government Action**

Since 2003, numerous agencies and departments of the United States government have stepped up measures for legitimacy after it was found out that a Department of Homeland Security employee had obtained employment with fraudulent credentials. As a result, the Senate and House of Representatives held hearings in 2004. On January 27, 2005, due to the exposure on Capitol Hill and the General Accounting Office (GAO) citing numerous federal employees with degrees from degree mills (or from schools with unrecognized accreditation [accreditation mills]), the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) took action.

OPM has now established further educational requirements for those seeking employment with the federal government. OPM stated, “Bogus degrees from so-called degree mills [“unregulated institutions of higher education, granting degrees with few or no academic requirements”] may not be used to qualify for federal jobs or salaries. The American people expect their public servants to be honest and forthcoming.” Now, only degrees accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education will be accepted.

Additionally, on February 3, 2005, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued a consumer alert titled, “Degree Mills: Degrees of Deception,” in which they discussed accreditation mills—accreditation from a bogus, but official-sounding agency created by the degree mill. They also mentioned the basic six warning signs of degree mills (no

studies/exams; no attendance; flat fee; no waiting; click here to order now, and advertising through spam or pop-ups). The FTC also issued a publication for employers titled “Avoid Fake-Degree Burns by Researching Academic Credentials.” (If all businesses would take the time to verify all presented credentials up front, think of the problems and embarrassment that could later be avoided. This would go a long way to dry up the market for fraudulent credentials.)

### **State Laws**

Each state has its own laws governing private, postsecondary education. States like Oregon, Michigan, and New Jersey lead the way in establishing standards and enforcement. There may be some light at the end of the tunnel regarding state legislation outlawing degree mills and accreditation mills.

#### **WYOMING**

Wyoming recently had a chance to create some tough laws in this arena, however, these failed to pass. Thus, Wyoming will continue to be the home base for many degree mills and also the home for several academic records storage/verification businesses.

#### **MAINE**

The state of Maine now has proposed legislation (Sec. I. 20-A MRSA Chapter 410—“False Academic Degrees or Certificates”), which defines accreditation, accreditation mill, diploma mill, degree mill, duly authorized institution of higher learning, false academic degree, and substandard school or institution of higher education. Further, Section 10802 states,

*This bill makes it illegal to issue, manufacture, and use false academic degrees or certificates to obtain employment, to obtain promotion or higher compensation in employment, to obtain admission to an institution of higher learning or in connection with any business, trade, profession or occupation. This bill also authorizes the Department of Education to protect consumers by providing Internet site information naming and updating known own state, national and international diploma mills, degree mills, accreditation mills and substandard schools.*

#### **TEXAS**

Proposed amendments to the Texas Education Code, Section 61.302, have just been sent to the Governor of Texas (to be effective September 1, 2005), outlawing “fraudulent, substandard, or fictitious” degrees; and issuance or use of a degree from an institution that is not accredited by a recognized accrediting agency. This statute prohibits the use of such degrees to obtain employment, or obtain license or certificate to practice a trade or profession or occupation, for promotion, compensation, admission to an educational program, or gain a position in government.

This proposed new legislation may be partially the result of the recent revelations that officials of Trinity Southern

**Table 1: Examples of Accreditation Mills**

Accreditation Mill	"Accredited School"
American Council of Colleges and Universities	St. James University
American Council of Private Colleges and Universities	Hamilton University
Association for Online Academic Accreditation	
Association for Online Academic Excellence	
Association for Online Distance Learning	Almeda College and University
Association of Distance Learning Programs	International College of Homeland Security, Irish International University
Association of Private Colleges and Universities (formed by founder of Trinity College and University)	
Council for International Education Accreditation	Ashworth College
Council for National Academic Accreditation	Will accredit anyone for \$1,850
Distance Graduation Accrediting Association	St. Regis University, Capitol University
Distance Learning Council of Europe	Wexford University
Educational Quality Accrediting Commission	Bircham Internationall University, American Coastline University, Irish International
European Committee for Home and Online Education	University of Dorchester, Dunham, Strassford, Shaftesbury, Stafford
European Council for Distance and Open Learning	Universityof Palmers Green, San Moritz, Harrington University
Higher Accreditation Services Association	Ellington, Lexington, Stanton University
International Accreditation Agency for Online Universities	Belford University
International Accrediting Commission for Postsecondary Institutions	Adam Smith University
International Accreditation Society	Southern Pacific University
International Commission for Excellence in Higher Education	Monticello University
International Commission for Higher Education (Accreditation Commission)	
International Distance Education and Training Council (IDETC)	American Central University
International Distance Learning Accreditation Council	Americus University
Midwestern States Accreditation Agency	American Western University
National Academy of Higher Education	Madison University, Concordia University—offers a degree in 12 hours
National Accreditation Association	American International University
National Association for Private Post Secondary Education	
National Association of Open Campus Colleges	Southwestern University
National Board of Education (NBOE)	St. Regis University
National Distance Learning Accreditation Council	Suffield College & University
New Millennium Accrediting Partnership for Educators Worldwide (NAPFEW)	U. of Berkley
North American College and University Accrediting Agency	
The American Bureau of Higher Education	Concordia College
United Nations Convivium for International Education	
United States Distance Education & Training Council	
West European Accrediting Society	Loyola, Lafayette, Cromwell University
Western Association of Schools and Colleges	Loyola, Roosevelt, Cromwell University
World Association of Universities and Colleges	American World University, Edison, Cambridge State University, and previously William Howard Taft University
World Online Education Accrediting Commission	Ashwood University
Worldwide Accrediting Commission	Loyola, Paris; DePaul

University in Dallas, Texas, had awarded an M.B.A. to Colby Nolan—a Pennsylvania Assistant Attorney General’s cat. After this revelation, officials in Texas took action against Trinity Southern University.

Just think of the implication of these statutes. If each state had such laws, and enforced them, this would seriously impede the growing market for fraudulent credentials. By eliminating the demand side, the supply side will dry up in time.

### **What can we do about this problem?**

Like degree mills, accreditation mills like to operate in the dark, without a lot of fanfare. Very few have ever advertised their existence, other than having a Web site. Of course, the best way we can rid ourselves of this problem is through legislation, followed by enforcement. I see no national legislation on the horizon regarding either degree mills or accreditation mills, thus it is up to each state to police itself. If each state would pass legislation outlawing the manufacture, possession, and use of any type of educational credential (either counterfeit or just worthless), and forbid the use of any educational credential that is not issued by an institution accredited by an entity recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or CHEA, we would be farther ahead in this battle.

If you encounter an accreditation mill, obtain copies of its literature, Web site, requirements for accreditation, lists of their “accredited” members, etc. Now that you are armed with facts and evidence, consider contacting your State Attorney General, Consumer Protection Department, or your state governing body regulating private postsecondary education. Also consider contacting a local investigative reporter (always looking for a juicy story), the education writer at your local newspaper, or a television investigative reporter. By bringing these criminal actions to the forefront, you can help eliminate them.

In 1983, two investigative reporters at *The Arizona Republic* newspaper (Richard Robertson and Jerry Seper) recognized that Arizona had a problem with degree mills. Their investi-

gations resulted in a series of front page articles about the numerous degree mills which then operated from Arizona. To prove their point as to exactly how easy it was to set up a school, the two reporters incorporated their own school—the University of the Republic—and of course, also incorporated their own accrediting entity—Southwest Accrediting Commission. They then placed an advertisement in *The Washington Post* offering degrees for sale. In a short amount of time, and with less than \$100, they formed both their university and accreditor. Then the reporters went public.

One of their stories, “Diploma Mills: A Festering Sore on Arizona Education,” so embarrassed the state legislature, that new laws were passed in Arizona outlawing degree mills. The result was that Arizona degree mills either went out of business, or just moved next door to Utah.

Legitimate accreditation is extremely important, as the federal government renders its decisions about institutional and program eligibility for student financial aid and other federal grants. Thus, it is up to us to remain vigilant concerning accreditation mills, and to take action when they are observed. We must police our own profession. Take action and become a part of the solution.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Allen Ezell** is a retired FBI agent who conducted the FBI’s “Operation DIP-SCAM (Diploma Scam)” in the 1980s. He is co-author, with John Bear, of *Degree Mills: The Billion-Dollar Industry That Has Sold Over a Million Fake Diplomas*, published by Prometheus Books in January 2005. In September 2004, he testified on degree mills and transcript fraud before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education in the Workforce, Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness. His article *Diploma Mills—Past, Present and Future* can be found in the Winter 2002 (Vol. 77, No. 3) issue of *College and University*. Mr. Ezell has been a frequent speaker at AACRAO state, regional, and national conferences for 20 years.

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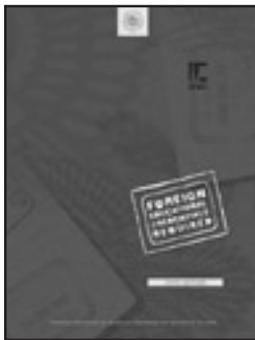
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