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Assessing the Decision to “Forward Place” Students in a Math Sequence
BY STEPHEN CRYNES

Agents of Change: Roles, Barriers, and Opportunities for College Admissions Professionals and High School Counselors
BY CHRISTOPHER W. TREMBLAY

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**Correction**

In the Volume 88, Number 2 (Fall 2012) issue of *College and University* the article titled “The Impact of MOOCs on Higher Education” incorrectly stated that Colorado State University is accepting transfer credit from Udacity; Colorado State University-Global Campus (CSU-Global) is the campus that accepts the Udacity transfer credit.

CSU-Global is an independent, 100 percent online university. It holds accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission and is statutorily independent from sister campuses CSU in Fort Collins and CSU-Pueblo.

All three universities are part of the Colorado State University System, and are governed by the same Board of Governors.
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This study examined the use of placement tests as a means to advance (forward place) students in their math sequence. Freshmen who used the math placement test to advance in their math sequence did as well in their first math courses as freshmen students who placed directly into the same courses based on their ACT/SAT scores.
Extensive literature has focused on developmental math and the validity of placement tests. The onus now is on validating decisions that are made on the basis of placement test scores. The current study assesses the practice of “forward placing”—that is, of moving students forward one or more math courses than their ACT or SAT score warrants. This practice has the potential to benefit students by advancing them in the curriculum and thereby freeing up credit hours and tuition dollars for other courses. Enrolling from the outset in the second math course in a sequence is clearly advantageous in terms of time and progress toward degree. However, a notable disadvantage would accrue if students were not prepared to succeed in the more advanced course: Their GPAs would suffer, and in the most extreme cases, students might need to repeat the course. Finally, it is worth considering whether testing resources are being wasted on an ineffective practice.

Consider an example of forward placing: A student whose ACT or SAT score qualifies him for pre-calculus takes a placement test to determine whether he can test out of pre-calculus and into Calculus I. Doing so would enable him to use the credit hours that would have been allocated to pre-calculus for another subject and to advance in the required curriculum. Such a scenario might appeal particularly to the business student whose curriculum begins with pre-calculus and requires a sequence of three math courses up to Business Calculus II.

Forward placing has not been assessed to determine whether participating students succeed at the higher level of math and are truly benefiting from this practice. One way to do so is to investigate the grade distribution and math GPA of students who are forward placed: If students who are forward placed have comparable grade distributions and math GPAs to peers who place into the higher-level math course solely on the basis of their ACT or SAT score, then forward placing should be considered a beneficial practice.

**BACKGROUND**

**ACT and SAT Scores**

This study focuses on a single university in the mid-south that uses two main data sources—ACT/SAT scores and scores from ACT’s COMPASS test—to place entering freshmen into math courses. In essence, the university uses both a one- and two-stage testing process. If the student’s ACT or SAT score is considered valid, then it is used for placement and the process involves only one stage. However, if the student’s scores have expired or if the student wishes to enroll in a higher-level course, then placement is a two-stage process that includes COMPASS testing. The university offers three entry-level math courses: Math for Critical Thinking, Pre-Calculus for Business, and College Algebra. Math for Critical Thinking typically is taken by majors who require only one math course and so is not included in this study. The courses at the next level are Calculus I and Elementary Functions.

**COMPASS Placement Tests**

COMPASS is a product of ACT that measures a variety of math skills. It is a comprehensive, adaptive program designed to help place students in the appropriate math course. The ACT and COMPASS tests are similar and measure many, but not all, of the same skills. Nevertheless, students’ scores on these tests cannot be considered equal. (That said, ACT does provide a concordance for comparing the test scores.) The university in this study uses three of the COMPASS tests: Intermediate Algebra, College Algebra, and Trigonometry. A combination of students’ ACT and COMPASS scores is used to place them in math courses. (See Table 1 for cut scores for course placement.)
Students may take the COMPASS test twice per enrollment period; test scores are valid only for one year.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In an effort to advance students in their coursework, academic advisors encourage students to take a placement test so they can qualify to start at a higher level of math than what is stated on their majors’ requirement sheets. The benefit to students is that they can use the freed-up credit hours as they wish; the risk is that students’ placement test scores may not accurately reflect their math skills, with the result that they may receive lower grades in an advanced-level math course than if had they worked through the math sequence as stipulated. This could adversely affect their overall GPAs and limit their future academic options. ACT/SAT and COMPASS scores are somewhat correlated, but the two-stage process may result in contradictory scores, as, for example, when the ACT/SAT score indicates that a student is not prepared for the higher-level course but the COMPASS score suggests that he is.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine whether students benefit from being placed forward in their math sequence. To benefit, students must earn the same grade or higher in the second-level math course as they would have had they taken the first-level course.

**Assumptions**

This study has three foundational assumptions:

- The university’s cut scores for ACT/SAT are accurate, and students are successful in the math course in which they are placed, be it entry level or higher, if they earn a grade of C or higher.
- Students who pass a math course with a grade of C or higher are adequately prepared to pass the next-level math course with a grade of C or higher.
- ACT/SAT scores reflect students’ math self-efficacy regardless of when the test was taken.

**STUDENT GROUPINGS**

Forward placement usually involves retesting students who already have “active” ACT scores; however, this study includes students who were required to take the COMPASS placement test because their ACT/SAT scores would have been more than a year old at the start of the fall semester. They were included in part to increase the size of some comparison groups and because ACT/SAT scores do reflect students’ math ability. No information was available that indicated the date or level of the last math course students had taken prior to entering the university, so ACT/SAT scores were interpreted as reflecting students’ ability rather than their current knowledge. A student may have taken the ACT/SAT more than a year ago but may have continued taking math courses until she graduated, or she may have stopped taking math after earning an ACT/SAT score with which she was satisfied. Students with older ACT/SAT scores were included in this study; every student had an active COMPASS score.

For the purposes of this study, students were placed into one of four different groups based on their ACT/SAT and COMPASS scores. The “Forward-placed” group included students who were forward placed—that is, they had ACT/SAT scores that placed them into the entry-level course but had COMPASS scores that placed them into

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Entrance Exams</th>
<th>COMPASS Placement Tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>SAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Business Calculus</td>
<td>23-25</td>
<td>540-590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Algebra</td>
<td>23-25</td>
<td>540-590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Calculus</td>
<td>26 or higher</td>
<td>600 or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Calculus for Science</td>
<td>26 or higher</td>
<td>600 or higher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Course Placement Requirements
the second-level math course. Forward-placed students chose to enroll in the second-level math course (N=102). The “Declined” group had the same criteria—that is, they had ACT/SAT scores that placed them into the entry-level course but had COMPASS scores that placed them into the second-level math course; however, they chose to enroll in the entry-level math course (N=12). (Clearly, given the opportunity to advance in their math sequence, the vast majority—89.5 percent—did so.) The “Entry-placed” group and the “Second-level” group served as control groups. Entry-placed students were placed into entry-level math courses on the basis of both their ACT/SAT and COMPASS scores (N=150); Second-level students were placed into the second-level math course on the basis of both their ACT/SAT and COMPASS scores (N=65). Students were assigned to the groups on the basis, first, of their ACT/SAT scores and then on the basis of their COMPASS scores.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS**

The following questions guided this study:

- What are the grade distribution and mean GPA in the first math course taken in the first fall semester for each of the groups? It was hypothesized that the grade distribution for each group would be the same and that there would be no statistically significant difference in mean GPA.
  - H₁: Forward-placed first math course GPA = Declined, Entry Level, and Second Level
  - H₀: Forward-placed first math course GPA ≠ Declined, Entry Level, and Second Level

- What are the grade distribution and mean GPA in the second-level math courses (Business Calculus and Elementary Functions) for each of the groups? It was hypothesized that the grade distribution for each group would be the same and that there would be no statistically significant difference in mean GPA.
  - H₁: Forward-placed Business Calculus or Elementary Functions GPA = Declined, Entry Level, and Second Level
  - H₀: Forward-placed Business Calculus or Elementary Functions GPA ≠ Declined, Entry Level, and Second Level

- What are the grade distribution and mean GPA in the third-level math courses (Business Calculus II and Calculus for Science) for each of the groups? It was hypothesized that the grade distribution would be the same for each group and that there would be no statistically significant difference in mean GPA.
  - H₁: Forward-placed Business Calculus II or Calculus for Science GPA = Second Level
  - H₀: Forward-Placed Math Business Calculus II or Calculus for Science GPA ≠ Second Level

**Significance of this Study**

This study assesses the practice of forward placing students and determines, on the basis of the groups’ grade distributions and GPAs, if it is truly to students’ benefit to forward place in their math sequence. If there is a significant difference in students’ grades and forward-placed students do not do as well as students in the other groups, then the practice should be reconsidered. This study also seeks to validate the two-stage assessment process: If the COMPASS assessment is accurate, then students should earn a C or better in the math course in which they are placed.

**Methodology**

This study sought to determine whether there were differences between the GPAs and grade distributions of four groups of students. The ex post facto design was appropriate because the study was conducted after students had completed the courses and because it sought to determine the consequences (i.e., math GPAs) of decisions that were based on common variables (i.e., ACT/SAT and COMPASS scores). A quasi-experimental design was appropriate because the groups were self-selected and not randomly assigned.

**DATA COLLECTION**

Cognos Business Intelligence software was used to pull data from the university’s student information system. Only data for students who matriculated during the fall 2009 and 2010 semesters and who took the COMPASS test were included in this study. Students who placed into remedial math and into Calculus for Science or higher were not included in the study. Students who declared a major that required only one math course and who declared a major in which the math sequence started with Business Calculus, Elementary Functions, or higher also were not
included in the study because they were not attempting to advance in their math sequence. The remaining data pertained primarily to students who were undecided about their major and/or who had declared business as their major. Because the few other remaining majors were only minimally represented, all but the business and the undecided majors were excluded. This left a total of 329 students: 230 business majors and 99 undecided.

In addition to students’ majors, the data included students’ ACT/SAT test dates and math subscores, their COMPASS test dates and math subscores (i.e., Intermediate Algebra, College Algebra, and Trigonometry), and their math courses and grades from their first and second semesters.

**Data Analysis**

Using SPSS software, descriptive statistics including frequency distributions, means, standard deviations, effect sizes, skewness, and kurtosis were generated to examine the grade distributions of the four groups of students. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether differences in GPA were statistically significant.

**Results**

**Placement Scores**

No demographic data—that is, information concerning students’ race, gender, age, etc.—were included in the study. Only test score data—i.e., ACT math, SAT math, and COMPASS College Algebra and Trigonometry—and course name and grade were utilized. As expected, the group that placed directly into the second-level math courses (Business Calculus or Elementary Functions) had the highest mean math scores on the ACT/SAT (27.2 and 595.2, respectively). The “Declined” group had the second highest mean math scores (24.2 and 568.3, respectively); members of this group had the opportunity to be forward placed but chose instead to enroll in the entry-level math course. The “Forward-placed” group had the third-highest mean math scores (23.0 and 539.7, respectively). The last group, “Entry-placed” (students whose scores qualified them for entry-level math courses and who therefore could not forward place), had average scores of 22.7 and 529.5, respectively. (See Table 2.)

Although one might expect the Second-level group (which had the highest ACT/SAT scores) to also have the highest COMPASS test scores, it did not. Rather, the “Declined” group had the highest scores on the COMPASS College Algebra/Trigonometry tests (69.3 and 47.2, respectively); the Forward-placed group had even lower scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Average Test Scores by Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ACT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimum Score</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximum Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SAT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPASS College Algebra</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPASS Trigonometry</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimum Score</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximum Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
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</table>

(See Table 2.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Forward Placed</th>
<th>Declined</th>
<th>Entry Placed</th>
<th>Second Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>144</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum Score</td>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maximum Score</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>24.17</td>
<td>22.67</td>
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<td>1.642</td>
<td>2.268</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum Score</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>420</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maximum Score</td>
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<td>630</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>539.66</td>
<td>568.33</td>
<td>529.50</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>150</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Maximum Score</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td>69.25</td>
<td>50.03</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>9.483</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMPASS Trigonometry</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum Score</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maximum Score</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>45.23</td>
<td>47.92</td>
<td>35.45</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>10.149</td>
<td>12.824</td>
<td>10.879</td>
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</table>
The first research question considered how each of the different groups performed in its first college math course. (For the Declined and Entry-placed groups, the first course was either Pre-Business Calculus or College Algebra; for the Forward-placed and Second-level groups, the first course was either Business Calculus or Elementary Functions.) The intent of this first comparison was to determine whether the Forward-placed group performed as well as the Second-level group (whose ACT/SAT and COMPASS scores placed them in the second-level math course) and the Declined group (who could have placed forward but who chose instead to enroll in the entry-level course). A basic univariate ANOVA was used to compare the groups’ average course grades.

The Declined group had the highest mean GPA of any of the groups: 3.42. This makes sense as students in this group had demonstrated skills sufficient for entry into the second-level course but had chosen instead to enroll in the entry-level course. The Second-level group had the second highest mean GPA, at 2.63, followed by the Entry-placed and then the Forward-placed group, at 2.59 and 2.45, respectively. The disparate sample sizes of the groups nullified the homogeneity of variance assumption, so the Games-Howell Post Hoc Test was used to determine statistical significance. The mean GPA for the Declined group was statistically different from the other three groups at the $p < 0.05$ level. No other group was significantly different from the others. The effect size of the test was small, with a partial eta-squared score of 0.34; the observed power was large, at 0.805.

Grade distributions were studied to determine the percentages of students who passed their math courses. Three groups were negatively skewed, indicating a tendency for grades to be unevenly distributed toward the upper limits (Forward Placed -0.488, Entry Placed -0.475, and Second Level -0.513); Declined was positively skewed at 0.388, but every member of the group earned an A or B. Overall, 81 percent of Forward-placed students, 100 percent of Declined students, 92 percent of Entry-placed students, and only 74 percent of Second-level students passed their first college-level math course (for the purposes of this study, a final course grade of A, B, or C was considered passing). The Second-level group also had the highest percentage of withdrawals. (See Table 3.)

Although the only statistically significant difference in grade distribution was between the Declined and the rest of the groups’ GPAs, a higher percentage of students in the Declined and Entry-placed groups (that is, who took

### Table 3. Distribution of Final Grades in First University Math Course Taken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th></th>
<th>C</th>
<th></th>
<th>D</th>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward Placed</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry Placed</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Level</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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the entry-level course as their first math course) passed the course; similarly, a lower percentage of students in these groups earned a D or F or withdrew from their first college-level math course. The statistically significant difference between the grade distributions of the Forward-placed and Declined groups makes it impossible to reject the null hypothesis for this question. The mean \( \text{GPA} \) of the Forward-placed, Entry-placed, and Second-level groups are not statistically different.

Second-level math course averages and distributions

The second research question considers the performance of all four groups on the second-level math course, Business Calculus or Elementary Functions. These were the first university math courses in which the Forward-placed and Declined students enrolled, so the same data were used as for the previous question. These were the second university math courses in which the Declined and Entry-placed students enrolled (students in these two groups enrolled upon completion of an entry-level math course). Theoretically, if the entry-level course prepared students adequately, then the students should perform as well as those who placed directly into the second-level course. Assuming that the placement tests are accurate and that the entry-level course properly prepares students for the next level, there should be no differences in the performance of the four groups in the second-level math course.

In fact, the Second-level group had the highest mean GPA (2.63). The Forward-placed group had the second highest mean (2.45), followed by Declined (2.42) and Entry Placed (2.06). This time, the groups did meet the homogeneity of variance assumption, so the Tukey’s Post Hoc Test was used to determine statistical significance. The mean \( \text{GPA} \) for the Entry-placed group was statistically significantly different from the other three groups at the \( p < 0.05 \) level. (No other group was significantly different from the others.) The effect size of the test was small, with a partial eta-squared score of 0.042; the observed power was large, at 0.882.

Grade distributions were studied to determine the percentages of students who passed their math courses. Again, three groups were negatively skewed, indicating a tendency for grades to be unevenly distributed toward the higher limits (Forward Placed -0.458, Entry Placed -0.249, and Second Level -0.513). The Second-level group had the highest percentage of students who withdrew, which may have caused the skewness to shift toward the higher grades (a withdrawal does not count as a grade). The Declined group was positively skewed at 0.325, with almost all students passing the course. Overall, 81 percent of Forward-placed students, 91.7 percent of Declined students, 70.7 percent of Entry-placed students, and only 73.8 percent of Second-level students passed their second-level university math course. (For the purposes of this study, a final grade of A, B, or C was considered passing.) The Second-level group again had the highest percentage of withdrawals. (See Table 4.)

Statistically, there is no difference between the mean GPA of any group other than Entry-placed, the members of which demonstrated lesser math skills on their placement tests. Nevertheless, success in the first university

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A (%)</th>
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<td>Declined</td>
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(See Table 4.)
math course should increase students’ chance of success in the second such course. At first glance, it appears that students in the Declined group performed better in the second-level math course: 91.7 percent passed the course with a C or better. However, the grade distributions in the second-level math courses tell a different story: The highest percentage of Forward-placed students earned an A or B (51.0%), followed by Second-level students (47.7%). The Second-level group had the highest percentage of students who earned an A (23.1%). Half (50.0%) of the students in the Declined group earned a C. Earning higher grades in the first-level math courses should have better prepared students to succeed in their next-level courses. While the Forward-placed, Declined, and Second-level groups had no statistically significant differences between them and did have similar grade distributions, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected because of the significant difference in the Entry-placed group.

**Third-Level Math Course Averages and Distributions**

The third and final research question pertained to the four groups’ performance in third-level math courses—i.e., Business Calculus II or Calculus for Science. This was only the second math course taken by students in the Forward-placed and Second-level groups, but it was the third course taken by students in the Declined and Entry-placed groups. There was a fair amount of attrition in each group: Many students were enrolled in the third level at the time of this study, but others had delayed their enrollment in the course or had decided on a major that does not require this level of math. Thus, at the time of this study, only 65.7 percent (n=68) of students in the Forward-placed group, 41.7 percent (n=5) of students in the Declined group, 32.7 percent (n=49) of students in the Entry-placed group, and 32.3 percent (n=35) of students in the Second-level group had completed a third-level math course.

Students in the Declined group had the highest GPA, with a mean of 3.00. Students in the Second-level group had the second-highest mean GPA, at 2.35, followed by students in the Forward-placed and then the Entry-placed group, at 2.20 and 1.88, respectively. The homogeneity of variance assumption was met, so the Tukey’s Post Hoc Test was used to determine statistical significance. Despite the differences in mean GPA, none was statistically significant at the p<0.05 level. The effect size of the test was small, with a partial eta-squared score of 0.046, and the observed power was modest, at 0.587.

Grade distributions were studied to determine the percentages of students who passed their math courses. While three groups again were negatively skewed, indicating a tendency for grades to be unevenly distributed toward the higher limits, they were much closer to a normal distribution: Forward Placed -0.634, Entry Placed -0.056, and Second Level -0.096; Declined had no skewness at all. The Forward-placed, Entry-placed, and Second-level groups had flatter grade distributions, with kurtosis of -0.332, -0.866, and -0.521, respectively; the Declined group, with fewer participants, had a narrower distribution and a more peaked kurtosis, at 2.00. Overall, 73.5 percent of Forward-placed students, 100 percent of Declined students, 63.3 percent of Entry-placed students, and 77.1 percent of Second-level students passed their third-level math class. (For the purposes of this study, a final grade of A, B, or C was considered passing.) The withdrawal rate of the Second-level group was much lower for the third-level math course than for the previous course.

There is no statistically significant difference between the mean GPA of any of the groups, so the null hypothesis for this research question can be rejected. However, a greater percentage of students in the Forward-placed group than in the Declined or Second-level group received a final grade of D or F or withdrew. Students in the Second-level group had a greater chance than those in the Forward-placed group of earning a D, which, technically, is a passing grade. The Declined group was by far the best performing, but its success must be viewed with caution given its small number. The Entry-placed and the Forward-placed groups had the same number of students who received an A (nearly as many as in the Second-level group), and the Entry-placed group had the second highest percentage of students who earned a C.

**CONCLUSION**

Forward-placed students performed as well in both the second- and third-level math courses as students who could have forward placed but chose not to (Declined), students who could not place forward but progressed through the second- and third-level courses (Entry Placed), and students who placed directly into the second-level math course on the basis of their placement test scores (Second
Level). There was no statistically significant difference between the mean final GPA of the Forward-placed, Declined, and Second-level groups for the second- and third-level math courses. Any statistically significant difference in mean GPA occurred in the first-level math course in which they enrolled, where the Declined group enrolled in the entry-level course while Forward-placed and Second-level students enrolled in the second-level course.

Some differences in grade distribution should be noted: The Second-level group had a higher percentage of students who received a D or F in or who withdrew from the second-level math course than the Forward-placed group. The Second-level group also had a higher percentage of students who received an A in the second-level math course. (This was the first math course for each of these groups.) On the third-level course, the Forward-placed group had a higher percentage of students who received a D or F or withdrew than the Second-level group. The Second-level group also had a higher percentage of students who earned an A. While the Declined group appears similar to both the Forward-placed and Second-level groups in terms of grade distribution, it is difficult to make any definitive statements given its low number.

**GENERALIZABILITY**

This study is generalizable to higher education institutions that forward place students in college-level math courses using a two-stage placement testing process. (Caution should be used when considering the forward placing of remedial math students as they were not considered in this study.)

**LIMITATIONS**

The most obvious limitation of this study pertains to the small number of Declined students—that is, of those who chose not to place forward. A larger number of such students would have facilitated accurate comparison of all groups’ mean GPA and grade distributions at the second and third levels of math course. Also, this study did not take into account the date on which students had earned their ACT/SAT scores. Further investigation of the relationship of recent or active ACT/SAT scores to students’ performance in the math courses into which they are placed may be informative. Neither did this study take into account the abilities of individual math course instructors or the amount of time between students’ enrollment in sequential levels of math courses. Finally, numerical course averages were not available for this study. Study of students’ raw scores may have resulted in more significant differences among the groups’ overall course performance.

**DISCUSSION**

Forward placing students in their math sequence does appear to benefit students: There is no statistical significance between the differences in mean GPA of students who are forward placed and those who are not. It is also apparent that given the opportunity, most students will choose to forward place in their math sequence. Students benefit by having one course free up so it can be used for another course. But it is impossible to say whether the practice benefits students’ overall GPA. That depends on the grade they earn in the course they substitute for their entry-level math course. Conversely, enrolling initially in a second-

**Table 5.**

*Distribution of Final Course Grades for Third-Level Math Course*

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level math course does not appear to lower forward-placed students’ GPAs any more than the course lowered the GPA of students who placed directly into the course.

At least at this university, the cut scores for the COMPASS test accurately reflect those for the ACT and SAT. Thus, a two-stage placement test process provides the opportunity for students to reassess their math skills prior to enrollment and thereby demonstrate their eligibility and preparedness for a higher-level math course. Students who place forward in their math sequence are likely to perform as well as those who place directly into an upper-level math course solely on the basis of their ACT/SAT score.

REFERENCES


About the Author
STEPHEN CRYNES is Director of the Assessment Center at the University of Oklahoma. He has a B.A. in History from Oklahoma State University, and a M.Ed. in Adult and Higher Education with a focus on Student Affairs from the University of Oklahoma. He is an A.B.D. doctoral student in Higher Education Administration, also at the University of Oklahoma.
This article discusses the roles of college admissions professionals and high school counselors in preparing students to apply to, select, and enroll at a college or university. Framed in the historical context of access to higher education, perceived and real barriers that hinder students from considering and enrolling in college, and strategies proven to alleviate access issues, this article describes opportunities to enhance the college-going process for youth in the United States.
emphasis on college access, academic progress, and degree completion (Balfranz et al. 2012; Callan et al. 2006; College Board 2008; Hines, Lemons and Crews 2011; Lee and Rawls 2010; Symonds, Schwartz and Ferguson 2011; Venezia, Kirst and Antonio n.d.). There is a consensus that the pursuit of a college education is a fundamental right in the United States (Mortenson 2012; Tierney 2008). As such, evaluation and action are required to advance this initia-
tive, and at the center are two primary groups of education professionals—high school counselors and college admissions professionals—both striving to support high school students’ pursuit of postsecondary education.

Historically, high schools prepared students for either of two paths: employment or college. That structure has evolved to a more intentional, interrelated college and career readiness approach (Conley 2010). While some educators view college and career readiness as one and the same, others believe them to be distinctly different (Conley and McGaughy 2012). At the core of college readiness is the concept of *college knowledge*. Typically, college knowledge includes information about the college search process, admission requirements, financial aid processes, and enrollment steps (Burleson, Hallett and Park 2008; Conley and McGaughy 2012). This article synthesizes research, implications, perspectives, and efforts by high school counselors and college admissions professionals to facilitate the education of young Americans in the 21st century.

**FROM ELITISM TO ACCESS**

Going to college is not synonymous with access to college. Going to college is the *intent* to go to college whereas access to college is having the opportunity to consider and enroll in college. “Prior to the 1950s, fewer than two of every 10 high school graduates went on to college,” state Kinzie *et al.* (2004). These authors cite that same timeframe for college access becoming a focus of national public policy in the United States. The introduction of the GI Bill, the establishment of the United Negro College Fund, and the beginning of the community college expansion plan are cited as evidence of the then-emergent focus (Kinzie *et al.* 2004). Tierney (2008) refers to college access as a national imperative. Dubrow (2008) cites the complexities involved: “The single most perplexing conundrum facing American higher education, particularly since the birth of public colleges, is reconciling the two goals of access and quality....” College admissions professionals and high school counselors alike facilitate students’ transition from high school to college.

“In a number of ways, the college admissions process is one that sorts students into institutions by income and social privilege; as such, it is a system that calcifies disparities between members of different economic and social status” states the University of Southern California (USC) Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice (USC 2011). The allusion is to elitism, which still serves as the template for today’s college admissions model (Stevens 2007). Elitism has existed for decades, if not centuries. St. John, Paulsen, and Carter (2005) cite the 1965 Higher Education Act as striving to equalize educational opportunities in the United States. Yet the effort to equalize has resulted in only limited progress. “Inequalities in college access rates across family income classes and racial/ethnic groups have narrowed only slightly over the past 30 years, and inequalities in college completion rates have narrowed even less,” states Ehrenberg (2008). This speaks to the continued need for growing and expanding college counseling, with a focus on specific populations. In recent years, multiple books have described elitism in college admissions as pervasive. Titles include *The Best of the Best: Becoming Elite at an American Boarding School; Creating a Class: College Admissions and the Education of Elites; No Longer Separate, Not Yet Equal: Race and Class in Elite College Admissions and Campus Life; The Power of Privilege: Yale and America’s Elite Colleges;* and *The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite.*

College access is a national movement that seeks to reverse the elitism of U.S. higher education. The movement is triggered by a decline in the academic ranking of the U.S. population internationally, by changing demographics in America, and by anticipated labor shortages of highly educated individuals (College Board 2008; Symonds, Schwartz and Ferguson 2011; WICHE 2008). Significant efforts—for example, the establishment of the National College Access Network and similar state networks as well as college access marketing campaigns—are being made to expand opportunity for all youths to pursue a college education. College access received federal attention when Representative Tim Bishop (D-NY) introduced House Resolution 2579, the Pathways to College Act (GovTrack.us 2009). The act would have provided grant funding to support the training of high school counselors; to strengthen college-going cultures; and to expand college preparation programs—primarily at schools with a majority of low-income students (GovTrack.us 2009; NACAC n.d.b). The need for all of these efforts has never been greater: Tierney (2008) states that “less than 10 percent of a school’s population benefit from college preparation programs.” Richardson (2008) refers to the college appli-
cation process as “the portal controlling access to higher education.” After describing what is essentially a gatekeeping process, Richardson (2008) summarizes guidelines drafted by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). Taken together, they describe the expectations of high school counselors and college admission professionals.

**EXPECTED COMPETENCIES**

Founded in 1937, NACAC (2012) is a membership organization that provides resources and support to more than 12,000 high school counselors and college admissions professionals. Two NACAC documents—the “Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor” (1990) and the “Statement on Counselor Competencies” (2000)—outline expectations of counselors.

The “Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor” (NACAC 1990) describes the components of an effective college preparation program and defines the roles of counselors in executing such a program. It emphasizes the need for all students to have access to a “strong precollege guidance and counseling program” early in their academic career (NACAC 1990). This could be considered a precursor to the modern phrase “college-going culture.” The statement also recommends a student-to-counselor ratio ranging between 100:1 (ideal) and 300:1 (maximum). It identifies twelve components of an effective program, from a philosophy to principles of equal opportunity. It also provides a lengthy list of counselor roles. The statement emphasizes early planning, promoting awareness, and direct contact with students and parents throughout the college preparation process.

In 1991, NACAC’s executive board approved two sets of competencies, one for school counselors and one for college admissions counselors; both documents were revised and reapproved in July 2000 (NACAC 2000). Nine competencies—applicable to both audiences—pertain to exemplary counseling, effective communication skills, student development, transition support, diversity, ethics, data analysis, advocacy, and precollege guidance. The overarching goal is to “…assist students effectively in realizing their full personal and educational potential” (NACAC 2000). NACAC criticizes school counselor preparation programs for failing to provide training that results in effective college counseling.

**THE MULTIPLE ROLES OF COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROFESSIONALS**

College admissions professionals have numerous and often disparate responsibilities. They are marketers and gatekeepers as well as counselors.

**Marketers**

College admissions professionals utilize numerous recruitment techniques as part of their effort to enroll new students (Noel-Levitz 2011). High school visits, college fairs, e-mail, and social networking sites provide opportunities to share information about the particular colleges they represent (Noel-Levitz 2011). Some college admissions professionals are assigned to designated geographic areas to facilitate contact with prospective and admitted students. (Territory management may be considered a form of market segmentation.) Many admissions professionals are given scripts as a means of ensuring that messages are consistent. (Typically, messages are aligned with the college’s branding [Sevier 2000].) As a former admissions counselor said, “On the road, responding to e-mails, and counseling walk-ins, an admissions counselor serves as a clearinghouse of information regarding the admissions process, financial aid, and academic programs” (Mathis 2010).

Kinzie et al. (2004) identify the 1960s as the decade when most colleges stepped up their marketing efforts: “Many four-year colleges and universities expanded their marketing efforts in an attempt to attract more students and achieve enrollment goals.” Henderson (2008) believes admissions marketing to have been the result of targeted recruiting uniting with business practice in the 1980s and 1990s. He specifically cites the emergence of telecounseling and direct mail activities (Henderson 2008). Marketing strategies were further enhanced with the advent of digital marketing techniques such as e-mail, websites, and social networking (Kinzie et al. 2004). Seventy-four (74) percent of admissions directors indicate that “social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) play an important role in our outreach efforts to prospective students” (Green, Jaschik and Lederman 2011). Fierce competition for students also fuels the marketing efforts of college admissions professionals (Kinzie et al. 2004). It is heightened by aspirations...
to increase the quality of the incoming class, by the marketing efforts of competitor colleges, and by demographics—specifically, decreasing numbers of high school graduates in many parts of the United States (WICHE 2008). There is no question that a competitive spirit is at the heart of colleges and universities’ marketing efforts (USC 2011).

Gatekeepers

According to Peterson (2008), “Once thought of merely as gatekeepers, admissions officers now need to master a wide variety of knowledge and techniques in order to help form the entering classes at colleges and universities.” Gatekeeping is the act of determining who is offered admission and who is not. Gatekeeping in U.S. higher education had its origins in 1642, when Harvard College established the first known requirements for college admission (Beale 1970). Most college admissions professionals evaluate applicants’ credentials against identified criteria (as, for example, in a formulaic or holistic review). The result is that some students are admitted and some are not, and the ritual that is at the center of higher education access and quality is perpetuated. A meritocratic approach describes quality on the basis of academic factors such as grade point average and test scores (among others); by contrast, a holistic approach considers “non-academic factors, personal characteristics, and individual experiences [as] important and positive for the campus community” (O’Neill 2011).

The gatekeeping role can be paired with the counseling role, as, for example, through on-site admissions when a college admissions professional announces the decision to the applicant in person (Wenzel 2002). The professional who delivers a denial decision can advise as to steps the applicant could take toward admission in the future—typically as a transfer student. The college admissions professional thus could turn a potentially negative situation into a positive one by communicating a different route to the same destination. Unfortunately, students often describe the gatekeeping function as the “admissions game” (Bound, Hershbein and Long 2009; Henderson 2008; Mathis 2010; Sacks 2010; Thacker 2004; Zwick 2007)—one that hinges on chance, skill, and luck rather than on academic and/or holistic factors. College admissions professionals can dispel this myth by utilizing effective communication and counseling.

Counselors

As counselors, college admissions professionals help students find the best “fit” and choose the college they will attend. The NACAC “Statement on Counselor Competencies” (2000) articulates three expectations:

- “Possess individual and group counseling and communication skills...” (Competency 1);
- “Possess the ability to engage in active listening with students, parents...and formulate relevant responses” (Competency 1); and
- “Demonstrate an ability to counsel students in understanding the full range of educational and career options open to them, including the requirements for achieving success in these pursuits” (Competency 2).

Listening and advising skills are critical to meeting students’ needs in the college search, application, and enrollment process. Hines, Lemons and Crews (2011) state that “personal counseling is a key practice in ensuring college and career readiness.” Mathis (2010) explains that an admissions counselor shares referent information, appraisal information, and relational information, all three of which help the student in the college search process.

Balancing Multiple Roles

Balancing these multiple roles can be challenging. According to Kinzie et al. (2004), “At some highly selective institutions, admissions officers’ jobs may depend in part on the quality and diversity of the entering class these officers recruit.” Daun-Barnett and Behrend (2011) state, “They may be the most knowledgeable professionals in terms of navigating the college choice process.” “Admissions officers track the numbers, deploy new technologies and analytic tools, and also draw on their experience and instincts to navigate the shifting terrain of undergraduate recruitment and admissions” (Green, Jaschik and Lederman 2011).

ROLES OF HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Champions of equity. Voices of the first-generation student. Advocates for admission. These phrases describe some of the significant roles that high school counselors can and should play in preparing students to pursue academic goals beyond high school (Bardwell 2012; Education Trust 2009c; Hines, Lemon and Crews 2011).
Promoting Ethical Behavior

NACAC’s (2010) “Statement of Principles of Good Practice” (SPGP) provides a foundation for the protection of students engaged in the college admissions process. It speaks to the role that high school counselors play in managing all aspects of the college search, to include admission and enrollment. As a code of conduct, the SPGP has evolved in response to marketplace forces and the increasing complexity of the college admission landscape (NACAC 2010). The SPGP (2010) describes a variety of best practices for high school counselors. One is “to provide a program of counseling that introduces a broad range of postsecondary opportunities to students.” This represents an intersection of the marketing and gatekeeping roles played by college admissions professionals. Encouraging a student to consider a wide array of colleges and universities helps the student defend against being wooed by the college with the best marketing efforts. The counselor’s role is to help the student identify where she has the highest likelihood of being successful. Further, by directing a student to consider multiple postsecondary options, a high school counselor helps position the student to receive multiple offers of admission. This is particularly important if the student is considering highly selective schools. (Note that the gatekeeping process is thereby expanded.)

Interpreting Admissions Decisions

High school counselors must help students navigate the gatekeeping process, select the admissions protocol (e.g., rolling admission, early decision, etc.) that best fits their needs, and manage the outcomes of the admission decision (NACAC 2010). These requirements align with competencies 1 and 3 of the “Statement on Counselor Competencies” (NACAC 2000): demonstrate “exemplary counseling and communication skills” and “possess and demonstrate an understanding of the current admission requirements, admission options, and application procedures employed by colleges and universities.”

Evaluative Storytelling

In a comparative book review, Deckman (2011) summarizes what Stevens (2007) introduces as “evaluative storytelling”: “A second way high school counselors influence the admissions process is by assisting admissions office staff in crafting stories about candidates who are on the cusp of admissions.” This is akin to Competency 7 of the “Statement on Counselor Competencies” (NACAC 2000): advocate on behalf of students. High school counselors often submit statements in support of students whose credentials are at the lower end of a college’s published admissions criteria. They also may provide valuable insights about applicants through their submission of secondary school reports (Common Application 2011b).

Overall Counselor Roles

“The school counselor plays a central and indispensable role in the precollege guidance and counseling process” (NACAC 2000). Tierney, Corwin, and Coylar (2005) state that “guidance counselors comprise a critical web of support agents for students thinking about going to college.” Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) emphasize the role of counselors as agents: “Counselors, as institutional agents, use their social ties with students to impose expectations and share resources for students’ educational endeavors.” High school counselors have a certain impact on increasing access to college:

Regarding college access, counselors create the college-going culture of the school by enforcing clear expectations about college access. They also make resources available to students such as early access to information, advice on making the transition to college, and appropriate courses that are required for college admissions” (Farmer-Hinton and Adams 2006).

The high school counselor plays a significant role in helping students plan for and enter college. Kinzie et al. (2004) point out that choosing a college is one of the initial noncompulsory decisions youths make, and it is one for which they have little previous experience. High school counselors must support students through this often-overwhelming process.

ARTICULATED PARTNERSHIP

NACAC (1990) emphasizes the vital nature of the relationship between high school counselors and college admissions professionals: “Critical to the success of such a [guidance] support system is the strength of the articulation process between the school counselor and college admissions personnel.” This articulation process includes regular communication, a high level of engagement
throughout the year (inclusive of all college enrollment processes), joint monitoring of student progress, and the exchange of information and data about applicants and enrollees. Tierney (2008) refers to this as an intersegmental partnership. The same goal exists for both the college admissions professional and the high school counselor: “to enable the individual to get into college.”

**COMMON BARRIERS**

To understand the complexity of the college counseling landscape, one must be familiar with the barriers that prevent high school counselors and college admissions professionals from providing adequate counseling and resources.

**Barriers Impacting High School Counselors**

**High Student-to-Counselor Ratio**

A frequently cited barrier to effective college counseling is the extraordinarily high student-to-counselor ratio (Clinedinst, Hurley and Hawkins 2011; Lee et al. 2011; NACAC n.d.a). According to the “2011 State of College Admission” ( Clinedinst, Hurley and Hawkins 2011), the national ratio in U.S. public schools was 459:1. Boyer has identified the ideal ratio as 100:1 (Clinedinst, Hurley and Hawkins 2011). If this ideal ratio were to be attained, 386,169 additional counselors would be needed nationwide at an estimated cost of nearly $21 billion (based on the 2010 median school counselor salary of $53,380) (Clinedinst et al. 2011; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). NACAC’s annual survey found evidence that “counselors at schools with lower student-to-counselor ratios spent more time on postsecondary counseling” (Clinedinst et al. 2011). Lee et al. (2011) state that “the student-to-college-counselor ratio describes the access a student may have to an individual who is responsible for providing college counseling.” Being individually responsible for hundreds of students inhibits counselors’ ability to prepare those students for the college admissions process.

**Specialized Populations**

First-generation students, low-income students, immigrant populations, and students from multicultural backgrounds require additional attention and support to facilitate their progress toward a college education (Clark 2008; Lieber 2009; McDonough 2005). Recent analysis indicates that 34.4 percent of students from families earning less than $40,000 annually enroll in college; as this is the highest percentage in at least eighteen years, work remains to be done to increase it further ( Mortenson 2012). “Education’s role is to prepare these young people for productive, responsible, and fulfilling lives in our society, economy, democracy, and in families” ( Mortenson 2012). Bridgeland and Bruce (2011b) indicate that students from underrepresented backgrounds tend to use external sources (that is, resources outside of school) to prepare for college. This attests to the need for more high school counselors to provide outreach and direct service to students.

Tierney, Corwin, and Coylar (2005) cite a national study in which the authors conclude “that efforts to improve high school counseling and equalizing students’ access to these services would be likely to have a significant impact on improving college access for underserved populations.” The University of Southern California Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice (2011) states:

*One of the greatest challenges now confronting the nation is to foster greater educational participation and degree attainment among those whom colleges and universities have traditionally served less well: lower-income students, first-generation students, and members of under-represented minorities.*

“Race and culture play an important role in shaping students’ college-going identities, and this role is related to the historical underrepresentation of many minorities in colleges” (Oakes n.d). McDonough (2005) states that “college counseling is generally agreed upon as one of the three main needs for improving college access for poor students and students of color...” It is clear that high school counselors and college admissions professionals need to focus increased attention on these populations through advocacy and one-on-one assistance.

**Competing Responsibilities**

Related to the barrier of high student-to-counselor ratios is that of time. Lee et al. (2011) explain that this “…measure [of time] seeks to raise awareness of the roles and responsibilities of school counselors and, in particular, how often the counselors are engaged in postsecondary admission counseling.” From 2006 until 2009, the percentage of time that counselors devoted to postsecondary admission counseling decreased from 39 to 26 (Lee et al. 2011).
McDonough (2005) agrees that counselors do not devote sufficient time to college counseling responsibilities: “Counselors have too many jobs assigned to them to be effective.” Bardwell (2012) asserts that paperwork and preparation for testing interfere with counselors’ abilities to provide guidance regarding college. The College Board’s “College Completion Agenda” reports (Lee, Edwards, Menson, and Rawls 2011; Lee and Rawls 2010) also call attention to the lack of time devoted to postsecondary admission counseling. The reports highlight the discrepancy between public and private high school counselors and how they expend their time: Whereas nearly 23 percent of public school counselors’ time was dedicated to postsecondary admission counseling, 54 percent of private school counselors’ time was thus dedicated (Lee and Rawls 2010). Lee and Rawls (2010) explain that private high school counselors have a more unidimensional role than their public school counterparts. In supporting the Pathways to College Act, NACAC (n.d.b) identified counselors’ limited time for college counseling as a primary structural barrier to college-going. Opportunities to dedicate more time to college counseling likely would be supported in environments characterized by a strong college-going culture.

**College Going-Culture**

The absence of (or a weak) college-going culture within a high school can significantly impede students’ pursuit of postsecondary education opportunities. By contrast, a college-going culture “builds the expectation of postsecondary education for all students” (College Board 2006). The most significant characteristics of a college-going culture are: fostering a college-going identity through the development of high aspirations (Tierney et al. 2009); “faculty belief in all students’ capacity to go to college” (Lieber 2009); and a place “where students appreciate academics, have a desire to succeed and a drive to attend college, and become lifelong learners” (College Board 2006). Multiple resources provide information about and suggestions for building and sustaining a college-going culture (Lee et al. 2011). Among them are Tierney and Hagedorn’s (2001) *Making the Grade in College Prep*, Tierney et al.’s (2005) *Preparing for College*, and the College Board’s (2006) *Creating a College-Going Culture Guide*, to name a few.

Fifty-six percent of counselors surveyed in 2011 indicated that they would like to spend more time building a college-going culture; they see this as vital to college counseling (Bridgeland and Bruce 2011a). “Too few urban students experience a college-going culture in high school” states Lieber (2009). Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman, and Coles (2009) refer to the establishment of a college-going culture as *structural support*. Such support can be particularly important to students whose families do not provide it. Ideally, middle schools as well as high schools are characterized by a college-going culture, thus helping to communicate over the course of several critical years the value of college (Lee and Rawls 2010). As early as middle school, students can develop learning habits for college, be introduced to the steps of the college preparation and admission process, and participate in field trips to colleges (College Board 2011d). Finally, Conley and McGaughy (2012) recommend extending the college-going culture into the community. Facilitating college enrollment apart from such a culture can be challenging indeed.

**Barriers Impacting College Admissions Professionals**

Barriers that have an impact on college admissions professionals are not as well-documented or -researched as those that have an impact on high school counselors. Nevertheless, one emerging barrier is worth noting.

**Focus On Strategic Enrollment Management**

In the first chapter of *The College Admission Officer’s Guide*, Henderson (2008) provides historical context for the field of college admissions—particularly its morph into the contemporary enrollment management industry. Henderson (2008) cites Hossler and Bean’s (1990) definition of enrollment management as a strategy that unites “student college choice, transition to college, student attrition and retention, and student outcomes” for the purpose of maximizing enrollment and revenue for the college or university. Henderson (2008) advocates for enrollment management, but he also describes “enrollment management’s dark side”: “High school counselors see enrollment management as a nefarious device to uncouple them from the college process.” He describes how online applications have removed high school counselors from the application process. Further, strategic enrollment management can include predictive modeling and financial aid leveraging tactics, a result of which is that the student is considered
more a source of revenue than a person pursuing college. Even NACAC’s “2011 State of College Admission Counseling” includes a section entitled “Enrollment Management Strategies” (Clinedinst et al. 2011).

What Thacker (2004) calls the enrollment management consulting industry exacerbates this barrier: “The rise and influence of the billion-dollar enrollment management consulting industry, which specializes in packaging and branding colleges according to strict bottom-line rationality and strategizing, is raising questions about what values and principles should determine college admission policy.” Meanwhile, Mathis (2010) suggests that a “Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) ambassador” can use research to guide recruitment strategies, engage faculty in the recruitment process, teach students how to use information in the college search process, and share information with prospective students. If it is not carefully monitored and managed, SEM could have a negative impact on the work of college admissions professionals.

**Factors, Strategies, and Approaches**

Many factors, strategies, and approaches have been proven to assist high school students in preparing for, applying to, gaining access to, and enrolling in college. Three are highlighted here:

**Number of Applications Submitted**

According to Tierney, Corwin, and Coylar (2005), high school counselors help students determine to which colleges they should apply. In October 2011, the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center issued a research brief entitled “Can applying to more colleges increase enrollment rates?” Smith concludes that

*Increasing the number of college applications from one to two can increase a student’s probability of enrolling at a four-year college by 40 percent, and increasing the number of applications from two to three can increase a student’s probability of enrollment by 10 percent.*

Therefore, college admissions professionals and high school counselors should—and are in a position to—encourage students to apply to at least three four-year colleges. A limitation of this study is that it is based only on the submission of Common Applications. Only 456 colleges accept the Common Application (2011a), so the study’s findings may not be generalizable to the vast majority of U.S. colleges and universities.

Bridgeland and Bruce (2011a) identify college application rates as one of the top five measures by which to assess counselor effectiveness. They state that “assistance with the college application process is among the most powerful ways that school counselors can impact college enrollment and attendance rates in secondary schools.” According to the National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA), “The school counselor’s support is critical for helping students submit complete application packages so they have the greatest opportunity for acceptance” (College Board 2011c).

**Building a College-Going Culture**

Tierney, Corwin, and Coylar (2005) state that “a college culture that establishes high academic standards and includes formal and informal communication networks that promote and support college expectations” is one of four high school experiences that has a “tremendous impact on college attendance.” According to Liu (2011a), “Students for whom a college-going culture is ingrained into their high school lives are readily familiar with the norms and values of the admissions process.” Conley (2010) writes that a college-going culture helps provide the cues, procedures, and insights that enable students to prepare for, plan for, and enroll in college.

To facilitate the growth and expansion of college-going cultures, NACAC has added a chapter on such cultures to the third edition of its Fundamentals of College Admission Counseling (NACAC 2012b). This publication is considered the only textbook in existence for graduate students and practicing counselors and has been published for use in college counseling courses on college campuses (Fraser 2011).

In their 2008 report “From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College,” Roderick et al. emphasize the impact of a college-going culture:

*[T]he single most consistent predictor of whether students took steps toward college enrollment was whether their teachers reported that their high school had a strong college climate, that is, they and their colleagues pushed students to go to college, worked to ensure that students would be prepared, and were involved in supporting students in completing their college applications (cited in Sherwin 2012).*
While Sherwin’s (2012) policy brief finds that a program called CollegeMatch netted positive results in helping low-income and first-generation students access college, the results were obtained by using three external advisors, not high school counselors. Nevertheless, the research brief points to a growing trend in the use of external assistance to support college counseling. Another well-known effort similar to CollegeMatch is the National College Advising Corps.

**Participating in a College Application Week**

A more recent proven strategy that high school counselors can implement is participation in a national movement called College Application Week. According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (2011), College Application Week began in North Carolina in 2005 as a pilot College Application Day and was designed to facilitate first-generation students’ application to college. North Carolina’s 2008 event resulted in 80 percent of participants enrolling in college in fall 2009 (SREB 2011). In fact, four times more applications were submitted that week than in the weeks before and after the event (Michigan College Access Network, pers. comm., Sept. 20, 2011). The impact of encouraging students to apply to college is clear. “Initiatives that provide students with direct assistance in completing applications are likely to stimulate college enrollment,” states Smith (2011). North Carolina’s College Application Week is a noteworthy example with proven results.

**Michigan’s first College Application Week**

In November 2011, the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN) launched its first-ever statewide College Application Week. While a select number of high schools (38) participated, the event successfully facilitated the completion of 2,219 college admission applications (MCAN 2012). Twenty-six (76%) of the volunteers who completed a post-event survey identified themselves as representatives from a college or university (MCAN 2012). While it cannot be assumed that they all were college admissions professionals, educators can play such a role in this process.

Counselor actions can help increase college access and enrollment. Beyond the efforts described above, many other interventions should be examined and quantified to determine their impact.

**MOVING FORWARD**

Now that roles have been defined and the context of access, maintenance of quality, and proven college counseling strategies have been explored, it is important to consider the preferred roles of high school counselors and college admissions professionals and the prerequisites for fulfilling those responsibilities. Following that, a rationale for formal training is shared.

**Emerging and Evolving Roles**

Currently, two major organizations—The Education Trust and the College Board—are striving to redefine the role of high school counselors.

**National Center for Transforming School Counseling (NCTSC)**

In 2003, The Education Trust, in partnership with the MetLife Foundation, established the National Center for Transforming School Counseling (NCTSC) (2009a). NCTSC’s mission is to “work to advance the school counseling profession’s central role in ensuring educational equity for all students” (Education Trust 2009b). NCTSC facilitates leadership, advocacy, counseling, teaming/collaboration, and the use of data (Education Trust 2009c). Two emerging roles for counselors focus on the use of data and work in support of social justice (advocacy). NOSCA’s 2011 survey of more than 5,000 school counselors provides support for an advocacy role: “Three out of four counselors (74%) rate their unique role...as student advocates who create pathways and support to ensure all students have opportunities to achieve postsecondary goals.” (Bridgeland and Bruce 2011a). NCTSC defines school counseling as “a profession that focuses on the relations and interactions between students and their school environment to reduce the effects of environmental and institutional barriers that impede student academic success” (Education Trust 2009a). This definition suggests an implicit goal of eliminating as many of the barriers to effective college counseling (particularly those described above) as possible.

**National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA)**

The College Board (the originator of the SAT) launched the National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA) in 2008 “to promote the value of school counsel-

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ors as leaders in school reform, student achievement, and college readiness” (2011a). NOSCA supports the practice of school counseling with three main priorities: equity in college and career readiness, leadership in systemic education reform, and transformation of school counseling practice (College Board 2011b). It defines eight components of college and career readiness counseling that would enhance equity and opportunity in the college admissions process. These eight components are the foundation of the High School Counselor’s Guide, a how-to handbook for counselors (College Board 2011c). Themes of the guide are advancing equity, using data, and working systemwide (College Board 2011c). Responsibilities include teaching students how to conduct a college search, helping students complete college applications, and educating students about financial aid processes (College Board 2011c).

NEED FOR FORMAL, CREDIT-BASED TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION

Many authors, researchers, leaders, and educators cite the need for training in college counseling and postsecondary advisement (Bardwell 2012; Bautsch and Martin 2011; Bridgeland and Bruce 2011; Daun-Barnett and Behrend 2011; Johnson et al. 2010; Lieber 2009; McDonough 2005; NACAC 2000; O’Connor 2010; Rapp 2012; Savitz-Romer et al. 2009; Savitz-Romer and Bouffard 2012; Tierney et al. 2004). Such training would benefit high school counselors as well as college admissions professionals because of content focused on all aspects of the college admissions and enrollment process. “NACAC believes there is a basic body of knowledge and fundamental skills one must possess to be effective in counseling students as they progress through school (elementary through postsecondary education) and make decisions regarding their postsecondary educational alternatives” (2000). In its “Statement on Counselor Competencies,” NACAC (2000) calls for syllabuses and resources in graduate coursework to facilitate the development of competencies related to college counseling. Government reports also emphasize the need for such training and knowledge: “Students and their families need advice from knowledgeable school staff if they are to successfully navigate the college application processes” state Tierney et al. (2009). As part of the effort to close the access and equity gaps, Lieber (2009) calls for “more exposure to the issues of college access for urban youth in graduate programs.” Bridgeland and Bruce (2011a) call for “mandatory coursework on advising for college readiness, access, and affordability.” O’Connor (2010), a past president of NACAC and current adjunct faculty member for college counseling coursework, spoke about the negative implications of not providing such training: “The long-standing paucity of college admission training will continue to contribute to the equally well-established academic achievement gaps between rich and poor, and white, black and Hispanic, thus pointing to the continued need to focus on access and equity among these populations.” According to O’Connor (2010), fewer than 10 percent of the 466 colleges offering a school counselor preparation program include a college counseling course.

College Counseling Courses

Currently, formal training in college admissions exists primarily in two formats: isolated graduate-level, credit-bearing courses and certificate programs. The first known courses were coincidentally launched in July 1991: The School of Education at Long Island University (LIU) launched Education 859 (“Counseling for the College Admissions and Selection Process”), and the University of California–Riverside launched two online courses, “College Counseling Process” and “Admissions Testing and Documents.” The LIU course was the first college counseling course to be required as part of a school counseling preparatory program (McGowan 2011). Among institutions with school counselor programs, at least 42 programs now offer a college counseling course (O’Connor 2010).

Certificates in College Counseling

In existence since 1991, certificate programs in college counseling offer a series of courses leading to a credential and training in various aspects of the college admissions process (Gruendyke 2012). In the United States, there are seven such programs located in four states: California, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Minnesota. Specifically, they are offered at Eastern Michigan University, Hamline University, Suffolk University, and the University of California (campuses of Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Riverside, San Diego). High school counselors and college admissions professionals both can benefit from this credit-bearing training.

Typically, these certificates require six courses, often completed online at many of the schools, thus making it
accessible to all types of education professionals nationwide. The coursework focuses on college applications, the admission process, equity and access, financial aid, testing, and ethics.

The impact of this coursework—and of the certificates—is unknown. A worthwhile research opportunity exists to measure the effectiveness of these educational experiences on college access, admissions, and enrollments.

Certification and Endorsements

Apart from credit-bearing college coursework, other certificates, credentialing, and endorsements related to college admissions counseling have been developed.

In 1989, NACAC considered the creation of a comprehensive national certificate in college admissions counseling for high school counselors and college admissions professionals. The certificate was never launched, but its merit should be reconsidered, particularly as comparable training efforts have been developed in two related professional fields (i.e., enrollment management and financial aid). The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) (2012) created a national professional credential in financial aid through a newly established entity called NASFAA University. A financial aid professional can earn this credential by completing five training components and passing a test (NASFAA n.d.).

The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) debuted a Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) endorsement in fall 2012. Similar to NASFAA’s financial aid credential, content will derive from a curriculum comprising online coursework, webinars, field visits, and a capstone project (AACRAO n.d.). The credential is intended to increase college admissions and enrollment management professionals’ “readiness to conquer current and future challenges in the field” (AACRAO n.d.).

Also in fall 2012, the University of Southern California’s (USC) Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice launched an online admissions and enrollment management certificate. The Center’s online video features an overview of the topics addressed, including working as change agents; equity issues; opportunities to influence educational attainment; and recruitment, selection, and financial aid processes (University of Southern California 2012).

Taken together, these initiatives demonstrate growth in formal, job-related education and training for the purposes of maintaining the balance of quality and access while increasing college enrollment and degree completion rates.

CONCLUSION

Sixty percent by 2025: That is the national goal for the percentage of Americans who will possess a postsecondary education credential (Lumina 2012). Reaching that goal will require a significant commitment to increase college access, to include dedicated time and resources for college preparation and training for professionals who work with students prior to their entry into college. USC (2011) reminds us that “no other nation has aimed to create a higher education system that leads the world in academic strength and the creation of new knowledge, while at the same time making a college education available to anyone seeking to learn regardless of ability to pay.” At the core of college preparation, admission, and enrollment is the intersection of what Furstenberg (2004) calls the “American values of merit and fairness.”

“College-going is a triangulated relationship composed of the student, the admission officer, and the guidance counselor” (Tierney 2008). In supporting students’ preparation for and transition to postsecondary education, college admissions professionals and high school counselors take on multiple roles, challenges, and opportunities. Conley (2005) reminds us that “college preparation is knowledge-intensive.” As such, it requires foundational knowledge that can be delivered through credit-bearing college coursework for those individuals who work in a professional capacity to prepare students for college. Matthay (1995) writes, “Advising for higher education in America is about harnessing our intelligence and goodwill in pursuit of a goal that will truly improve all facets of American life: a well-educated citizenry.” The ultimate goal for college admissions professionals and high school counselors is to ensure that students choose and enroll in postsecondary institutions that meet their individual needs. NACAC (1990) would consider this to be sound educational decision making.

Lieber (2009) calls for professionalization of the school counselor function, in part by enhancing the education of those involved in postsecondary planning. Facilitating the
pursuit of a college education is a collaborative effort (Cervere 2010); “Counselors are uniquely positioned to help reverse these trends, restoring America’s status as first in the world in college attainment” (Bridgeland and Bruce, 2011a). According to McDonough (2005), “Research clearly shows that counselors, when consistently and frequently available and authorized to provide direct services to students and parents, can be a highly effective group of professionals who impact students’ aspirations, achievements, college enrollments, and financial aid knowledge.”

Given the numerous publications and guides for high school counselors and the absence of similar resources for college admissions professionals, it is recommended that documents be developed to clarify ways in which college admissions representatives can work more effectively to increase enrollment. In addition, there exists a major opportunity for NACAC, NOSCA, and NCTSC to partner to increase the effectiveness of college counseling; together, they can work to eliminate the barriers that prevent more students from pursuing a college education. A joint effort would funnel resources and leverage expertise in a collective, meaningful way.

College access professionals are an emerging group of educators who play a role in the “going to college” process. They provide college counseling in high schools when high school counselors are unavailable. Some are affiliated with the National College Advising Corps, some with college access networks, and some with Michigan’s new College Coaching Corps. Daun-Barnett and Behrend (2011) refer to this group as “pre-college outreach counselors” and describe their role as supplemental to high school counselors in terms of helping students prepare for college. However, given that nearly 400,000 school counselors are needed to attain an ideal counseling ratio, welcoming college access professionals into the process would seem to be one way to fill the gap. Surely an increase from two to multiple agents of change would support an increase in the number of students pursuing a college education.

REFERENCES


About the Author

CHRISTOPHER W. TREMBLAY is the incoming Associate Provost for Enrollment Management at Western Michigan University. He most recently served as Assistant Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Management at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. He previously served as Director of Admissions at UM-Dearborn and Gannon University. Tremblay earned both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Western Michigan University. He has a post master’s certificate in enrollment management from Capella University, and is a doctoral candidate at UM-Dearborn studying educational leadership with a research focus on college counseling training. He has published articles in College and University, the Journal of College Admission, Journal of College Orientation and Transition, and the Journal of Intergroup Relations. He has presented at 40 association conferences for AACRAO (SEM), the College Board, NACAC, MACAC, PACAC, NISTS, MACRAO and NODA.

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Organizations that support the university community need to remain relevant for the students, faculty, and staff despite the changes that lie ahead. Creating mission, vision, and values that align with the institution allows for priority setting, staff-focused development, and an organizational effectiveness plan to keep the unit focused as a service provider. These all played an important role in defining my personal leadership journey.
never really thought about my leadership style until six years ago. My goal for the office then—as now—was to make a difference for students, faculty, and staff in the university community. At the time, everyone talked about the baby boomers’ retiring and taking undocumented knowledge with them. After learning that 58 percent of my staff soon would be eligible to retire (though I still had a long way to go), I knew it was important to ensure that the organization remained strong for students, faculty, and staff, despite the changes that lay ahead. Our unit, Academic Support Resources (ASR), has been called the central nervous system, the backbone, and the infrastructure of the university. Considering this responsibility and the potential loss of dedicated, knowledgeable staff, it was clear that we needed an organizational effectiveness plan to secure “the infrastructure” of the University. Carefully honed guidance played a distinctive role in orchestrating the plan, and my personal leadership journey has been defined largely by its development.

**CREATING THE MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES**

The ASR unit directors and I realized that the office’s mission, vision, and values needed to align more clearly with the University of Minnesota’s own purpose of instruction, research, and outreach. A cross-unit and cross-staff development team was created and charged with two tasks: providing preliminary feedback on a mission and vision statement developed by myself and the ASR directors and organize an all-staff event during which employees would provide feedback on our initial statements. At the first event, all staff were assigned to tables (yes, we assigned seats) to create additional cross-functional and cross-staff groups; reactions to the mission and vision were gathered through targeted questions. As part of an “ice breaker,” each group also answered questions regarding what they valued about working for ASR and the University. Subsequent analysis of this information was displayed in seven affinity diagrams.

The team continued to meet and communicate with directors to determine how best to refine our mission and vision. Ultimately, it was the team’s draft, based on feedback from all ASR staff, that informed the unit’s current mission and vision. The team then determined how best to communicate the themes of the affinity diagrams in relatively short statements. These ultimately became our organizational values. Our mission, vision, and values are now incorporated into the annual review process. This ensures that their importance is understood.

Each year, we form a development team that focuses on creating two all-staff events. The resultant team-building contributes to the department’s overall success. For example, I give a yearly “state of ASR” address to inform staff of upcoming goals, changes, and other important infor-
mation. Staff are willing to assist and provide feedback to strengthen the organization when they feel empowered through this sharing of information.

**A STAFF-FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS PLAN**

We adopted an organizational effectiveness plan as part of our effort to keep the office strong as we head into the future and ‘live’ our mission—“to make a positive difference in students’ lives”—and our vision—“to foster student success.” Rather than focusing simply on business processes or service automation, ASR’s plan focuses primarily on staff; ultimately, they are responsible for the success of the office.

As the directors and I developed the plan, it became clear that we had a significant amount of work to do to ensure the unit’s long-term success. First, we worked to identify gaps in the organization’s knowledge, skills, and abilities. We compiled information—about staff members’ current needs; we reviewed job descriptions; and we researched similar positions. This helped us to detail the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) required for each position. We then grouped jobs according to their KSA. Seven “career families” emerged from these groupings. Next we assigned staff to the “career family” that most closely matched their position. The resultant ‘families’ were cross-functional as well as cross-staff level. (Because many staff could work well within several of the career families, assignments were based on the KSA required for at least 51 percent of their work). That said, the same KSA are not repeated across multiple families; rather, those that are required of every position reflect our organizational values. In other words, certain behaviors demonstrate our values, with the result that staff now know “what it looks like” when they are “going above and beyond.”

The career families have allowed us to utilize staff across units in different situations. For example, when a staff member left our fiscal unit, we were able to make use of resources in our accounting unit until the position in the fiscal unit was filled.

Because it was particularly important for staff members to understand the unit’s direction and goals—to include the role of expectations in its success—we communicated the organizational effectiveness plan in several ways. A significant component of the plan focuses on staff development. Because employees make or break the organization’s success, I meet with each new employee and explain the organizational effectiveness plan in depth. I describe the office and our budget, but I focus primarily on my expectations of employees as leaders. Afterward, our coordinator of organizational effectiveness describes the plan in even greater detail. It is at this meeting that prospective employees are introduced to the career families and the resources provided for individual development. Once these meetings have been completed, new employees have a thorough understanding of their roles within the context of the organizational effectiveness plan. Each employee should be a leader by taking responsibility for her own development.

**WHAT DO I MEAN BY “LEADER?”**

The expectation is that each employee will be the best person in her position as she strives to meet the leadership expectation depicted in Table 1, on page 31. Specifically, each employee is accountable for her actions, development, and longevity in the position. Supervisors are accountable for the middle column in addition to the first, and unit directors are expected to adhere to all that is listed. Employee leadership is completely self-driven and supervisor assisted. Each staff member creates an Individualized Development Plan (IDP) and shares it with her supervisor (see Figure 1, on page 32). If a staff member wishes to increase her proficiency or to learn new skills so she can apply for another position in the office, the supervisor is expected to help her locate resources accordingly (within reason). That said, we strive to hire the best-qualified person—internal candidate or external—for every position. The organizational effectiveness plan, which we have posted on our intranet, permits us to post only internally (it is worth noting that for some openings, our organization has many qualified internal candidates). In my opinion, this means our plan is successful. The same is true of staff who are content in their current positions: It is their responsibility to work with their supervisor to ensure their continued success, which may require keeping up with technology and improving business processes for greater efficiencies. This portion of the plan is driven by the employee but supervisor assisted.

The organizational effectiveness team continues to evaluate the strength of the organization and to implement changes necessary to meet the evolving needs of the University community. These changes are always com-
municated through several channels, e.g., a newsletter, director’s e-mail, brown-bag lunches on specific topics, and all-staff events. Supervisors are expected to answer staff members’ questions and to seek answers from the unit director as necessary. This is done in combination with ongoing communication of the mission, vision, and goals of the unit as well as any pending initiatives. Staff who understand the unit’s goals and outcomes are confident in themselves and their achievement; ultimately, this contributes to the success of the unit. Staff must be treated well. When the directors and I are thanked for the work we do, we immediately attribute our success to the staff. The provost once asked me, “How do you manage to accomplish so much for the University?” I replied that it wasn’t me but the great staff who was accomplishing so much, and then I thanked him. This is the type of leadership style I prefer: aligning and communicating goals and removing barriers that inhibit staff performance.

Although this plan was created about six years ago, it is a continuous process. I am not interested in a succession plan that specifies that a person in a particular position will take over when someone else leaves. Rather, I always try to hire the best person for the position and to give all qualified staff

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1. ASR Leadership Skills and Abilities</th>
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<td><strong>Leadership (All ASR Staff)</strong></td>
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<td>Contribute</td>
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<td>Manage individual performance</td>
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<td>Support sound decisions</td>
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<td>Understand strategy</td>
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<td>Align actions with unit and ASR goals</td>
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<td>Mindfully use allocated resources</td>
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<td>Learn from actions</td>
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<td>Influence productivity</td>
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<td>Seek customer satisfaction</td>
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<td>Implement effective plans</td>
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<td>Take initiative</td>
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<td>Weigh risks of alternative actions</td>
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<td>Support colleagues</td>
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<td>Energize the workplace</td>
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<td>Develop self and support others</td>
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<td>Be a team player</td>
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<td>Represent ASR values in all interactions</td>
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<td>Earn respect</td>
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<td>Help resolve issues during crisis/team issues</td>
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<td>Be a “green” individual</td>
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<td>Be an effective active listener</td>
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<td>Actively Participate in training</td>
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the opportunity to apply. When we first started to create our organizational effectiveness plan, we created a team that visited several companies in the Minneapolis area to gather as much information as possible. We wanted to be sure that we considered all possible pieces of a plan so we would be in alignment with the University.

Another area on which we have focused is supervisor development. A small team of ASR volunteer staff conducts an anonymous quarterly employee survey. Suggestions are consistently made with regard to supervising. Early discussions made it apparent that we had a wide range of expectations of our supervisors. To promote consistency, supervisors now meet on a regular basis—about once every two months. Agenda items include supervisor expectations, evaluation of the performance review process, management of employee situations—positive and negative—organizational change, and professional development and employee checklists. Supervisors no longer simply supervise; many are also performing specific tasks. It is crucial to ensure that supervisors understand leadership and how to support employees so the unit can maximize its success. Routine employee surveys help me understand how employees perceive themselves within the organization; this, too, is critical to the unit’s success.

**SETTING ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS**

I have been in my current position for about ten years. As I reflect on my conduct when I first started in the office, I realize I could have been a much better leader. At the time, we were completing a student system conversion; implementing a one-stop student services model; creating an office of classroom management; combining student finance and financial aid units; converting to semesters; and transitioning administrations. All went well, thanks to a dedicated staff who lacked the benefit of guidance from their leader. I should have set goals, sought input, and communicated with staff. Instead, I maintained a breakneck pace and struggled against feeling overwhelmed. Today, the projects remain numerous; but one significant difference is that the organizational effectiveness plan requires that we set goals for staff to work toward. This ensures that we all head in the same direction as we adhere to the same mission. We now are able to respond both to emergencies and to new initiatives identified by the
administration, and this makes everyone’s job easier. We accomplished this with a team of dedicated leaders who truly value student success.

I have never considered myself the type of leader to dictate what must occur. To be honest, I don’t consider myself a leader but rather a facilitator and barrier breaker. I prefer to listen, gather goals from the broader community, and determine direction with guidance and feedback from the administration, colleges, and coordinate campuses. I prefer to rely on consensus or buy-in from the majority to ensure success. Those of us in student services are lucky because we can witness first-hand the achievements that result from our positions. This is gratifying. When a decision must be made, I can make the wisest choice thanks to the information my staff provide. Team discussion and debate are both encouraged and welcomed.

If a team member thinks only of the unit he supervises, you will need to address the situation. Neither your organization nor staff will attain success if such a narrow focus is not broadened. How the individual is approached will prove critical. In my own experience, I work with the employee to develop an appropriate plan for meeting the challenge at hand. This acknowledges the delicacy of the situation and keeps the organization moving forward.

Other key ingredients of a unit’s success are integrity, honesty, humility, and a sense of humor. While the truth may hurt, it must be told, or other problems will arise. Ultimately, honesty must prove the order of the day so the unit can accomplish its work. Maturity and pragmatism are essential. Take missteps in stride. Focus on your mission and how to continue to move the organization forward. Also realize that change requires collaborative negotiation. A hostile takeover is never good for staff. Changes need to be negotiated.

THOUGHTS ON LEADERSHIP

Be open and honest when sharing ideas, potential visions, or possible priorities and strategies. Building relationships (especially with the chief financial officer) is critical. Recognize that you are new to the position and that listening and learning are crucial aspects of your work. Create a few high-level talking points and encourage feedback. At an open forum, a potential supervisor once presented her mission, vision, and values along with a proposed organizational chart. It did not go very well for her because she had no idea what offices or functions she would be overseeing. So hit the ground listening and learning as much as possible about the organization—and take copious notes. You’ll need to determine what is valuable and informative and what is merely complaining and whining. Assess the pool of talent that is available, and identify where additional knowledge, skills, and abilities may be needed. Assess different cultures within the organization in order to determine how much work needs to be done to build a successful, nimble organization. Multiple cultures within the unit may impede progress. Address issues early by communicating clearly about where the organization is headed. Doing so will help build a strong, cohesive unit. Realize that you have an important opportunity to assess the organization from your perspective. Openness and honesty with staff will cultivate a dedicated team that focuses on and produces for the university.

Gathering information will enable you to build relationships that in turn will help you identify a vision and strategies for attaining it. Leadership means helping others or enhancing a larger goal. Be sure you know the goals of the administration so that yours align. I recall that in first grade, my classmates and I all had to run for “president for a day.” My classmates talked about what they would like to have happen if I were president for a day. After gathering their suggestions, we voted on the top ten items; the top five became my platform for “president for a day.” My classmates talked about what they would do for the class; I asked what my classmates would like to have happen if I were president for a day. After gathering their suggestions, we voted on the top ten items; the top five became my platform for “president for a day.” This worked well: I did not have to talk in front of the class (I was terrified to do so); I had only to listen, take notes, add votes, and read the top five. Perfect! Initially surprised that I won the election, I suddenly realized that now I had to follow through on my commitment. I asked for volunteers, who were happy to contribute to events that were “by and for” the class, not the president. Moreover, the teacher—our top administrator—agreed to our top five, with the result that her goals and our goals mirrored one another. By merely gathering information, I was able to make others happy. Then, as now, I found this much more gratifying than setting an agenda built solely on my own ideas.

Another way in which ASR enables staff to provide feedback and information is by holding “Sue for a day” brown-bag lunches. Staff may discuss anything they wish, to include raising any question. Great ideas evolve from these sessions, and follow-up sessions are scheduled to
address what has been accomplished and what items remain pending. I hold brown-bag lunches during which I explain the budget process and my philosophy in ensuring the unit’s stability. By listening, knowing limits, and setting clear expectations, almost everyone can move ahead with shared understanding.

Some leaders conceive of their ideas and goals without any staff input whatsoever. Ask yourself, “Who is this for?” Leaders must attract followers to complete a project, but it’s imperative for the project to serve the greater good. Leadership is not having subordinates do as they’re told; that is managing. Managers hold positions of authority and strive to run well-oiled shops; yet many avoid conflict altogether. This type of management can result in a unit becoming stagnant and unsuccessful. ASR staff are responsible for keeping the unit—as well as the University—running well. Every position is important and serves key functions that influence other positions. Indeed, our external impact and gratification keep us energized and focused. As Abraham Lincoln said, “A leader is best when people barely know he exists; when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say we did it ourselves.”

How does one work with a leader who builds her own ego and fails to consider the mission of the university? It’s not easy. Strive to earn the respect and support of the people in positions of authority above you. As a leader of a unit, you must eliminate barriers so staff can concentrate fully on their responsibilities and the mission of the unit. Exercise care in dealing with contentious and/or political issues. Your success may be threatened if you fail to meet another unit’s demand. Keep those in positions of authority informed, and ask how they wish you to handle the situation. Try to negotiate a balance, and do not get caught off guard. If contentious situations continue to arise and impede progress, then it may be time to consider other possibilities. Other AACRAO members will help you conduct a reality check. The demands may be so overwhelming that you need to be assured that you haven’t lost your mind. Consider the pros and cons of the situation: Is the unit’s mission no longer in alignment with that of the university? Analyzing and adjusting to changing initiatives is common in our profession. And knowing the point at which you must adjust is a sign of a strong leader. I often remind staff that we need to return to our unit “bubble” in which our aim is to provide positive outcomes for students, faculty, and staff. Look out for one another and provide guidance and assistance when needed. Finally, be sure to take advantage of opportunities for professional development. Our positions are demanding, and there is no shame in seeking the advice of others.

At the end of the day, passion and fantastic staff fuel success. As John Maxwell once said, “A leader leads by example, whether he intends to or not.” My job is to remove obstacles and barriers that impede my staff’s success. I want to build confidence in them so they can increase their personal impact on the University, as well as on our overarching mission, which is to make a positive difference in students’ lives.

About the Author

SUE VAN VOORHIS is Associate Vice Provost of Academic Support Resources and University Registrar at the University of Minnesota. During her 25 years in this profession, she has led the successful implementation and enhancement of ERP software, the One Stop Student Services Center and the Office of Classroom Management for the University of Minnesota and previously at Montana State University, Bozeman. Van Voorhis, who has many other administrative assignments at the university, also was involved in the institution’s conversion to semesters, renovation of several campus buildings, reengineering of university wide processes and policies, and also serves as a consultant to other colleges and universities. She regularly volunteers and presents at AACRAO and UMACRAO.
Creating a Healthy Workplace

By Karl E. Burgher, Michael B. Snyder, and Kyle Schroeder

Welcome to the fourth in a series of articles in which we focus on workplace efficiencies and the use of good management and project management techniques and tools to foster a productive and healthy workplace. This article lays the foundation for creating the work environment needed to realize good management practices. Without a healthy team (or at least a team tending toward health), it can be difficult to organize, motivate, cultivate loyalty, and set priorities. In addition, we discuss why you need to know your organization, your service and/or product, and your culture. If we do not know who and where we are today, then how can we move forward tomorrow?

We introduced work plans early in the series so our readers could begin to address some tangible issues. But it is just as important to assess the “level of health” of the unit or organization early in the project management (PM) process. It is much easier to introduce or improve efficiencies when the environment fosters such improvements. Although many terms and phrases can be used to describe a good work environment, we prefer the word “healthy.” We often hear about building teams, creating community, fostering trust, and providing a safe place where people can work to their full potential without being bombarded by the kinds of issues that typify low-morale environments. Creating a pleasant place to work requires considerable leadership if only because health-promoting rules and workplace practices need to be enforced and underlying tensions and departmental practices that drag everyone down need to be corrected.

People must be shown the way and given an opportunity to change. (Just a couple of flies in the soup make the whole pot undesirable.) That said, change is a two-pronged process: The boss must lead and manage well, and the team must want to participate. The leader/manager cannot expect much success without a team that wants to contribute, that has purpose, that is eager for change, and that has the fortitude to follow through. It is not all the boss’s responsibility; however, too often, failure becomes an exercise in blaming the boss.

In the latter half of this article, we describe how the manager and team can build a foundation to help the unit move in a healthier and more efficient direction. In subsequent articles, we will discuss de-motivation and motivation and will address the specifics of team building and reducing stress. Finally, we will present a series of case studies detailing how to put it all into practice—i.e., implementation. If we only plan and do not execute, we will not find a new or better way. Thought experiments and planning exercises are all now “Internet free,” meaning that we have more than enough templates for planning.
Those who learn these skills and then are able to execute the plan will remain competitive.

A healthy workplace requires a strong and confident boss with good management and leadership skills. Health in an organization needs to be enforced. Problems abound in units where the manager does not affect the change needed to keep the environment safe and successful. The tools and techniques described in Part I of this article can be rewarding, but they are not for the faint of heart. Strong, confident, careful management and leadership are required in today’s highly competitive environment.

Many of the topics we address can be found in management books and on websites such as BNET.com and TechRepublic.com. You are likely to recognize much of what you read. We hope to get you to think differently about some of these time-tested ideas; to describe an implementation plan; and, perhaps most important, to convince you that good management and project management works and that the challenge is worth it. We hope to motivate and convince you to take at least some of the steps necessary to improve your organization and not be satisfied with the status quo—particularly if your workplace is unprioritized, overwhelmed, and unhealthy.

**PART I: KNOWING WHERE—AND WHO—you are**

**Leadership vs. Management**

It seems nobody wants to be a manager anymore. The popular choice is to be a leader/warrior. Leadership—not management—programs are all the rage. It is much more inflating to be thought of as a leader—everyone it seems must be envisioning themselves as a Troy or Cleopatra. Many years ago, a Native American mentor lamented that everyone thinks he is a warrior, but there really are few. True warriors and leaders often pay a high price personally to affect change; as such, they are hard to find. The word “leader,” like “entrepreneur,” has become overused and, therefore, misused. This misuse can deceive us into searching for the “silver bullet” or the big new plan that can affect change apart from proper management and execution skills. Becoming organized and efficient does require some leadership, but what most often is needed are good management skills. Typically, improving an organization requires that many middle managers adopt a shared vision and implement the necessary steps toward improvement. Often, these steps are not very romantic—and that, we believe, is at the heart of many management problems. “Blocking” and “tackling” and “staying in shape” (that is, running and lifting) are the keys to successful organizational execution (and better weekend football). But alas, everyone wants to be the star quarterback without the day-in, day-out discipline necessary for success.

Leadership skills are not the same as—or should they replace—management skills. Rather, they should enhance them. Both are necessary. Rather than the recent disproportionate focus on cultivating great leaders, we need to cultivate great managers. The world doesn’t appear to appreciate good management much anymore, but we contend that if you take the time to be a good manager, you will be promoted, you will get a pay raise, and you will be happier at work. You may not make it to the front page of the local newspaper, but you may actually be happier and more successful as measured by our capitalistic scorekeepers (pay grade!). A pretty good read is the book “The Millionaire Next Door”—often and simply these folks are quiet, humble, solid long-term managers. Management should be studied and researched just as much as our academic content areas. We all should be more content to manage and facilitate others’ success than search for silver bullets.

Let’s tighten up our definition of these two terms. We define leadership as the act of setting a vision, being innovative, inspiring, and/or spearheading change. A leader sets the direction and inspires a belief in the idea and in the employees of the organization. We define management as the ability to direct, control, and achieve based on a pre-established vision, direction, or plan. A manager executes by directing resources to achieve an objective. Successful management is goal-, benchmark-, and deliverable-based execution.

Leadership skills are important, and much is written these days about their value. (Kouzes and Posner, among others, have written a variety of great books on the topic.) However, we believe that successful organizations require that most people be skilled in the art of management. The work must be implemented, not simply envisioned or discussed in meetings or at the water cooler. Your people must be lined out, directed, and then freed up to do their work. It is wonderful and necessary to have someone with the vision and capacity to plot a course to a brave new world. That is leadership. But what is the value if no one is
capable of working toward achieving the goal—i.e., of taking the sometimes boring and methodical steps necessary to accomplish the work? We must develop and employ great managers. So let us begin that journey with a few suggestions about how to build the organizational foundation that will lead to robust execution.

**Understanding Where You Are—KYP Analysis**

Understanding that we need great managers (many) as well as great leaders (few) to be successful, how do we go about building a workplace foundation that will keep people engaged day in and day out? The short answer is that we do so slowly and steadily, while every day practicing good management behaviors. The burden is on managers/leaders to regularly perform a “Know Your People” (KYP) analysis. We learned the KYP concept from a ninth grade basketball coach who required that we know our teammates. In the same way, we need to know to whom to delegate critical aspects of the work effort. Who is the best staff member to perform the work equivalent of a Hail Mary pass, a last-second shot, or perhaps that last set for the game-winning spike? Other dimensions can be added to the “KYP” analysis as there are many things we need to know if we are to manage more effectively. (This is somewhat similar to a SWOT analysis.)

**Know Your People**

This is the “build relationships” parameter, the task of getting to know your people’s skill set. As we have become “meta-beings,” we seem to have forgotten how to be real human beings. In our first article, we described the various types of project managers and the importance of knowing your employees well enough to assign appropriate and “matched” projects to them. This section is about making that part of your job full time. Build a relationship with each and every direct report. Learn their interests, their dislikes, their kids’ names, and even their pets’ names. And most important, know where their skills “fit” so you can assign appropriate tasks to each and thereby complete work efficiently and well. Develop relationships to such an extent that there are never any awkward moments in your discussions with your staff. This will result in everyone feeling respected, speaking freely, and bringing great ideas to the table without fear. Annual evaluations will become summaries of the daily evaluations you have throughout the year. Be sure to facilitate your people’s success, not your own. Remember: If they succeed, you succeed. Give away power and credit, and you will gain responsibility and power (and increased pay) in return. Everybody wins. Ultimately, you will find that being a good manager in fact can be somewhat self-serving.

**Know Your Culture**

To move ahead, you must take stock and understand both where you are geographically and the state of your organization’s health. Take into account the many differences that may affect your environment. These may be regional, or they may be the result of the sector in which your institution lives. Some differences are the result of staff members’ age, race, and gender. Organizational behavior characteristics such as top down, bottom up, hierarchical, egalitarian, weak matrix, and strong matrix may be at play.

Our point is not to describe all of the possible differences but rather to demonstrate that you need to know where you are and understand the culture of the organization where you work. Some organizations move quickly, some move slowly. Sometimes power is distributed, and sometimes it is not. With a little forethought, you can improve performance most of the time. We have not always been perfectly successful in this, but we always have tried our best. For example, while working on Native American reservations, it was important to remember that we really were in another country. Our failure to remember this resulted on occasion in severe project slowdowns. Amendments can be made, but this costs time and goodwill. It is better to invest effort from the outset in getting to know the unique culture of your work environment. There is a learning curve, so pay attention.

It is also important to assess morale not only in your department but also in your organization as a whole. As manager, you are responsible for laying the foundation for change. You must know how much trust must be built to be able to begin the processes of organizing and managing change. Maybe you will be lucky enough to walk into a unit that is ready and eager to learn, build, and grow. But seldom is that the case. More often, we must invest significant time and energy in development before we can think about achieving organizational success.

Finally, you need to know the level of civility that prevails and how your employees treat one another. If staff are
not kind to one another, then you will have to overcome some significant trust and management issues before you can even consider writing that first major work plan. The worst offenders may have to be invited to change right away; this can help communicate to all that a new order is on its way. Small projects can often be used as tools to work on these things. In summary—know, admit, and accept where you are. Then begin the process of helping people help themselves.

**Know Your Product**

Know what your product (or service) is; know what your value proposition is; and know what you are specifically charged with accomplishing, both directly (product) and indirectly (satisfaction). We all have a vision statement, a mission statement, and perhaps even a value statement. In addition, we need to know exactly what we are responsible for delivering. Only then will we be able to implement tighter management controls and project management techniques. Are we responsible only for the simple task of delivering transcripts with a smile (did you make a friend? develop a loyal alumnus?), or are we responsible for the complex task of improving retention? In either case, it is imperative that we know our product and the desired service outcome. (Our use of the term “product” is admittedly loose, but we want you to think about everything you deliver.) Be careful not to send mixed messages; these will only confuse and compromise performance. In addition to knowing what you deliver, know what your competition delivers. Become an expert. Know, too, what you do not deliver. Do not try to be all things to all people.

Consider the following analogy: The sales rep who knows virtually nothing about the store’s products is bad for the customer as well as the seller. If it does not pay to be present, the individual who needs help often can save time and effort by seeking service (and products) online. Indeed, online vendors have become adept at customer service, making it ever more important to provide top-quality face-to-face service in all aspects of our work. In many fields—education included—it has become quite easy to change service providers.

To its credit, higher education has improved its service through the introduction of one-stop service centers, cross-training, robust IT help desks, and customizable online services. But many units still have a long way to go. A little expertise can go a long way: When a customer service representative has downtime, she should build her product knowledge by reading manuals and actually utilizing the products. Consider this specifically in our line of work: Do we teach enough? Do we require that our staff learn something new every day? Do we give our staff time to become great at what they do, with what they deliver, with what they know, and with what their product is and does? Ample professional development is imperative, but often it is one of the first things we cut from the budget. It should be the last.

**Know Yourself**

Perhaps the most important aspect of knowing yourself is knowing what you do not know. Understanding this can help you move forward, set priorities, and decide what you and/or your unit can take on. What you don’t know provides important information about whom to add to your team, whom to send to training, when you need to seek help, and when you need to let something go. No one likes to admit defeat; and as we discussed in our first article, “killing projects” can be interpreted as failure. Nevertheless, we are strongest when we know what we can and cannot do. We also need to be “present” and to know what we are best at, when we are best at it, and how best we can contribute. We need to know how to articulate these concepts to our group, to our supervisor(s), and to students. We cannot know everything (nor do we need to), but understanding who we are and who we are not can position us to succeed.

**Know Your Students/Stakeholders**

Whom does your unit or department serve? Are they primarily freshmen, seniors, community members, or other taxpayers? You and your staff must be able to define who it is that you serve. This may be one of the simplest “KYPs” to understand but one of the more difficult to determine. Do you read the IPEDS data? Have you read the Fact Book? Do you have a focus group? Do you have a suggestion box? (This seems simplistic, but good bosses collect information in as many ways as possible.) Do you meet regularly with your students, with your community, and with your other stakeholders?

Consider again the 21st century college or university. Really, there are very few pure research institutions. Most of us are in the business of education. Certainly we
should have the opportunity to commit to our scholarship (which contributes to our teaching), but we must maintain our focus on the primary directive of educating students. We must know who is in our classes, and we must know what our students need. We cannot make up the rules so that they fit us; rather, we must ensure the right fit for them. Thus, KYPs are about managing the products/services that students actually need (as opposed to what we think they need). Projects and PM techniques must be “wrapped around” our students’ needs (if for no other reason than that their tuition pays our salaries). We must become much better service providers. Indeed, better service to students in fact can be quite self-serving, allowing us to be scholars, educators, and “student success providers.”

Summary

Take time to manage. Know your people. Know your people’s work styles, but know your people as human beings as well. Take an extra five minutes to build relationships in addition to conducting business. Visit slowly so that work management can go quickly. Choose whether to take time to build relationships with staff and colleagues—perhaps over a cup of coffee or a light lunch—or to lose time to clarifying (or, worse, arguing about) work.

PART II: BUILDING THE (CULTURAL) FOUNDATION

Laying the foundation of your work environment helps ensure that good work is accomplished. For the purposes of this article, the foundation is the established healthy culture of the workplace that enables effective management. Today more than ever, as knowledge workers work so much longer and harder, it has become so important to provide a healthy workplace environment. This can be easy to describe on paper but difficult to implement. The process can be lonely for the manager, but it can bring lasting rewards. Starting fresh can be the most challenging part of any change management implementation.

The norm for new managers is to assume that the team is ready and to embark immediately on the work (which usually is piled high). But teams—or, more specifically, the people on them—often are not ready. Rather, they may be beset by underlying workplace cultural and “health” issues, including knowledge that needs to be built and skills that need to be developed. Major league ballplayers spend weeks preparing for a six-month season; why do we not devote time to preparing for our “season?” Just as professional athletes train, so we, too, must train so our “team” can perform to the best of its ability.

Workplace culture often needs to be established; ground rules for getting along need to be enforced; and employees need to be encouraged/required to participate in the building of the team. The basic tenants of a healthy workplace can be found in the management literature, and there is no shortage of consultants that are willing to provide seminars on the same. These same concepts can be found in one form or another in all religions. These thoughts are the basis of societal cooperation, and thus, organizational cooperation. For the organization that does not “coop”erate cannot perform, or at least perform well. In addition, we must get some sort of handle on the complete picture of our team members’ lives as each employee must organize around not only work but family and play. We argue all is connected. We argue that the person who states they shut it (knowledge work) off, or who turns knowledge work on like a light switch are lying to us and/or lying to themselves as well. We all must manage all things cooperatively—obviously as managers we are focusing on the workplace—but we should have some knowledge of the peripheral as well. Life is a mixed fruit cocktail—not a box of individual chocolates.

And now on to the list—written for our need to read quickly, learn quickly, and practice quickly. We have been known to make lists, hang them up, and read them over and over until we get it. (These items are easy to vocalize and easy to assert but so difficult to put into practice). As many have said, “You will forget all of these things, but you will also be given many opportunities to learn.”

Honesty

If you are always honest, the world will remember for you. In practice, we often are guarded and feel we cannot really be forthcoming. We worry about being taken advantage of or being cheated. But we suggest flipping this on its head: Assume that people will cooperate if they are given the opportunity to be truthful, straightforward, and heard. Sure, sometimes you get burned, but all the energy saved from not being guarded all the time is now freed up to do meaningful work. And the additional work will more than make up for any dishonesty—as dishonesty should only happen once, and then be dealt with.
Consider our shop: Given that we currently facilitate 45 teams performing work in a matrix without a support staff, we cannot possibly remember everything. All of the teams have budgets; in all, there are some 300 or more projects of varying sizes. Even though many have said that this is not possible, we say it is possible because all we have to recall in real time is what we need to do next. Some teams need to be managed more than others, and some areas have intermediate managers supervising their work. Nevertheless, almost all decisions are made by the staff who perform the work.

Be honest with your team, and expect your team to be honest with you. Give them the benefit of the doubt, and they will repay your honesty ten times over. Your teams will appreciate this and rise to the occasion. And it sure makes life a whole lot simpler. When you make a mistake, acknowledge it to your employees and yourself. Make amends quickly, and expect that people will continue to trust and understand; after all, we are human beings—and, thus, fallible. Tomorrow, trust someone (or even something) you have not trusted yet.

Empathy

We love the movie “Little Big Man” because of the Cherokee warrior who guides viewers through the movie and points out the “good human beings.” Empathy is a trait of those managers who truly care for their employees. We have heard often that a manager needs to be an “active listener.” While listening is certainly important (and not always easy for busy people), we take issue with this approach: If we have empathy and truly want to facilitate others’ success (i.e., be a good manager), then there should be no need to practice active listening because we already care and are present. We should not have to think about listening at all. We always listen (some days we may listen more or less attentively, depending on how busy or tired we are), but we should never need to think about listening. If we practice empathy, we will hear what is said because we truly care. If you as the manager practice empathy and lead by example—and ask others to do the same—then your organization will be well on its way to building a strong foundation. Tomorrow, practice empathy rather than active listening.

Loyalty

Larry King once said “that the American people have the [consumer] loyalty of an alley cat ...” Loyalty does seem to be a dying practice (in fact, maybe it always was a practice of the few). It is apparent that many either do not comprehend (or simply are not willing to undertake) what loyalty requires. Create a team, build trust, demonstrate that you will protect your team, and thereby cultivate loyalty. Neither you nor your team members will have to expend energy watching your back; instead, energy can be directed fully toward more and better work. Do this consistently, and soon you will find that yours is the over-achieving team. Your team will be out in front because your team has more energy devoted to work and play rather than fear and worry. Tomorrow, protect your team—from the noise, the politics, and the unfair—as best you can. Do so, and your team will repay you with loyalty. (If they do not, you may need to provide a quick and decisive opportunity for some to change.) Teaching loyalty can be difficult, but the benefit to your unit can be significant. Loyalty should be a prerequisite for promotion.

Building Trust

Trust is built one day at a time. If you practice the healthy behavior-building suggestions in this article, trust will ensue. Choose to trust before you have evidence to do so, and most important, always do what you say you will do. Consistency aids the trust-building process. You may have to take a few more notes and invest a little more effort, but when problems arise or you drop the ball, your people will feel more comfortable being honest with you because of the healthy environment you have created. Tomorrow, choose to trust, and do everything you say you will do.

Integrity

It would be fine if at our funerals nothing were said but that “he had integrity.” Integrity has been described as “honor in practice.” Integrity also can be defined as doing the things that are necessary to create a healthy environment despite the costs—in particular, costs to the individual as manager. Practice integrity by striving to become a great manager. Learn constantly about management processes, and then apply that learning to great management every day. Think before you act or speak; care for and nurture your employees; create a work environment such that
employees don’t go home and kick their dogs. Tomorrow, practice integrity. Your people will follow, and everyone will be better off.

Ethical Clarity

Nearly every organization has a policy, and nearly everyone wants to practice good ethics…but whose ethics? Discussion about ethics has become increasingly complicated in our “flat world” (Friedman) as cultures and norms collide at the speed of the Internet. As a manager, you must define the ethical values of your organization. The organization needs to have an ethics policy and a set of practiced characteristics to be functional. You, the manager (and leader), need to do two things: follow the policy, and enforce the policy. If managers do not pay for the bottled water in the office refrigerator, why should anyone else? It can be as simple as that. To function properly, your organization must know its ethics prior to needing them. You will be judged on the basis of your reactions, not your actions. Volumes about ethics have been written, researched, practiced, and argued, but ethics does not have to be complex. Nevertheless, it must be defined, and all must know the organization’s expectations. Examine the organization’s policy and practice, and then examine yourself. All must fit together as a cohesive whole. If they do not, you may need to seek employment elsewhere. Tomorrow, create a one-page ethics policy for your department that is based on your institution’s policy. (If your institution does not have such a policy, then develop your own.) Talk about it, and hang it on the wall next to your business license (if you have one), in the hall, and in the bathroom. Put your employees on notice—politely—that your team has an ethics rulebook that will be enforced.

Compassion

Compassion is a lot like empathy. Empathy means identifying and feeling what others feel. Dictionary.com defines compassion as understanding someone else’s struggles and then taking action to help correct them. The bottom line is that we need to care about our folks, manage, and lead. As Leila says in “Leila’s House of Corrections” at BNET.com, “Managers—avoid empty expressions.” Be sincere (we say, “be compassionate and empathetic”), and, most important, take action to correct what you can. Take heart: You are responsible for your employees from 8 am until 5 pm, so dig in and manage them. Give them positive and healthy options for overcoming their struggles. This is what you are paid to do. Tomorrow, walk a few steps in each of your employee’s shoes (try it, despite the cliché).

Respect

A Gros Ventre Sioux mentor on the Fort Belknap Reservation said, “For if you respect others that do not respect you, then you have no self-respect.” We must respect ourselves so that we (1) can respect others who deserve our respect and (2) can manage change in others (as it is within our authority to do so) in order to maintain a respectful work environment. We must constantly work on and enhance our respectfulness as we relate to our constituents (our students, primarily) and, of course, our colleagues. We can disagree, but we must do so in an educated, informed, and mature manner. Benjamin Franklin said that “the sign of an educated person is to be able to argue without anger.” Put the issues before the personalities, give folks the benefit of the doubt, and this will become a whole lot easier. Tomorrow, respect (start with being polite and civil toward) all in your office and all who require your goods and services. Monitor the result: You will get more in return than you expect. Finally, remember in all of this that someone has to go first. Let it be you. Take a few lumps for the team (if need be), and be the catalyst for respectfully helping all to do their jobs well.

SUMMARY

This article presents little new information about management and PM issues. Instead, our intent is to present a sort of road map for organizational change. We challenge you to give it a try. Three overriding factors demand that work evolve: (1) the 21st century knowledge worker requires extensive ownership, a healthier workplace, and considerable buy-in; (2) the world is becoming “flatter” every day as information becomes increasingly ubiquitous, cultures are colliding; and (3) the economy is now permanently (at least for the foreseeable future) global, and transactions occur if not quite at the speed of light then at the speed of the Internet. There are no secrets; information is free; the skill, the employment, the pay, and success are in the execution. So execute to make a better work environment for your people, to become more efficient, and to keep
your business open. Those unable to do so will fail; at a minimum, their organizations will be defined by mediocrity and so will become indistinguishable from the rest. We must adjust...or perish.

In our next articles, we describe how to build teams and a project management office in a much more actionable (that is, in a much less philosophical) manner. In the meantime, we urge you to focus on managing better and improving the culture in your workplace. If expectations are high, persistent, and enforced (remember that some of this will require significant strength), then improvement will ensue.

We have struggled with many of these challenges ourselves; even when we do our job well, the results aren’t always perfect. But in our 40 years of combined project management experience, we have learned what needs to be done if we are to have more good days than bad. Some may say that six months is a long time to wait for change. But let us put it in perspective: What is six months—or even a year—in the context of an entire career? Most of us have a decade or two (or even three) of work still ahead. Most spend their first decade at work learning content; we recommend spending a mere six months to a year to develop some specific management and PM tools and techniques to improve the remaining decades of your career.

Even if things do not or cannot work out in your current environment...well, at least you will have tried. And if you realize that a healthy workplace is important to you, then you just might look for a job that will help you feel a little bit better about the world. Someone somewhere else will notice that you have adopted a new way and will provide you with options. We promise.

Until next time,
Karl, Mike, and Kyle

About the Authors

KARL E. BURGHER, PH.D., P.E., is Chief Strategy Officer and Professor at Indiana State University (ISU), where he has worked since January 2010 to manage implementation of the University’s five-year strategic plan. He oversees 45 teams, more than 250 people, and well over 300 specifically defined projects in a PM-like matrix. Karl learned PM techniques in the construction industry, where he worked for ten years as an explosives engineer. Subsequently, he managed many federal research and education contracts as a Center Director and then as a Vice President of Research and Contracts. Prior to arriving at ISU, he taught management and project management at the University of Missouri-Rolla. Karl earned a B.S. and an M.S. in mining engineering from Michigan Technological University and a B.S. in economics and a Ph.D. in mining engineering from the University of Missouri-Rolla Karl is in his 28th year in the academy.

MICHAEL B. SNYDER is the Director of Enterprise Services in the Office of Information Technology, a program manager for strategic initiatives at Indiana State University, and a certified PMP. He has been a project manager for more than twelve years, having worked in higher education for the past five. Currently, Mike reports to both the CIO and the Chief Strategy Officer, managing multiple projects that affect various specific areas on campus as well as the entire university. He manages a robust co-curricular data collection effort that culminates in a student co-curricular record. In addition, he is ramping up a Business Intelligence Unit and student success “war room,” helping the CSO and Associate Vice President of Student Success initiate campus-wide Strategic Enrollment Management practices. Mike earned his bachelor’s degree in computer science, specializing in business systems, from Pacific Lutheran University and is currently working on his M.B.A. at ISU.

KYLE SCHROEDER is a Channel Partner Manager at ExactTarget—global digital marketing technology. He has served in project management and program management roles during his two and half years at ExactTarget where he executes sales process and program improvements across departments that increase efficiencies in their global partner program. There are more than 500 partners in their network. Kyle often bridges the gap between the efforts of the marketing organization and sales team in order to drive successful project execution with their partners. Kyle received his bachelor’s degree in business management and marketing at Anderson University (IN).
Turning an Elephant into a Ballerina

By Connie M. Goodman and Anne Massaro

Breaking down silos, sharing resources and services across departmental boundaries, streamlining processes, and strengthening multidisciplinary research efforts are just a few of the ways in which President Gee of The Ohio State University (OSU) wanted to transform the institution’s culture. OSU’s culture, defined as a set of beliefs, unwritten rules, and “how we do things around here,” included the notion that departments reigned supreme. When President Gee returned to OSU in 2007, he claimed interest in “one university”—in moving the institution from a position of excellence to one of eminence, in turning an elephant into a ballerina. This article details a few of the initial steps that were taken to realize President Gee’s vision.

One of the first steps was a decision to hire Senn Delaney®, whose website describes the company as “the leading international authority and successful practitioner of culture shaping that enhances the spirit and performance of organizations.” A foundational tool of the company and its clients is Winning Teams, Winning Cultures by Larry Senn and Jim Hart. The book sets forth six essential values for high performance as well as a methodology for shaping culture. Defining Ohio State’s values was an inaugural effort of the president and his leadership team.

OSU’s core values are:

- **Excellence**—in the standards we set, the results we produce, the relationships we are in, and the dedicated service we provide.
- **Collaborating As One University**—our aspirations demand we remove internal boundaries—we must share information, promote teamwork, and think creatively to make this happen.
- **Acting With Integrity And Personal Accountability**—we accept responsibility for our actions, we keep our word, we focus on solutions rather than fault and blame, and we take initiative to make things happen.
- **Openness and Trust**—our communication is direct and honest, we promote authenticity and transparency in our relationships and activities, we’re open to feedback and coaching, and we give feedback with candor and respect.
- **Diversity in People and Ideas**—the health of our environment demands that we respect each other, that we are inclusive, and that we profoundly value who each of us is as a whole person and what each of us uniquely contributes.
- **Change and Innovation**—these principles are our heritage and our future—we’re curious, we’re creative, and we embrace positive, constructive conflict.
Simplicity in Our Work—in the administration and management of our enterprise we are responsive, ethical, and transparent and we strive to make the functioning of this complex institution simple and efficient. (<www.osu.edu/eminence/values/Values.html>)

The Wexner Medical Center at The Ohio State University has two additional values to support a focus on improving people’s lives through personalized health care:

Empathy and Compassion—this is at the heart of what we do. We are caring, respectful, and encouraging to each of our customers and to each other. Because we are sensitive to individual needs, we actively listen and seek ways to improve the OSU Medical Center experience.

Leadership—we live in alignment with our values and are thoughtful about how we influence others as we develop and deliver personalized health care.

Helping others understand these values and question long-held beliefs was the next major challenge. On the advice of the hired experts, the University designed two-day retreats as means of facilitating personal insight—“aha!” moments—that would inspire reflection on the extent to which each individual’s performance was aligned (or out of sync) with the aspirational culture. Strengthening personal effectiveness and unlocking “status quo tendencies” were the objectives to be accomplished through activities, personal reflection and journaling, sharing with a partner, group discussion and solution finding, and commitments to behavior change.

ATTAINING THE OBJECTIVES

“Collaborating as one university” is one of OSU’s stated values. This includes such concepts as sharing information and promoting teamwork. “Broken squares” was the activity that was used to illustrate how effectively (or not) faculty and staff lived this value. One outcome was awareness of the need to focus individual attention and energy on developing the ability to collaborate. Small groups debriefed the experience, and then the retreat facilitator offered an opportunity for reflection. Each participant was asked to identify thoughts and actions that contributed to or detracted from her team’s success. “I will…” statements and commitments to behavior change followed the time for reflection.

Retreats alone cannot change culture. While they were critical in helping individuals examine their behaviors, reinforcements of new behaviors were required in every work environment. Deans and vice presidents were asked to be champions for the culture change, living the values themselves, focusing attention when others lived the values, and instilling accountability throughout their units for embracing a new way of working together. Each dean and vice president also was asked to identify a culture strategist within his respective area, someone who was trained to sustain the momentum gained during the retreats. Note that this initiative was “leader led,” not “leader driven”: Upper-level management attended the retreats to learn and understand prior to sharing the culture change with their staff. Active participation by all was key.

When the culture strategists were convened for training, they were invited to explore how the University’s values played a role in their units’ achievement of their mission. How does creating a culture of change and innovation support every college’s research agenda? In what ways does “diversity in people and ideas” affect staff morale? These types of questions and the opportunity to align the values and the retreat experiences with mission-critical efforts constitute the beginning of the real work of culture transformation. Abstract concepts must be made relevant to everyday work. To that end, culture strategists worked with department managers to keep the concepts alive. Staff in one large department expressed a desire for more and better-quality coaching and feedback. Specifically, they wanted more acknowledgment from their supervisors when work was meeting expectations and more direct and timely communication when it was not. In response, the department instituted a mentoring program for supervisors. Those who participated were given the opportunity to candidly ask more senior managers how to give feedback—particularly constructive feedback. This real-time learning gave supervisors the confidence and the skills to give their employees what they needed and wanted.

A smaller department implemented “thank you Thursdays.” The culture strategist asked each member of the department to identify ways in which colleagues were being supportive, excelling as team players, and communicating in open and trusting ways. Every Thursday, the strategist
supplied a variety of note cards, pens, and trinkets intended to serve as “thank you tokens.” Staff members were encouraged to express their appreciation by giving the tokens to one another. Soon, department members were finding their own ways to demonstrate their appreciation for one another—and not just on Thursdays.

One college completely changed both the structure of its faculty meetings and how decisions were made. The dean...
emphasized transparency and open inquiry in all matters pertaining to academic excellence. While this new approach required some to learn new ways to communicate and all to be patient with one another, the results were dramatic. Typical interactions in this college now include listening to diverse viewpoints and listening to understand rather than debating. Collectively, the faculty have defined their strategic direction. All now express the value of a culture of openness rather than one of distrust and competition.

**MEASURING PROGRESS**

University and department surveys were designed to assess progress in changing the culture. The surveys were anonymous so respondents would feel comfortable expressing their honest opinions. Given staff and faculty members’ disparate needs and motivations for change, different surveys were designed for each group. The staff survey sample shown in Table 1 (on page 45) demonstrates the types of questions that were asked as well as the tracking method that was used. “Staff” refers to a specific department or unit within a larger group labeled “All Other Ofc. Staff” (i.e., a processing area within a larger department). The last column, “All Non-Ofc. Staff,” refers to areas outside of the target population. This format clarifies the baseline as compared to the current level of functioning as well as how one department compares to others. Cells shaded in light gray show statistically significant improvement while cells shaded in dark gray show a statistically significant decrease in performance.

The surveys were used to diagnose the culture and readiness of departments to move to a higher level of performance. University-wide surveys will be conducted every three years, with mini-surveys and focus groups administered as needed in the interim. Individual departments use the survey responses to target specific elements of their culture that need strengthening—e.g., coaching and feedback and peer acknowledgment.

All universities should determine the kind of culture they need to attain their goals. Once that has been defined and a related set of values identified, faculty and staff should be engaged in experiential, disorienting opportunities to question the status quo and to embrace new ways of interacting and working. To sustain new insights and efforts toward behavior change, employees must see their relevance and applicability to their everyday work. Helping employees understand differences and the perspectives from which others may view a situation creates opportunities for dialogue and the broader sharing of ideas. Rather than dismissing ideas outright or finding fault, the prospect of expanding upon and improving ideas emerges. Creating a common language helps foster more open conversations.

What can you do to improve the culture at your university? With or without a vendor partner, start listening for and observing the values that are emphasized today and that are necessary for tomorrow’s success. Read blogs, articles, and books and engage in activities that relate to those values. Share your discoveries with others. Ask a powerful question, and engage others in dialogue about what one or more of the values means at your institution, for your goals. Turning an elephant into a ballerina is a wonderful metaphor for streamlining and making the complex simple; use the metaphor, share it, or craft an even stronger picture. Once you pique interest, energy toward change will follow.

**About the Authors**

**CONNIE M. GOODMAN** is Assistant Registrar for Academic Records and Training Coordinator in the Office of the University Registrar at The Ohio State University. During her 29 years at OSU, she has worked in the Registrar’s Office in various capacities, as an academic advisor in a college office, and in the Admissions Office. She has served for the past two years as a Culture-Shaping Facilitator and has presented numerous sessions—including one on the culture-shaping initiative at Ohio State—at AACRAO conferences as well as at Ohio AACRAO. Currently, she is Vice Chair of the AACRAO Information and Systems Technology Committee; she has served as Chair of AACRAO state and regional and is a Past President of Ohio AACRAO, for which she currently serves as Webmaster.

**ANNE MASSARO** is Director of Organizational Leadership Effectiveness at The Ohio State University and co-PI on the NSF/ADVANCE grant “Comprehensive Equity at Ohio State.” Her current work is focused on academic leadership development, organizational change, and strengthening the retention of women faculty in the sciences. She started at OSU in 1997 as an Organization Development Consultant and was Project Manager for the culture transformation initiative. Previously, she held human resources and student affairs positions at the University of North Texas, Xavier University, the University of Tennessee, and Appalachian State University. She has a B.A. in psychology from the College of William and Mary, an M.Ed. in student personnel in higher education from the University of Georgia, and a Ph.D. in workforce development and education from The Ohio State University.
On July 14, 2009, President Barack Obama presented the United States with a challenge that would become known as the American Graduation Initiative. A significant component of the initiative was to make the United States the leading nation in the world in college graduates. More specifically, he demanded that by 2020, U.S. community colleges produce an additional five million graduates (<www.whitehouse.gov/blog/Investing-in-Education-The-American-Graduation-Initiative>). At Northampton Community College (NCC), this was received as a direct challenge. The Records and Registration Office began to consider what we were doing and how we could make it better; what could the Records and Registration Office do to increase the number of graduates? NCC offers three graduation dates and holds two commencement ceremonies annually. As the assistant registrar responsible for certifying graduates, I began to more carefully consider the number of graduates we were producing in May, August, and December of each year. NCC policy is that students must apply for graduation, but attendance at commencement is optional. Unlike four-year institutions where the majority of students enroll as members of an entering class in the fall and graduate in the spring four years later, NCC students enroll at various times. Applying for graduation is one way that students can inform us that they are nearing completion of their programs of study. Information on the graduation application triggers other office processes, such as ordering diplomas and inviting graduates to the commencement ceremony. We began to wonder whether confusion regarding graduation and commencement might have a negative impact on the number of students who apply to graduate. For example, did some students not apply for graduation because they did not plan to attend the commencement ceremony? We decided that the best way to find out was to ask students directly. In May 2009, just ahead of the initiative announced by President Obama, we enlisted the help of the Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Effectiveness in conducting a survey.

BACKGROUND

Northampton Community College is located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and serves more than 11,000 students at three brick and mortar campuses as well as online. Students take anywhere from one semester (for a six- or nine-credit specialized diploma) to a few years to finish a program of study. Our student population is incredibly diverse. Our residence halls attract students who wish to attend community college and live away from home; on-campus housing also makes it possible for us to recruit
internationally. Sixty (60) percent of NCC’s enrollment is female, and 40 percent is male.

Prior to conducting the survey, the Records and Registration Office informed students about the importance of applying for graduation and about the difference between graduation and commencement: we hung posters and flyers around campus, and in programs with prescribed requirements, we notified advisors of who had not applied and included applications for those students to complete. The 2009 survey asked students how effective they found these approaches.

**SURVEY: 2009**

The goal of the first survey, conducted in 2009, was to find out what students knew about graduation and commencement; how and when they learned about graduation and commencement; and from whom they got the information. Additional questions focused on the ease of the process and students’ level of satisfaction with the Office of Records and Registration.

Surveys were distributed to students who had already applied for graduation; in fact, they were included with the standard letter informing them of their graduation status. Surveys were sent only to those students whose graduation status was “yes” (all courses completed) or “tentative” (final courses in progress). Students whose applications for graduation were denied but who subsequently registered for their final requirements received a survey with their updated status letter. In this way, we ensured that no student was surveyed multiple times.

**Awareness**

The survey included a few general questions (e.g., are you enrolled full time or part time; did you apply for graduation electronically or on paper; etc.) but focused on how students had learned that they needed to apply to graduate.

The exact survey question was “How did you first become aware that you needed to apply for graduation?” Students chose from the following options: “instructor told me about it;” “advisor told me about it;” “other students told me about it;” “Facebook, Twitter, e-mail from Records and Registration;” “discovered it when I registered;” “saw it on posters and flyers on campus;” and “other.”

The Records and Registration Office mailed 800 surveys to students who applied to graduate in May 2009. The response rate was 24 percent (n=194).

We decided to administer the survey again: Approximately 300 surveys were sent to students who applied to graduate in August 2009. The response rate for this group was only 19 percent (n=58). Similar to the first group of students surveyed, 21 percent were informed by their advisor that they had to apply to graduate; 14 percent had read online that they had to do so. In sharp contrast to the May graduates, only 7 percent of respondents had been informed by other students that they had to apply to graduate.

During fall 2009, we mailed 539 surveys to students who applied to graduate in December. The response rate for this group was 26 percent (n=138). Compared to the results for the August graduation cohort, the results for the December cohort were slightly more comparable to those of the May cohort: 24 percent of respondents had been informed by other students that they had to apply to graduate, 17 percent had learned from their advisor that they had to do so, and 21 percent learned from the website that they had to apply to graduate.

Given that the largest number of applicants and graduates was during the spring semester, we decided to administer the survey during one additional semester. In May 2010, we mailed 850 surveys and attained a response rate of 25 percent (n=216). The results proved fairly comparable to those obtained the previous spring and fall: 14 percent learned from the website that they needed to apply to graduate. Interestingly, 14 percent—the highest percentage reported by any of the four cohorts surveyed—indicated that they had been informed by their advisors that they had to apply to graduate.

The results across the spring and fall semesters (that is, for graduation dates in May 2009, December 2009, and May 2010) were comparable; August 2009 was the outlier, yielding the fewest applicants and graduates. (Of course, in comparison to the spring and fall semesters, summer finds the fewest students on campus and enrolled in coursework.)

When did students become aware that they needed to apply to graduate?

Our second area of concern had to do with when students were learning that they needed to apply to gradu-
We asked this question with a few goals in mind: if there was a correlation between when and how students were learning that they needed to apply to graduate, then perhaps we could make even better use of those methods even earlier in students’ enrollment. This could prove significant because the earlier students apply to graduate, the more time they have to improve their eligibility to do so. For example, if they are not in fact eligible to graduate, they nevertheless may have enough time to alter their schedules so they could graduate when they had planned to. This might result in a few more graduates than if students didn’t have sufficient time to learn that they had yet to complete some requirements. The survey asked, “When did you become aware that you needed to apply for graduation?” Respondents were offered three responses: “soon after start,” “well into studies,” and “very recently.”

The results from each of the four survey groups were similar, with each having a large number of respondents indicating that they had only “very recently” learned that they needed to apply to graduate. Given that the surveys were mailed in the same semester that the students intended to graduate, finding out “very recently” could mean within the previous semester, or, for students starting and finishing their program in one semester, “very recently” could mean the week before they applied to graduate. The results helped clarify that the response “very recently” was too broad to be meaningful. Nevertheless, we can conclude that students’ awareness of graduation application practices increases as they near the end of their community college career.

**Response to Survey Findings**

Overall, the survey results reinforced some of what we already knew even as they inspired some new thinking. We were somewhat surprised to learn that many students prefer to receive a letter or to read informational flyers. We

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### Table 1. How did you first become aware that you needed to apply for graduation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
<th>Form of Communication (% Response)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mailing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2009</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2009</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2009</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>216</td>
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### Table 2. When did you become aware that you had to apply for graduation?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
<th>Timeframe (% Response)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Soon After Start</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>19</td>
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</table>
responded by redoubling our efforts to post brightly colored flyers on walls and windows around campus, and we continued to mail graduation application information to students enrolled in online programs as well as to those in programs with prescribed requirements.

We also increased our electronic communication efforts, to include strategically timed posts on social networking sites, information screens around campus, a PowerPoint in the Student Life Zone (a popular hangout), and a blast e-mail sent every semester to students registered for their programs’ capstone courses.

**SURVEY: 2012**

After approximately two years of implementation of changes inspired by the 2009 survey findings, the Records and Registration Office conducted a survey to assess the impact of the changes. The 2012 survey included only those questions that pertained to how and when students learned that they needed to apply to graduate. This finding was similar to that of the 2009 survey—i.e., that between 20 and 30 percent of respondents had been told either by their academic advisor or by other students that they had to apply to graduate.

**Response to the 2012 Survey Findings**

Updated survey results for two of the year’s graduation cycles (May and August 2012) were sufficient for us to confirm that overall, students wish to be informed about graduation requirements the old-fashioned way: by word of mouth and/or in writing. The Records and Registration Office responded by soliciting the help of advisors. We prepared information packets for direct distribution to advisors’ mailboxes. The packets include a stack of graduation applications, flyers (printed on brightly colored paper), and a cover letter that briefly explains the survey results—

### Table 3.
How did you first become aware that you needed to apply for graduation?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
<th>Form of Communication (% Response)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mailing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2012</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Table 4.
When did you apply for graduation?

<table>
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<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
<th>Month (% Response)</th>
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<td>January</td>
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<td>May 2012</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2012</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>69</td>
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</table>
WHO ARE WE?

From 1965 until 1991, AACRAO evaluated foreign educational credentials for the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Office of International Training, Academic Advisory Services. With the end of USAID’s scholarship program for developing nations in 1991, AACRAO opened IES to provide an evaluation service to its members, as well as the public.

WHY CHOOSE US?

AACRAO published the World Education Series, the Projects for International Education Research (PIER), the AACRAO Country Studies, and the web-based Electronic Database for Global Education (EDGE).

All IES evaluators are country and/or region specialists who have previously worked in international admissions at US institutions.

All IES evaluations follow the placement recommendations as approved by the National Council for the Evaluation of Foreign Educational Credentials (CEC), and the International Education Standards Council.

WHO DO WE SERVE?

AACRAO IES for Colleges and Universities

AACRAO IES provides foreign credential evaluations for over 1,500 institutions. Our evaluations paint a clear and comprehensive picture of the applicant’s education history allowing you to make the correct admissions decision. Looking to evaluate credentials yourself? AACRAO IES is here to help. We provide training and resources for those performing evaluations internally. For more information go to www.aacrao.org/ies/institutions

AACRAO IES for Immigration

AACRAO IES is the owner and content creator of the Electronic Database for Global Education (EDGE), the measure by which Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) judges evaluations submitted with applications for naturalization. Our immigration evaluation will give you honest and accurate information for submission to secure H1B Visas or permanent residency. For more information go to www.aacrao.org/ies/immigration

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CONCLUSION
Assessing students’ understanding of graduation and commencement proved a valuable project for our office, our institution, and, most important, our students. The surveys provided insight into what students knew, improved our understanding of what and how students needed to learn from us, and increased students’ awareness of graduation application procedures. Despite our expectation that students would seek graduation messaging via technology—for example, the Internet, social media, etc.—students overwhelmingly requested that information be provided in old-fashioned ways—to include flyers, hard-copy letters sent via regular mail, and word of mouth. President Obama’s challenge to increase the number of community college graduates not only has caused us to evaluate how we do things but also has created awareness of and generated conversations about the American Graduation Initiative. Not only will our campus benefit, but so will our students.

Data and results were provided by The Office of Planning and Institutional Research at Northampton Community College.

About the Author
GINGER B. YAVORSKI is Assistant Registrar at Northampton Community College. She has worked in higher education for ten years. In 2005, she joined the Records and Registration Office at NCC. Yavorski has a bachelor’s in anthropology from Muhlenberg College, and is currently pursuing a master’s in higher education administration with a specialization in leadership through Capella University. This article is based on her presentation titled “The American Graduation Initiative and the Impact on a Community College” at the 98th AACRAO meeting in Philadelphia on April 3rd, 2012.

AUTHOR’S NOTE: I would like to give special thanks to the Student Affairs Assessment Team at Northampton Community College for their assistance with this article.

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Leadership by Respect

By Bill Haid

One of the best things about getting older is that people sometimes think you must be smart or wise to have reached this point in your life. Even my kids now seem to think I may know a thing or two. As your hair turns gray, your wisdom or advice is more often sought, especially if you hold positions of leadership in your profession or in your community.

This phenomenon struck me most vividly when, at a recent meeting, a young professional said, “I’d like to get your opinion of a situation because I’ve heard that you are experienced in these matters.” I’d just met this person, but either my reputation (which is what I’d like to think) or my graying hair (just as likely) caused her to consider me wise (or perhaps she was just being polite to a senior citizen!).

I started thinking about whether I could articulate a leadership style or philosophy that I have developed over the course of my career. Until now, I haven’t tried to put a label on it, but I have shared my ideas with my colleagues, co-workers, and the handful of people I have been fortunate enough to mentor.

I call my philosophy “leadership by respect.” And while I don’t think I’ve ever heard of a leadership style by this name, I doubt it is original. My leadership style is driven by my core values: dignity, individual worth, and the belief that everyone is inherently equal to everyone else. Early in my career, I identified with a Bible verse that I subsequently adopted as my life statement: Romans 14:19 (ASV) says, “So then let us follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another.” I am a peace maker. And I believe in building up others so they can become the best they can be, in work, in service, and in relationships.

How does leadership by respect work in the workplace? For me, it works quite well! How is it done? The following principles and practices equipped me to serve and lead at several successful organizations:

- Treat people respectfully. Learn their names, and use their names often and always. Protect the dignity of each person to others and to the individual. Never demean or joke about another person. Always give the benefit of the doubt and assume good intentions; allow the person the opportunity to prove otherwise before formulating a negative evaluation. Expect the best.
- Listen to others, and consider all opinions valid. Unless you know everything already, depend on others for expert opinion, and invite them to contribute to decisions.
• Value the contributions of everyone! No matter what each person’s role in an organization, that role is important to the success of the organization.

• Give credit for success to others. Every organizational success is achieved as a result of the work of many. Rarely is anything accomplished by a single individual. Acknowledge achievements often, and celebrate successes regularly.

• Take responsibility for organizational failures. Every failure is an opportunity to learn and improve. Let those involved in any failures be part of a successful recovery. Don’t punish unless the failures are intentional and repetitive.

• Share almost everything with everyone. Although some personnel, budget, and executive decisions are kept confidential until an appointed time, most other routine management information can be shared. The more people know about the hows and whys of their work environment, the more secure they feel in working toward organizational goals.

• Tell staff in your organization what your goals and plans are and why they are important. Share your plans with others, and they will adopt your plans as theirs.

• Give people the tools and permission to do their jobs. Update and upgrade office furnishings and technology when the opportunity presents itself. Reward staff with non-tangibles, such as office get-togethers, impromptu recognitions, removal of bureaucratic obstacles (when possible), support of their decisions with clients, and permitting them to make exceptions (within guidelines) to certain policies, practices, or procedures.

I have lived by these principles and have used them all in my work and volunteer activities. During my year as AACRAO president, a primary task was to incorporate the organization. The task included legal filings of articles of incorporation and modifying association bylaws to conform with the new articles. In some settings, these tasks might have been managed by a lawyer and/or staff members; but AACRAO is a membership-governed association, so the bylaws could be changed only by a vote by the membership.

I approached the task by appointing a task force of AACRAO members, officers, and staff. I selected people who cared deeply about the organization. There was no consensus about the outcome of this task; indeed, the task force members held highly divergent views of AACRAO. We began with a clear statement of why it was necessary to incorporate, and we considered the implications of incorporating as well as the risks of not incorporating. We detailed how this would be presented to the membership for approval, and we projected a timeline for doing so. I then asked each member to state his or her views on the task as well as any personal objectives in serving on the task force.

I proposed a process that would divide the task among work groups: Several members would develop a proposal for change of the bylaws or articles. The workgroups would present recommendations to the entire task force for final approval. I proposed that we require unanimity before including anything in the proposal to the members. The task force members agreed that we would operate in accordance with those principles.

The result was that we had an effective, efficient, and harmonious process for working through some complex governance structure issues. The next steps included communication with the membership and a vote during the annual business meeting. The proposal was accepted, and AACRAO was incorporated soon thereafter. Credit for this accomplishment is due to the task force members, who worked tirelessly to negotiate compromises and build consensus for the good of the association. Everyone won!

When I started my most recent job, at UC San Diego, I was advised that staff morale was low and that staff had been through more leadership change in recent years than their peers at most organizations. I wanted my staff to know that I would be a different leader for them—that I would be their advocate. I had met most of them once or twice during the interview and during my first few days on the job. At the first all-staff meeting, held during my first week on the job, I started by calling every one of the 22 staff members by name. This was not a big deal, but it constituted a good start to establishing a culture of leadership that knows and cares about each individual.

After three and a half years, the result is an organization that is moving in a positive direction. Survey results show high levels of employee satisfaction with leadership and in general. No, we have not had raises, and yes, we have had budget cuts. We’ve also focused on creating and maintaining a healthy organization, and we’ve had significant suc-
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I have obtained similar positive results in every organization and at every institution where I have worked. That doesn’t mean that I haven’t made mistakes or that I haven’t been unsuccessful in some individual cases. Some people cannot be led with respect and in fact don’t respond well to any authority, organizational structure, or leadership. That said, I’ve been fortunate to witness some changes of heart by people who initially were distrustful.

I have seen some managers either flame out or leave a trail of destruction and hard feelings as a result of their basic rudeness and self-aggrandizement, self-centeredness, or lack of effort. That doesn’t mean that organizational goals weren’t obtained. But the results may have proven difficult to obtain, and the cost of such leadership is inevitably high in human terms.

My guess is that most managers use a combination of styles and philosophies that range from supportive to directive and that they value teamwork. Most managers want their organizations to be good places at which to work. Certainly, that has always been one of my goals.

A leader who starts with a culture and philosophy of respect can achieve much if he can provide a vision for the future and obtainable goals. One of my early mentors told me that if you want your employees to take good care of your customers, then you need to take good care of your employees. It’s not that hard to do. Start with respect, and be consistent in your application of basic human kindness. You don’t have to swim with sharks or be the last one standing to come out a winner.

About the Author

WILLIAM HAID is University Registrar at the University of California - San Diego. He previously served as Assistant Vice President for Enrollment and Access and Executive Director of Enrollment Services at Colorado State University. In his career, Bill has always placed an emphasis on organizational development for his teams and career development for those with whom he has worked. Of all the experiences, accomplishments, and achievements from a career as registrar and enrollment manager at large public institutions, what Bill cherishes most is the growth, development, and advancement of so many of the people he has mentored over the years, who have also risen to positions of leadership in their professional careers. Bill is an AACRAO Past President (1999–2000) and has served in leadership roles in AACRAO, RMACRAO and NMACRAO. He has a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from San Jose State University and a Master of Business Administration from Arizona State University.
A Leader with Unexpected Roots

By Susan Gottheil

I am a child of the sixties...True, I did not “come of age” until the 70s but I am a baby boomer none the less. I proudly marched in anti-war demonstrations and was even prouder that “my country” stayed out of Vietnam and that we re-created underground railroads to help young American boys escape the draft. I grew up in Montreal (Quebec) during the Quiet Revolution—when the whole society rebelled against the patriarchal church, and social justice values and principles became embedded in provincial and even federal politics. Canadians were early adopters of Medicare and were not ashamed of offering a “social safety net” to help those who lost their jobs or became ill or disabled. After the Second World War, we opened our country to immigrants and refugees (although the shuttering of those doors to Jews and others trying to escape Nazi Europe has remained a dark spot in our collective history) and proclaimed ourselves a “multicultural” society. We smugly believed that the race issues exploding on the streets of the States were not our problem.

Yet it was not long after I started my postsecondary studies that my complacency was shaken and my analytical tools honed. Education opened my eyes to the world around me. Canadian industry was part of the military-industrial complex and complicit in manufacturing napalm that killed and maimed thousands of innocent people. Many children were living in poverty in my hometown. Although French-speaking Quebecers were in the majority in our province, the language of business remained English and many francophones dropped out of high school and remained in low paying jobs and out of the halls of power. If Native (Aboriginal) Canadians were in anyone’s consciousness at all it was as a stereotype—living in teepees on the Prairies or in igloos with dogsleds in the far North (not in nearby communities or dispossessed of their land and living in communities without adequate food, shelter and water). As a young woman, I realized that I faced blatant and systemic discrimination, and unless things changed I would not have the same opportunities as my male peers to intellectually grow and develop and contribute to society—never mind being paid equally. The seeds of rebellion were sown.

CHANGING THE SYSTEM FROM WITHIN

I became a student activist on campus—establishing a Woman’s Centre and helping friends start a GLBT bookstore, protesting the destruction of old Victorian mansions in nearby neighborhoods, studying the writings of Karl Marx and Mao Tse Tung, and trying to imagine a more utopian and egalitarian world in which to live. Many debates ensued over strong coffee and beer—could the
world be changed through evolutionary shifts in policy and processes, or were more radical, revolutionary tactics necessary? My pacifist nature led to rifts in friendships as I declared my unease with violent actions (that were never acted upon) against “the state.”

Instead, I serendipitously found myself in a summer job at the Dean of Students Office researching the status of women (students, staff and faculty) on campus—and had my first career mentor set me on my journey of postsecondary work. Erin, a professor in the Faculty of Religious Studies, was a former nun who had embraced liberation theology and worked for many years with impoverished communities in South America. She was also a strong feminist. Nun, feminist, social activist, professor—these all seemed to me to be distinct roles, and I certainly couldn’t fathom how anyone (except perhaps the Berrigan brothers in the United States who were pivotal in the anti-Nixon era) could mold what I considered disparate and contradictory traits into one personality. Yes, people are complex and complicated. Most importantly, I learned from Erin that one can be an effective agent of change and impact the lives of others by working within institutions. It was not necessary to blow them up.

“WE’RE BEHIND YOU”: THE YOUNGER SIBLING COMPLEX

My educational journey took me to the United States where I could enroll in a graduate degree in women’s history (Canada had no such programs at the time). Although my interest was in Canadian oral history I was told in no uncertain terms that I could not study Canadian history. The not-so-subtle message was that we were not worthy of study and no one really cared. So European history it was—and my fellow students rewarded me with a convocation present of an American flag with a 51st star added to it—a jocular message to let me know that they liked me despite my Canadian “second-class” citizenship.

Back in Canada I followed a circuitous career path—always passionate about what I was doing and convinced that I was making a difference. I taught humanities and women’s studies for nine years in a college that served a diverse population of students, many of whom were immigrant and first-generation Canadians. I jumped careers and worked as an employment and educational equity officer at a university in a new city, pulling a husband and young family along with me. And when the opportunity came along to apply for a position of Assistant Vice President in student and academic services, I convinced myself I had the skills and abilities to lead a large team. Reflecting back to that period of my life I realize that I didn’t know how much I didn’t know. But it was my second career mentor, the provost, who took a chance and gave me the opportunity to bring my equity vision into the realm of student affairs.

It was at this juncture that the postsecondary world in Canada underwent cataclysmic shifts—large cuts in provincial funding and big tuition increases, the introduction of the Macleans university rankings, increased competitiveness, and the genteel “Canadian” approach to collaboration between universities gone. The university I worked for saw a 45 percent decline in enrollment over a five-year period. Our new president asked me to take the lead in working with colleagues across the university to turn things around. How could I say no? I have always been up for a challenge.

Being an academic at heart, I read up on best practices in student recruitment and retention, picked up tips at workshops in the States offered by consulting firms, and started attending AACRAO’s Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Conference. I imported a strategic enrollment management framework into Canada and was quick to let colleagues know we were far behind our American friends in how we did business. In retrospect, I realize I was typically Canadian—feeling like a country cousin to big city-slickers. Perhaps I was still impacted by my graduate school experience. It took me some time to learn that Canadians are not “less than” or “behind” Americans. What works in one jurisdiction may not work in another. And sometimes those who leap too quickly can’t catch themselves as they tumble over the edge. The Canadian educational system has been shaped by a different history and set of values and is governed by a different legislative system. Study your options, and do your research. Continually learn. Don’t be afraid to innovate. But keep your eyes wide open.

WORDS OF THE WISE: GANDHI’S DICTUM

So I became a leader in Canadian strategic enrolment management. (“Who, me?”) With more than 30 years now under my belt leading teams and change within
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postsecondary institutions, there are a few wise words I can pass on. Most of these can be found in the myriad of (other) books published on work, management, and leadership. Be true to yourself. Follow your passion(s). Admit your mistakes. Share the glory.

It is true that my success as a leader in SEM has been in my ability to continually see “the big picture,” to inspire others to buy into the “change” I envisioned and was excited about, to understand the interconnectedness of different parts of the organization and the importance of working together, and to keep students at the center of all I do. But the most important lesson I have learned is that change does not happen in a vacuum, and no leader leads alone.

“I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people.”
— MAHATMA GANDHI

Good leaders are fundamentally people who like other people. At least, I do. What has made me a successful enrollment management leader has been building partnerships and breaking down departmental silos in the institutions I have worked. It is true that I have also had to be analytical and strategic, recognizing that there are limited hours in the day and that priorities must be set if goals are to be achieved. (“Keep your eye on the prize.”) However all the leaders I know have an innate sense of curiosity about the world around them and respect for the diverse people who live in it.

Leaders want to make a difference. Sometimes that means being a rebel, speaking up against inequities and injustices, and working to change “the system.” It may also mean taking risks and not being afraid of failure or making mistakes. But no matter what, true leaders want to share their knowledge and passion, mentoring colleagues and students so they, too, may make a difference in the lives of others.

Do not follow where the path may lead.
Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.
— HAROLD R. MCALENDON (ALSO ATTRIBUTED TO EMERSON AND OTHERS)

About the Author

SUSAN GOTTHEIL has more than 30 years of leadership experience in the Canadian postsecondary sector helping institutions to promote and expand academic programs, increase student recruitment and retention, enhance learning and development, improve student and academic support services, and promote collaborative partnerships. With an undergraduate degree from McGill University and an M.A. in Women’s History, Susan began her career at Vanier College CEGEP in Montreal where she spent nine years teaching before moving into senior administrative positions at Carleton University. In 2006, she moved to western Canada to help Mount Royal transition from a college to a university and roll out new undergraduate degree programs. Susan currently serves as Vice-Provost (Students) at the University of Manitoba, and has also helped a number of Canadian institutions develop strategic enrolment plans in her role as Senior Consultant with AACRAO Consulting. Susan and Clayton Smith have organized the Canadian SEM Summit over the past five years and co-edited the 2011 AACRAO book SEM In Canada: Promoting Student and Institutional Success in Canadian Colleges and Universities.
Reflections of a Professional School Registrar

By Daniel J. Bender

It’s an honor to be invited to submit a reflective essay on lessons I have learned in my career. I flatter myself to think that if “pearls of wisdom” such as those presented here and in other essays in this series had been available to me 20 years ago, I might have had an easier path. In reality, I am not certain it would have helped. I had no idea where I would land when in my mid-30s I left a successful post-secondary classroom teaching practice for full-time administration. My initial exposure to the functions and importance of the registrar was in my first full-time administrative position, where I supervised a staff of ten, one of whom worked with the registrar’s office to ensure our remote degree completion courses were recorded appropriately to the student’s transcript. I wager that almost every registrar’s story is unique, whether it began as a part-time work-study job in the registrar’s office, or you stumbled into it by chance, learned to love it, and stayed (as in my case).

Regardless of the personal story, I believe there are skill sets that are critical to becoming and remaining a successful, effective registrar. The skill sets I present here are derived less from the management or education literature and more from personal experience. I did not do everything I recommend, and in retrospect I wish I had done more. The list is not exhaustive, but I suspect the reader will discover overlap between my reflections and those of other contributors—in and of itself a valuable lesson for the emerging registrar.

Beyond merely adding to a list of recommended behaviors, however, I would like to challenge the reader, be they an established or up-and-coming registrar, to begin thinking about our work and role in the educational enterprise as a profession and of yourself as a professional. By this I do not mean pay grade, what you wear to work, how large a staff you supervise, or whether you have preferred parking on campus. Being a professional implies having specialized and sometimes highly technical knowledge or training and using it to provide service and benefit to others. The relationship between a professional and the consumer of professional services is based on trust, because the consumer does not have the expertise, time, or interest in performing the work. A further hallmark of a profession is autonomy. Professionals are largely self-governing and self-policing; they agree as a group on how to define and perform their work and set the standards to which members of the profession adhere. Being a professional implies a commitment to the profession as a whole, to its growth and development as such, to lifelong learning and ethical behavior of its members, and to helping shape the next generation. Dentists, lawyers, physicians, and architects
are typically counted among the professions. Why not add registrars to that list?

**HUMAN SKILLS**

Technical skills and knowledge are necessary to be a good registrar, but they are not sufficient. The human skills of communication, understanding, compassion, and listening are equally important to our work. Use these skills often; and if you don’t have them, develop them. Be mindful of the tone of voice and the non-verbal cues you send in meetings or in one-on-one interactions. Listen actively to the student complaint or unreasonable faculty demand; don’t interrupt; maintain eye contact; and nod appropriately (if you can). You may not agree or ultimately give in, but you will have demonstrated respect for the other person. If you are unable to act, provide a reasoned explanation, and describe the context in which your decision was made. Recently a student requested a waiver that was clearly a violation of academic policy. Rather than responding with “No, it’s against the rules,” I explained how the request created a moral dilemma for me: if I made an exception for him, how could I justify not making the same exception for other similarly situated students? I pointed out that the request was against school policy, but also against my personal sense of fairness and justice. He was disappointed in my decision, but I feel the discussion was as important as the outcome.

Two human characteristics critical to our work are integrity and accountability. Doing the right thing is important for everyone, but perhaps more so for a professional. A good academic leader cannot wish away a problem: you must assume responsibility for errors and take action. Critics will undoubtedly point fingers when things go wrong, but in my experience many will be impressed (sadly) if you take responsibility and correct a mistake you or someone in your office made. This applies also to staff problems. It is much easier to correct a data entry error or to implement a better process than dealing with a poor attitude or poor performance. When you encounter such a problem, act promptly and make your expectations clear. It’s your job.

My view of the registrar’s office has changed drastically over the years. It has gone from righteous defender of transcript integrity and enforcer of academic rules and regulations (indeed, the only one on campus, or so it sometimes seems) to service provider for faculty and students. I have worked hard to break the all-too-common feeling of dread and reluctance held by many of our “customers” when they think about the registrar’s office, and I am fortunate to have worked at schools with small enough student and faculty populations to know some by name. My focus has shifted from FERPA, graduation planning, and room reservation software packages—certainly all important facets of the registrar’s work—to people. I make a conscious effort every day to engage others personally and face-to-face, no small challenge in an age where instant electronic communication and 24x7 service is the norm.

Long ago I implemented an “open door” policy. Most of these drop-in visits are work-related, and I appreciate how a short conversation can sometimes eliminate endless email exchanges. More gratifying, though, are the non-work related visits by students and faculty: “Oh nothing in particular, I was in the area and thought I would pop in to say hello.” That is success.

A related word of advice to registrars in professional schools (e.g., theology, dentistry, law, medicine), such as myself, who are untrained or unfamiliar with the discipline being taught. Make a special effort to visit classrooms, labs, clinics, and mock courtrooms to get a sense of what and how students learn and how faculty delivers content. In doing so, you demonstrate respect for the core enterprise of the school and open doors for conversation and relationship building with key customer groups. You also provide an opportunity for them to learn about you, what you do, and how your office fits into the functioning of the school. At the risk of sounding too Pollyanna, there is a practical value to these visits. I am now able to anticipate scheduling needs and room preferences for some courses, and have a deeper understanding of course sequencing and prerequisites.

**GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

If you accept my challenge that the registrar is a developing profession, you acknowledge important characteristics of being a professional, including a commitment to lifelong development of yourself and of the profession. We play a critical role in identifying, mentoring, and growing the next generation of professional registrars.

Be constantly vigilant in identifying growth and development opportunities and take full advantage of them.
It’s worthwhile to think small and local in this regard, but don’t forget about learning opportunities beyond your institution. Human resources offices at most schools coordinate seminars on “dealing with difficult people” or “conflict management,” certainly two skills important to the registrar. Attend such seminars and actively encourage your staff to do so. It’s important to demonstrate how much you value professional growth for everyone. Major sis and room scheduling vendors (to name just two) offer an annual users conference, where important technical updates are shared and valuable contacts are made. Attend and take a staff member, if possible. It’s important to stay current on advances in the tools of the profession. The jewel in the crown for us is AACRAO, its regional components, and the national meeting. Our professional organization has been invaluable to me, and it was primarily through my involvement that I began to develop as a registrar. I have gone from a mostly passive attendee at the annual meeting, to facilitator, committee member, presenter, and candidate for national office. *College and University* is one of a handful of professional, peer-reviewed journals I read regularly. I encourage you to become an active and lifelong participant. I believe firmly in the value of formal learning and in what it contributes to personal and professional growth. There is no degree in “registrarial sciences,” but a registrar should never discount the possibility of pursuing the next level of higher education. If you don’t have a bachelor’s degree, consider enrolling in a degree completion program for working professionals. If you have a bachelor’s, think about pursuing a master’s or doctoral degree. I returned to graduate school in 2000, and although it was difficult, I have not regretted it for a minute. The skills you build in an advanced degree program—critical thinking, teamwork, reflection, time management, communication, research—will serve you well in the profession. In the academic environment where we all work, an advanced degree carries cachet with faculty, and can build “street cred” with this important customer group. I don’t believe it’s entirely my imagination when at my institution I note a tinge of respect for Dr. Bender, who is regularly seen reading the peer-reviewed journal *College and University*, and who travels to national conferences to give formal presentations. How different that perception is from the one who hounds people for grades and demands justification for a simple change to the catalog description of a course.

Mentoring has its appropriate place in this skill set. For new registrars, I recommend you actively seek at least one mentor and hope you end up with many. Think broadly when choosing a mentor. It should be someone you admire, respect and trust, perhaps someone who has experience in the profession or at the institution. Do not limit yourself to selecting “the registrar” unless, however, the fit is right. There is only one registrar on campus, and if you don’t get along with that person, look elsewhere. Remember, you are not looking for someone to train you for a job; you are looking for someone to help you grow and develop skills that will sustain your success. In retrospect, I wish I had been more proactive in this regard.

For established registrars who may be reading this essay, actively mentor a promising staff member. It’s a fact that you are a role model (whether you want to be or not); your daily behavior, the decisions you make, and how you handle stressful situations and people send powerful messages about you as a leader. Being a mentor is slightly different, especially when it comes to developing the next generation of professionals. Be alert to the promising young staffer who has the right combination of skill sets to be a good registrar. Spend a little more time with that person, share a copy of *C&U* or forward the weekly *Transcript* email. When the time is right, have a conversation about their career plans and ask them to think about becoming a registrar. Development professionals call it “The Ask,” and it is powerful. I don’t think anyone is born wanting to grow up to be a registrar. We should not leave the future of our profession to chance.

**REFLECTION AND STRATEGIC THINKING**

There is no denying that being a successful registrar requires a high level of proficiency in attention to detail, organization, time management, follow through, and technical skills. Managing people demands additional skills that a good registrar must also have. We are successful because of the ability to manage just such a workload. I know from experience how easy it is to get lost in the details of the day-to-day demands of a busy office, but I strongly recommend you make time for quiet reflection. “Turn it off” as often as you can and think strategically about large issues that could impact you, your work, your office, and the institution. Ask yourself: why has this been a problem for as long as anyone can remember, and is there
something I can do to solve it? What is the next big issue in the profession (think electronic transcript exchange) and how does it play out at my school? What is the long range plan for this office and how does it support the mission of the university? There are important issues for the registrar beyond FERPA, and they require your attention.

The professional development activities described above are an obvious and rich source of new ideas and new thinking, and I reiterate how critical such engagement is to growing and expanding the profession. When flying home from a national meeting or driving home from work or class, give an idea freedom to bounce around your brain unrestricted. You could be surprised where it leads. Another important trigger to new ways of thinking is your professional reading. Don’t set aside the latest edition of College and University or any journal you read regularly with the promise to pick it up later; there are too many distractions. If you find a few moments during the workday to read, make it a special event. Leave the office, have a cup of coffee, sit outside: there is nothing like no phone or foot traffic and no computer to force you to slow down and to give you the opportunity to engage in critical, reflective thought. It is some of the most important work you will do. Lastly, do not discard chance as a source of valuable new ideas. A conversation on an unrelated topic in a meeting, a book you are reading for pleasure, an interview you hear on the radio—such inputs can spur new thoughts related to your work and development. And by all means, do not attempt to schedule 20 minutes of “quiet reflection” twice a week! You cannot schedule spontaneity, creativity, or innovation. They happen organically.

**CONCLUSION**

Throughout your career, keep an eye on the future. Set clear, measurable short- and long-term goals for yourself, your office, and the profession. Regularly reflect and take stock of your progress. Keep in mind that your success will not be linear, but the overall trend should be positive. Always strive to be better: develop a new skill, design a new process or implement a new tool, read or do something that challenges you, and most importantly, promote and advance the profession.

**About the Author**

DANIEL J. BENDER, Ed.D., is Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Registrar at the University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry in San Francisco, CA. In 2005 he earned an EdD in Learning and Instruction from the University of San Francisco. He is an active member of AACRAO and the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), and has been an officer, presenter, and facilitator at national meetings for both groups. Dr. Bender’s research interests include race and gender issues in health care and health care education, diversity and inclusion, student support services, teaching and learning, and faculty development.
One of the most challenging—and key—aspects of international credential evaluation is the process of determining their equivalents within the U.S. education system. This challenge is faced daily by countless university admissions officers across the country, to say nothing of private international credential analysts as well as state licensing boards and government agencies. International credential evaluation is an arcane practice that requires knowing everything possible about the foreign credential as well as the U.S. education system. Given the complexity of this process, it is no wonder that practitioners often seek advice from trusted and experienced professionals in the field. But who are the experts? The answer to that question has changed significantly over the past 60 years.

**CREATION OF THE COUNCIL**

In 1955 the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) called together several key organizations dealing in international education to form an inter-associational committee. The organizations were AACRAO, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the Institute of International Education (IIE), the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), the College Board, the American Council on Education (ACE), and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC); the New York State Department of Health and AACRAO-USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) were included as observers. Thus, the National Council on the Evaluation of Foreign Educational Credentials was created. Representatives of each of the participating organizations began to deliberate on the proper placement in the U.S. education system of holders of various countries’ academic credentials.

Council representatives were selected by the leadership of the various organizations involved and served for specified terms. The Council reviewed drafts of forthcoming publications of the World Education Series Committee (WES, another interassociational committee, of AACRAO and NAFSA), and AACRAO published books that were funded by the United States Information Agency (USIA). Simultaneously, the Joint Committee on Workshops (JCOW, a joint committee of AACRAO and NAFSA) met to select nations for group country studies. By the 1980s, WES and JCOW merged and formed Projects in International Education Research (PIER), which oversaw the drafting and publication of single- as well as multi-country volumes. The Council continued to approve placement recommendations.
Beginning with its inception in 1910, AACRAO has promoted leadership in developing and implementing policy in the global educational community with a focus on the identification and promotion of high standards and best practices.

AACRAO’s International Education Services (IES) serves as a resource center for matters on international education and exchange. All of the evaluators in IES have worked for a number of years at institutions evaluating foreign educational credentials and has an average of 20 years of previous evaluation experience before joining AACRAO, with no staff member having less than seven years of experience. Our extensive archives, built up over 35 years, enable AACRAO to accurately research any educational credential in great depth. Historically, this service started with the AACRAO-US Agency for International Development (US-AID) Cooperative Agreement that began in the mid-1960s.

The Foreign Education Credential Service provides evaluations of educational credentials from all countries of the world, assuring consistent assessment of the qualifications of those persons educated outside the United States. The Foreign Education Credential Service is trusted in the field, and our evaluation reports are designed to help any reader to understand foreign academic credentials.

If you are looking for an easily accessible up-to-date electronic resource on foreign educational systems, the AACRAO Electronic Database for Global Education (EDGE) provides a wealth of information for each country profile in a convenient and consistent form. EDGE is a valuable and trusted tool for both novice and experienced international admissions personnel. The database is being expanded regularly and updated as educational systems change. For more information and to subscribe online visit aacraoedge.aacrao.org/register.

Resources for International Admissions
AACRAO International Education Services
FOREIGN EDUCATIONAL CREDENTIALS REQUIRED
Looking for a concise and easily referenced source for information on credentials and other documentation that would be required for entry from a given country to the specified level of study? The fifth edition of Foreign Educational Credentials indicates, in a convenient and consistent form, the educational credentials which should be available for applicants from over 200 countries.
Item #9019 $100 nonmembers | $75 members (2003)

THE AACRAO INTERNATIONAL GUIDE: A RESOURCE FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS
This comprehensive resource for international education professionals contains compelling overviews of the current and future states of the field, as well as chapters on core issues such as international recruitment and enrollment management, technology, study abroad, undocumented students, fraudulent documents, and the Bologna Process. It also includes practical guidance on concerns such as international credential evaluation, student visas, and English proficiency assessment.
Item #0129 $110 nonmembers | $80 members (2010)

THE AACRAO INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE ADMISSIONS GUIDE
A companion to The AACRAO International Guide: A Resource for International Educational Professionals, this volume provides a hands-on approach to enable you to determine the admissibility of applicants from abroad to your graduate degree and non-degree programs. A critical addition to any international educational library.
Item #9018 $75 nonmembers | $50 members (2003)

AUSTRALIA: EDUCATION AND TRAINING
A guide for United States admissions officers to the structure and content of the educational system of Australia, including descriptions of the state and territorial public school systems. Also includes a formal set of comparability and placement recommendations based upon the author’s research.
Item #9026 $95 nonmembers | $70 members (2004)

BRAZIL
A study of the structure and content of the educational system of Brazil, including extensive descriptions of undergraduate and technical programs. Also includes specific regional and country-wide statistics, and the author’s recommendations on the evaluation of foreign educational credentials.
Item #6538 $85 nonmembers | $60 members (2004)

THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
A study of the educational system of the People’s Republic of China, from preschool to higher education. Includes information on entrance examinations, vocational education, and a thorough guide to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States.
Item #6536 $85 nonmembers | $60 members (2000)

INDIA
A study of the educational system of India, including the different types of universities, computer and management education, and a detailed list of professional associations in India. Also includes guidelines to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States.
Item #5342 $85 nonmembers | $60 members (1998)

KYRGYZSTAN
The Educational System of Kyrgyzstan describes the current educational structure of Kyrgyzstan and serves as a guide to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States. This monograph contains information on both secondary and higher education, grading scales and a directory of post-secondary institutions in Kyrgyzstan. It also covers transitional issues, fraud and academic corruption.
Item #9020 $45 nonmembers | $30 members (2003)

PHILIPPINES
A study of the educational system of the Philippines from basic to higher education, with information on academic and vocational degrees, and non-traditional education, including Islamic education. Serves as a valuable guide to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States, with information on accrediting agencies and professional education associations in the Philippines.
Item #6537 $85 nonmembers | $60 members (2001)

ROMANIA
A study of the educational system of Romania. Includes an extensive list of sample diplomas, and detailed guidelines for admissions officers in the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States.
Item #5339 $75 nonmembers | $50 members (1998)

TAIWAN
An extensive guide to the structure and content of the educational system of Taiwan, from kindergarten through graduate and professional studies. Includes detailed information about schools recognized and not recognized by the Ministry of Education, a vital guide for any admissions officer considering incoming students from Taiwan.
Item #6539 $95 nonmembers | $70 members (2004)

THAILAND
A study of the educational system of Thailand and guide to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States. Covers preschool education onwards, with a particular emphasis on higher education studies, including degrees and teaching methods. Includes information about teacher training, technical and vocational educational and health studies.
Item #5341 $75 nonmembers | $50 members (1998)

UNITED KINGDOM
Offers guidance on the structure and content of the United Kingdom’s education system. The five-chapter guide includes a historical look at major legislative and policy changes affecting the system as a whole, and offers details on the country’s Further Education, Secondary Education, and Professional Qualifications frameworks. Additionally, helpful reference information can be found in the book’s five appendices, including: a key to system-related acronyms; listings of the UK’s higher education institutions and further education colleges; details on the National Qualifications Framework; and a comprehensive listing of professional bodies and learned societies.
Item #9027 $95 nonmembers | $70 members (2006)
CLASSIC PLACEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
The Council reviewed the placement recommendations in the draft publications and either approved them or required changes. Only the Council could make new recommendations during a review process. Over the years, the Council began to compile template language for the recommendations; ultimately, this language was published as NAFSA Working Paper #23. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, authors were required to use these placement recommendation templates. Placement recommendations followed a fairly standard format: What was the entry qualification to the credential in question? What was the duration of the credential program? What did the credential lead to in-country? On the basis of the answers to those three questions (and a liberal dose of the quantitative method—sometimes referred to as “year—counting”), the Council made its recommendations. These were printed at the back of each country (or multi-country) book (or, in later years, buried in the text).

CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GAME
In 1996, somewhat in response to European concerns about U.S. credential evaluation methodology, the Council convened a symposium to devise a better methodology than one that simply counted years. The result was a methodology that compared each foreign credential to its supposed U.S. counterpart by examining the constituent elements of the credential program, adding them together, and drawing a conclusion. Though this certainly was a more transparent method, it had two primary drawbacks: first, it required charts, levels, citation of a requisite number of elements, etc. and thus was somewhat lengthy to publish in a book; second, it proved too complex for quick and easy reference, particularly by those relatively new to the field of international evaluation. Nevertheless, the Council moved to incorporate the new methodology into the PIER process.

A FUNDING DILEMMA AND CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE
By the late 1980s, USIA, which had taken the lead in paying for so-called “country books,” was folded into the State Department. Funding for international education publications began to dry up, and PIER died a lingering death that coincided with the end of the century. Traditional publishing was now too expensive, and as NAFSA changed its focus and AACRAO moved forward with its own publication plans, the Council found itself with no books to review. Finally, in March 2006, the Council was dissolved, more or less by mutual consent of the constituent organizations.

OTHERS FILL THE GAP
Efforts to provide placement guidelines are longstanding and ubiquitous. AACRAO has published Foreign Credentials Required for many years; currently in its fifth edition, it includes placement advice. NAFSA published the Handbook on the Admission and Placement of Foreign Graduate Students in 1990; it contained placement advice (given by the authors of each country entry) and was an effort of NAFSA’s Admissions Section, which evolved first into Recruitment, Admissions, and Preparation and more recently into the International Enrollment Management/IEM Knowledge Community. The Handbook was updated in 1999 but without placement recommendations; an online version was made available in 2011. Several credential agencies also have provided resources and advice: World Education Services (not to be confused with the defunct World Education Series volumes) produces the newsletter “World Education News & Reviews,” which offers advice on credential evaluation. The International Education Research Foundation (IERF) has produced three versions of the Country Index; the latest, published in 2011, contains recommendations regarding countries’ education credentials. Other books also contained placement advice—for example, Ireland, published in 1994 by Solveig Turner of the Center for Documentation Research, and The Educational System of the Federal Republic of Germany, by Karen Lukas, published in 2002 by IERF.

AACRAO MOVES AHEAD
AACRAO anticipated problems with Council placement recommendations and began to prepare alternatives in two ways: First, the AACRAO International Publications Advisory Committee (IPAC) received approval from the AACRAO board of directors to form its own Council equivalent if ever the need arose. Ultimately, the International Education Standards Council (IESC) was formed. For a brief time, IPAC brought in a small group of experts to review drafts of publications and to approve author placement guidelines on a publication by publication
basis. Two books—on France and Central Asia, respectively—were created according to this model. However, this was quickly replaced by the IESC, particularly once AACRAO introduced the Electronic Database for Global Education (EDGE) in 2004. EDGE now includes data pertaining to the education systems of 232 countries.

IESC members are appointed by AACRAO’s vice president for international education and currently include Chris Foley (of Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis), Gloria Nathanson (formerly of UCLA), Johnny Johnson (formerly of Monterey Peninsula College), and Robert Watkins (of The University of Texas at Austin). The IESC, much like the National Council before it, built a template of credential placement advice to be used for each of the countries’ credentials included in AACRAO EDGE. These credentials span the education spectrum, from primary school leaving certificates to post-doctoral attainments. The credential advice is designed to help the subscribers of AACRAO EDGE know how to place international students who hold particular credentials.

CREDENTIAL PLACEMENT PHILOSOPHY

Over the decades, credential placement terminology has evolved though its philosophy and methodology have remained largely the same. Given the vastly different approach toward higher education in the United States as compared to higher education in Europe and much of the rest of the world, U.S. evaluators of international credentials frequently fall back on the quantitative method of credential comparison. In the United States, the bachelor’s degree represents four years of study, the accumulation of a certain number of course credits, exposure to a breadth of disciplines (often referred to as “general education”), a percentage of courses comprising a specialization or major, and a smaller subset of courses in another discipline that may be categorized as a minor. In certain countries that adopted the U.S. education model (e.g., the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, etc.), this model was replicated. Yet the vast majority of nations do not have a comparable education structure. The European model of first degree studies consists of concentration in a chosen discipline or field to the exclusion of the study of other subjects. Thus, international credential evaluators must attempt to compare vastly different pedagogical approaches: one prizes breadth of knowledge whereas the other prizes depth of knowledge. Because the European model requires concentrated studies in a chosen discipline, some assume that certain coursework—particularly in the final stages of a three- or four-year course of study—will be comparable to graduate-level courses at U.S. institutions. But the fact remains that the European study is at the first degree level. How, then, does one compare quality? Is breadth better than depth? Is deep understanding of a single subject superior to knowledge of a broad range of subjects?

Quantitative comparisons eschew any attempt to favor one structure over another. An overseas first university degree that is not built on the U.S. model of breadth cannot possibly be equivalent to the U.S. bachelor’s degree. International credential evaluators therefore avoid use of the term ‘equivalent’ and instead use the phrase ‘comparable to;’ that is, the overseas degree is roughly akin to the U.S. bachelor’s degree (or not). The simplest non-subjective way to express that comparison favorably is by ascertaining the full-time length of the program. When it is four years in length, the degree is considered comparable to the U.S. bachelor’s degree—despite the degrees’ very different content. Does this mean that the holder of a three-year first degree from a European or European-style education system is not qualified to study at the graduate level at a U.S. university? No: Any such individual should not be precluded from consideration by graduate admissions officials at any given U.S. university; after all, individual institutions exercise autonomy in their admissions and placement process. But the quantitative model suggests that the three-year degree is not comparable to the U.S. bachelor’s degree because the first requirement is comparable length of program. This is the philosophy that underlies AACRAO EDGE.

THE NEED FOR STANDARDS

One of the Council’s contributions to the field in the latter part of the 20th century was an authoritative promulgation of standards. Many may have objected to the standards inherent in the quantitative approach to credential comparison, but in the end, with no U.S. ministry of education to set a credential comparison standard and with all actors—institutional or private—free to set any standard they desired, the Council at least established an unwavering set of standards for users who chose to accept its recommendations. In effect, the Council served in
a role comparable to that served by National Education Information Centers (NEICs); in many countries, NEICs evaluate other countries’ education credentials against their own. (Two examples of NEICs are the Netherlands’ National Universities Foundation for International Cooperation and the UK’s National Academic Recognition Information Centre. The IESC—particularly through EDGE—fulfills a similar role. Even the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), which adjudicates work visa applications that require varying levels of education predicated on the U.S. model, utilizes EDGE. USCIS adjudicators compile evaluation reports from many different sources in support of petitioners for employment in the United States and utilize the EDGE database to evaluate petitioners’ credentials. When AACRAO acquired EDGE from its creator and founder, Dr. William J. Paver, former assistant dean of graduate studies at The University of Texas at Austin and past AACRAO vice president for international education, it did not seek primarily to establish EDGE credential advice as the national standard. Rather, it sought to provide a helpful tool to international credential evaluators, wherever and however situated, for use in placing international students as appropriately as possible. But in a field lacking regulation and oversight, the mere introduction of a set of standards proved a boon to the arbiters of visa applications—particularly against a backdrop of myriad viewpoints as to what is and is not comparable to this or that U.S. education credential. At least for the immediate future, AACRAO EDGE will continue to set the standard for international credential evaluation in the United States and thus will remain an invaluable tool for government and institutional officials who must grapple with this complex process.

About the Author

ROBERT WATKINS is Assistant Director of Admissions at the University of Texas at Austin and serves on the EDGE Admin Group. Watkins also served on AACRAO’s Board of Directors as Vice President for International Education 2009–12.

The Electronic Database for Global Education (EDGE) is an AACRAO project designed to provide contemporary and ongoing information and standards for the evaluation of foreign credentials for applicants seeking to be admitted to educational institutions in the United States. EDGE is also an effective tool in the evaluation and placement for individuals presenting foreign credentials for visa screening, professional licensure, and immigration attorneys.
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