Enrollment Management: Perspectives on Student Retention (Part I)

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Expanding the Conversation about SEM: Advancing SEM Efforts to Improve Student Learning and Persistence—Part I

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Among the earliest principles and premises of enrollment management as it evolved in concept and practice was that student retention is as critical as new student recruitment in achieving an institution’s preferred enrollment profile. Over recent decades, student retention has been one of the most studied aspects of college enrollment dynamics, with abundant articles and journals, studies and dissertations, models and theories, practices and programs, consultancies and conferences all devoted to improving retention and rates of degree completion in American higher education. Despite this, not much has changed in terms of overall rates of college degree completion in America’s colleges and universities. If anything, four- and six-year graduation rates have declined in both the public and private four-year sectors. The current level of degree attainment and the wide disparities between groups of students (by socioeconomic profile, by racial/ethnic background, by parental educational attainment) and groups of institutions (by selectivity, by two-year and four-year, by public and private) have now become a prominent focus in President Obama’s education agenda. As the next topic in our series of essays in *College & University*, we offer our observations and reflections on retention in the form of responses to interview questions. In this first of two essays, we discuss retention in general; in the second essay, we will turn our attention to retention as a function and focus within an enrollment management organization and process and what we know about the effectiveness of current institutional efforts to increase student retention and graduation rates.
You have each been engaged for decades in elevating the profession’s appreciation of retention in the theory and practice of enrollment management. How would you describe the evolution of your involvement in the issue of student retention in colleges and universities?

Kalsbeek: My earliest professional awareness of the emerging work in student retention strategies was from reading ACT’s small monograph entitled “What Works in Student Retention,” published in 1980, I believe. It recognized the importance of viewing retention as a combination of both student and institutional characteristics. It was a simple yet lucid little treatise, and it seems to me that despite decades of attention, investment, theoretical developments and programmatic experimentation, we’ve not advanced all that far from the insights offered in that cursory text on how institutions should approach improving student retention.

In terms of retention research, I also recall that decades ago I was initially intrigued by the work of Peter Ewell at National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) as he was introducing and advocating for longitudinal enrollment tracking as an approach to institutional retention research. I appreciated his questioning the value of the typical, traditional “exit surveys” (i.e. “autopsy studies”) for understanding attrition and his recommending instead the comprehensive tracking of enrollment patterns to, through, and out of an institution. His premise was that if you know with sufficient precision who leaves what institution when, you are probably well on the way to knowing why—even without doing an exit survey to ask that question of an individual student; that insight resonated with me as a young researcher and drew me into this arena of enrollment analysis.

So my own active involvement in developing retention research and retention strategies began when I was a research director at Saint Louis University, with the innovative TRAILS project. TRAILS, an acronym for Tracking Retention and Academic Integration by Learning Style, was a university project I created and directed that integrated data on student academic and enrollment progress that Ewell advocated. That project was instrumental in my early work with Charles Schroeder in helping faculty
understand the impact of teaching and learning styles not only on classroom performance but on enrollment outcomes such as choice of major, levels of academic engagement, and student retention. The correlates we found with standardized tests such as ACTs and SATs were instrumental in rethinking the use of test scores in admission to some academic programs.

Now at DePaul as a senior enrollment officer for the past twelve years, my perspective on retention has naturally shifted substantially. At a very large urban institution, solution scalability is key and the enrollment challenges inherent with a highly diverse student population are apparent and manifold—including challenges related to retention and degree completion. My current focus is on improving rates of degree completion for populations historically underserved in higher education, namely first generation and low-income students, often of underrepresented minority groups. DePaul is among the most socioeconomically and racially diverse of all national private universities, and its rates of degree completion exceed what would be predicted in light of the diversity and profile of its student body. In that respect, DePaul offers a compelling learning lab for institutions seeking to improve the success of such student groups.

Hossler: My interest and work in retention dates back to the late 1970s. During that time I was working in both student affairs and academic affairs at my undergraduate alma mater, California Lutheran University. I was also pursuing my Ph.D. at that time and became interested in the growing body of research on student persistence. During that time, I found myself appointed to the position of retention coordinator. This was one of three to four hats I was wearing at that time (as is common at small colleges). My role was to track persistence and graduation rates, undertake studies of our retention efforts, and to provide information to senior campus administrators and to the faculty. It was during this time period that I first became intrigued with how little most institutions were doing to improve student success and graduation.
Since that time period, my interests have shifted back and forth across the various areas of practice and research related to enrollment management. During the time in my career where I served as the Vice-Chancellor of Enrollment Services at Indiana University Bloomington, student retention was not part of my portfolio. However, during this time period, two of my colleagues at IU, George Kuh and Ray Smith chaired campus committees that focused on student success, and I served on this committee. One of the things that struck me during this time is the impact that a strong advocate for enhancing student success could have on institutional efforts. George did a masterful job of cajoling, pushing, and supporting efforts to enhance student success and persistence. Later, during the time Ray chaired this committee, I also became convinced of the role that even small amounts of funding could have on jumpstarting student retention programmatic efforts. Ray had the authority to spend approximately $100,000 per year on new student retention efforts. While this may sound like a good deal of money, at a university as large and complex as IUB, it really did not go that far. But, many creative ideas emerged that often required seed funding of $10,000 or less to get them started. And all too often, a little as $10,000 or less is not forthcoming when campus offices develop potentially good ideas to improve student success.

Since 2003 my research interests have shifted back toward student retention. Since that time, I have been working on projects funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education, The Spencer Foundation, and The College Board. The grants from Lumina have focused on using student data to study campus-based efforts to enhance student success and on how commuting, working students negotiate their multiple commitments so that they can remain enrolled and make progress toward degree attainment. The Spencer Grant focuses on the impact of need-based financial aid on student persistence and degree attainment. Projects funded by The College Board have been focused on efforts to develop surveys of students that would help to identify relevant institutional policy levers to enhance persistence and graduation. Additionally, I have been part of a team studying the intensity of effort to improve persistence across colleges and universities, and the policies and practices institutions are enacting to try to improve measures of student success. Collectively, these research projects have provided an opportunity to undertake both action research on student success, and more traditional academic research on student retention. They illuminate both the complexities of trying to improve student persistence and graduation rates, and the potential avenues for enhancing student success. Both are necessary to inform thoughtful efforts to enhance student persistence and success.

What is it that you believe has elevated retention to its current level of prominence in the national public policy discourse on higher education?

Kalsbeek: What may appear to be a new, heightened level of attention is actually the result of some long-term changes in American higher education. About ten years ago, Arthur Levine described higher education's evolving status as a "mature industry." After decades of public investment in higher education as a "growth industry" and the accompanying expansion of educational opportunity, he noted the current view of government toward higher education has shifted. The public policy posture toward so-called "mature industries" is very different than it is toward growth industries; its focus is on accountability, quality control, performance and productivity rather than expansion. So this new level of attention to rates of degree completion as indices of institutional quality and accountability is actually, in part, a reflection of a broad and long-term tectonic shift in the American public policy posture on the entirety of higher education.

Now as state budgets are squeezed and higher education competes with other pressing societal needs for scarce resources in difficult economic times, there will naturally be scrutiny to what the public return on the investment in higher education truly is, to what degree the taxpayer's investment is actually contributing to a more educated workforce, and the degree to which institutions themselves are doing all they can to ensure student success. That's what recent texts such as Crossing the Finish Line by Bowen, Chingos and McPherson are pointing out: that the current level of degree attainment constitutes a crisis for America's universities and erodes public confidence in higher education in general.

What's clear at any rate is that the elevated scrutiny we now feel is certainly not because there's been significant changes in rates of degree completion. In most respects, retention and degree completion rates have been marked more by their stability than by any substantial improve-
ments or erosion—and that’s been true for decades. But as an aside, this alone could be viewed as remarkably good news, given how the doors of higher education have swung much more widely open and how today’s college classroom is a far better representation of American society than it was decades ago—yet completion rates have held constant. But seldom is heard that encouraging word.

Hossler: I don’t have much to add that David has not already covered. In many areas of government we have entered new eras of accountability. State and federal policy makers are seeking evidence that the dollars they invest in any endeavor, including postsecondary education, are being well spent. Many policy makers would like to have good indicators of student learning, but finding good ways to measure student learning for which the costs are not prohibitive have turned out to be much more intractable than policy makers had hoped. Thus, student persistence and graduation rates have become more affordable proxy measures that are increasingly being used in efforts to determine institutional effectiveness. I would submit that graduation rates are at best only modest indirect indicators of institutional effectiveness, but in a policy environment where policy makers want evidence, measures of student persistence have become widely used measures. These accountability measures, combined with the growing emphasis on international measures of degree attainment have resulted in a growing federal and state emphasis on persistence and graduation rates. This emphasis among public policy makers, along with the long standing reasons for institutions to be concerned about persistence and graduation—rankings and tuition revenue—provide a powerful set of incentives for colleges and universities to devote more institutional effort to enhancing student success.

Kalsbeek: Don’s point about the recent emergence of international comparisons on degree completion and degree attainment rates is a very important one that raises another question about what motivates this policy discourse in the first place. For years the arguments have been that rates of degree completion are unacceptably low, with attention on the extreme class-based disparities. Nearly 50 years after the 1965 Higher Education Act that sought to remedy the gaps in attainment between the have and the have nots in America, the disparities in completion and attainment between the poor and the affluent have not closed at all. The concern about how American higher education is exacerbating the class divides in this country has certainly elevated attention to rates of degree completion and overall attainment, and done so with a tenor of moral outrage. Of course, this really isn’t a new concern; as Christopher Jencks and David Riesman noted in their text The Academic Revolution: “Given the current tendency to siphon first-generation collegians into colleges with high attrition and second-generation collegians into colleges with low attrition, the overall attainment gap between children of different cultural backgrounds may well continue to widen for some time” (p. 97). That was published in 1968.

But more recent calls to action on retention and degree attainment have shifted, as Don noted, to one of national competitiveness, and that’s not an insignificant repositioning. Since the recent OECD reports (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) that demonstrated America’s decline in relative performance compared to other industrialized nations in terms of degree attainment, the rationale for public concern about retention and completion seems to have shifted from social justice and equity to national economic competitiveness. One must wonder if the new narrative suggests a retreat from the uncomfortable equity concerns in public policy circles or if perhaps it is a pragmatic calculation that national competitiveness will garner more attention and investment in higher education than social justice arguments. It remains to be seen what narrative will dominate in the Obama era.

At the institutional level, what do you think is the primary reason so many institutions struggle to effectively organize for and mobilize a comprehensive retention strategy?

Hossler: For the last four years, I have been working with The College Board on developing institutional surveys of policies and practices designed to enhance student persistence. Recently, Jerry Lucido and the Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice at the University of Southern California have also become partners in this effort. We have now conducted one pilot study of policies and practices at four-year colleges and universities in five states as well as recently completing a national study. We are now working on a similar national survey of policies
and practices at two-year colleges. We have gained considerable insights from these efforts.

The results to date reveal that the amount of effort to improve persistence—as reflected in the amount of dedicated administrative time, in the authority of the responsible person to influence policy, and in the funding for programs—is low across most institutions in both the pilot and the national study. For example, well over half (60%) of the institutions reported that they had an individual responsible for tracking and coordinating campus retention efforts. But we also discovered that the average amount of time allocated to coordinating these efforts was less than one-third of a full-time position. Additionally, most responding institutions reported that their efforts to coordinate retention strategies are modest at best; few institutions have formal retention plans, and on most campuses no one is responsible for retention that has even minimal amounts of policy making authority or the ability to fund retention efforts.

Our recent national study also found that most institutions report that they do not make systematic efforts to assess the effectiveness of their retention efforts. And I would note that these findings are consistent with other studies that have examined the extent to which institutions evaluate their retention initiatives. We also found that most institutions do not have strong support systems in place for students who are encountering academic difficulties. Too many institutions put retention initiatives in place without sufficient staffing and funding, and, not surprisingly, these initiatives seldom work.

In addition to these surveys, the Lumina funded research on student success that was started by Ed St. John at the University of Michigan, and which I continued, demonstrated a consistent pattern of under-resourcing student success efforts. Our Lumina work revealed a pattern of mounting programs that relied heavily on part-time faculty or untrained students to deliver various forms of academic support. In addition, the administrators in charge of these programs usually were asked to undertake these efforts with no release time from their other duties. The results gleaned from these surveys and our Lumina funded research suggest that few campuses devote resources to changing practice or policy, and these results paint a bleak picture of efforts to enhance retention and graduation rates on most campuses.

Kalsbeek: First, I think the results of the studies Don describes are important; most institutions would benefit from a candid assessment of how little real time, energy, attention, and resources they commit to improving student retention and degree completion. Many institutions would benefit from having someone explicitly tasked with coordinating the institution’s efforts in this regard.

But I don’t find it puzzling that these studies find that most “retention coordinators” lack authority and resources to make the sweeping programmatic and policy changes required to substantially improve student retention. What “coordinator” positions in any arena have significant funding and policy authority? Policy and budget authority and autonomy typically rests with positions with a scope of responsibility much greater than that implied by a position with 100 percent of its focus being “coordinating” retention efforts. The key to me isn’t the authority or resources at the disposal of a retention coordinator specifically, but rather the commitment to retention by those who do have policy and funding authority—such as chief enrollment management or chief academic officers.

So in that regard, I think a reason institutions struggle to effectively organize their retention efforts is that their planning and implementation processes for retention efforts are not grounded adequately in a context of accountability for the intended outcome. This will be addressed further in the subsequent essay, but I think that where one organizationally centers the retention responsibility, and how explicitly the retention effort is tied to institutional enrollment goals, makes all the difference between success and failure.

In your view, what are the most critical ingredients for a successful retention strategy?

Hossler: First, it takes an individual or a group of individuals who are committed to enhancing student success, who individually or collectively have the time, resources, and administrative gravitas to garner the attention and support of other campus administrators and faculty about the importance of student success and to directly implement, or to play a key role in influencing others, to put into place thoughtful programs and policies designed to improve student persistence and success.

Related to the first point, colleges and universities need to devote institutional research (IR) resources to studying
student persistence. Good research is an essential element to improving student success. All too often, a campus administrator or committee reads the latest synthesis of research on the correlates of student persistence and implements a set of activities and then decides, there, we have done what we need to do to improve persistence and graduation rates. The most important factors that affect student persistence can be different from campus to campus. Thus successful efforts require that campus administrators drill down into institutional data, study the impact of programs they have in place, and be constantly seeking new approaches to improving student success.

Successful efforts also require an open mind, and a willingness to challenge the status quo. Too often I have been on campuses where there is an entrenched administrator who makes claims about the effectiveness of his or her programs in reducing student attrition when, in fact, there is either no empirical evidence to support the claims, or the evidence, in fact, indicates the programs are having no effect. It is also essential that research and policy making efforts consider all possibilities. While academic success is the most essential ingredient of efforts to improve student success, sometimes other factors influence student success. My colleague John Braxton at Vanderbilt has found that the degree to which students perceive that universities are concerned about student well being is a strong predictor of student persistence. In some studies I have undertaken with The College Board, we found that the extent to which institutions provided strong transition services between high school and college was a good predictor of first- to second-year persistence. In a grant funded by Lumina, Ed St. John and others found that one church-affiliated school had a positive impact on persistence when they started to offer a Life Calling course for first-year students. Each of these studies has found different policy levers to enhance student success, and in each case, a strong institutional research effort and openness to new ideas were an essential part of these efforts.

Kalsbeek: The first critical ingredient is clarity of purpose and focus. Since retention is one of the most studied and analyzed of all college enrollment issues and outcomes, one unfortunate consequence of that fact is a plethora of conceptual models and theories and innumerable studies of the correlates of retention. One can argue that these studies and complex models have served more to diffuse rather than focus our attention; though we have a richer understanding of all of the many factors that contribute to student retention, campuses can’t gain traction because they can’t focus on what really matters.

For example, the typical focus of institutional retention research is on measuring persistence rates and using simple year-to-year retention as a primary metric of success. This focus on persistence often distracts us from the more important underlying measures of academic progress. I often ask campus retention committees, “What’s your retention rate?” And they all know the percentage of freshmen returning for a second year—even to two decimals. But then I ask, “What percent of your freshmen come back having made one year’s progress toward degree completion?” And I’ll get blank stares. While all retention research highlights the importance of initial academic success and satisfactory academic progress, such progress is too often framed as one of many dimensions of effective retention efforts when in fact it is in all likelihood the most critical part of the retention equation at most institutions and merits a singular focus.

A second critical ingredient echoes what Don said regarding a concerted effort to do research in support of the retention agenda. I believe most studies published in countless educational journals amply illustrate the disconnect between the kind of academic scholarship that’s often underway by researchers choosing to study student retention, and the real decisions and choices administrators face in trying to affect change. Granted, there have always been disconnects between the worlds of knowledge production and knowledge utilization. It’s what’s known as the “two communities” theory—that the failure of research, typically public policy or social science research, to be used in public policymaking, is related to fundamental disconnects between the scholars and analysts who do the research on the one hand and those leaders or administrators who are in a position to shape policy, fund programs, and make decisions on the other. The predictable dialogue is one of the analysts wondering why their data aren’t used and the decision-makers wondering why they have no usable data. This may be truer in the realm of retention research than any other part of enrollment management research.

The remedy—and something I think is perhaps the most critical ingredient for retention success—is a commitment
to what is called “action research,” the kind of research and analysis that is designed explicitly to frame policy choices and inform decision making, where the research team members are active stakeholders in the policy arena and shape their research and analysis primarily to improve action. Every successful retention initiative I have been a part of over 30 years has had at its core an analytic process that has provided baseline data to guide the definition of the problem, formative analysis to guide the development and implementation of the initiative, and a summative evaluation to assess outcomes and effectiveness.

**What do you think are some of the most promising new insights and understandings about retention that institutional leaders should be mindful of as they develop and implement retention strategies?**

**Kalsbeek:** I’d offer three. First, improving an institution’s retention and degree completion rates by any substantial margin generally requires improving students’ academic experience. Doing so requires broadening our focus from “high-risk students” to “high-risk experiences” that create conditions that hinder student progress and success. For example, we all know the so-called “killer courses” on our campuses that have atypically high failure or student withdrawal rates—and such failure contributes to attrition. A strategic approach to retention shifts the focus from students who fail courses to courses that fail students, so new approaches to pedagogical reform and technologically enhanced classroom instruction hold promise for improving the assessment process, improving student learning, and improving student retention. The work of the National Center for Academic Transformation is at the heart of what I think are among the most promising retention strategies.

A second source of important new insight about retention is the work and writing of Cliff Adelman. The papers “Answers in the Toolbox” (1999) and “Toolbox Revisited” (2006), which he authored for the U.S. Department of Education, provide an extraordinarily valuable perspective on these issues. These are must-reads for everyone in our profession. The core insight we glean from Adelman’s work is the importance of focusing on what’s most critical in degree completion: academic content in pre-college preparation, early academic success, and timely academic progress. There seems to me great wisdom, common sense, and valuable guidance in his assertion that we should avoid creating complex stories built from marginal variables to explain student attrition.

A third key and relevant insight is that which has surfaced regarding the so-called “student swirl.” In Vic Borden’s interesting summary of this issue in *Change* magazine, he sums up the challenge saying: “The traditional “linear matriculation” image of the college student still influences policy formulation and educational practice at all levels, despite the reality that the majority of 18- to 24-year olds, not to mention older students, do not experience a college education in a linear fashion.” (Borden 2004, p. 11). Adleman echoes the importance of this phenomenon in his analysis of the seething movements of students that define the complexity of today’s college attendance patterns. The fact that students are increasingly taking routes toward their degree completion that are not the traditional pathways that have long characterized our thinking, our research, and our approach to retention is a significant development that has not yet fully framed our national discourse on student retention and success. If the baccalaureate degree more and more represents a portfolio of courses from multiple institutions, often experienced simultaneously, the way we design, implement and evaluate retention strategies and retention outcomes all change in significant ways.

**Hossler:** Recently I have been intrigued with two strands of inquiry related to student persistence. First, increasingly, studies are finding that the frequency with which students are taught by part-time faculty exerts a modest negative impact on student success. Intuitively this makes sense, if as Pascarella and Terenzini suggest, faculty are often the socializing agents of our institution, then it should not surprise us that part-time faculty members might not know our institutions well enough, or be sufficiently committed to the mission of the college or university to be successful socializing agents. Furthermore, I would add that for many of the campus-based studies that were undertaken as part of a Lumina Grant that both Ed St. John and I directed, we found that very often retention efforts were staffed by part-time faculty or students with little or no training.

Additionally, an emerging body of research is beginning to suggest that our wide range of curricular offerings that we make available as part of general education courses may not be a good curriculum model for first generation and at-risk students. Rather, offering a very specific set of
courses that all students in a cohort take, and that are offered at predictable times over a one- to two-year period can be important retention efforts. This enables first generation students, who are also often working part-time or full-time, to plan their schedules well in advance, and do not have to make a plethora of academic choices. This also enables institutions to provide support services also tightly coupled with respect to timing and location of these classes, thus enabling them to be critical components of successful efforts.

Finally, there is an additional point I would like to make. One of the strongest findings that emerged from the Lumina funded work that Ed. St. John and I lead for a period of five years was that in some respects effective interventions are more like three yards and a cloud of dust than 50 yard touchdown passes. My point here is that we found that student success interventions that worked were not the result of new innovative ideas but rather were the result of implementing well-planned, organized, and funded initiatives.

SUMMING UP
Increasing student retention and graduation rates in post-secondary institutions has become an increasingly important objective for institutional and public policy makers as they strive to enhance objective measures of student success. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence that most colleges and universities have failed to make significant, measurable improvements in student persistence, retention, progress, and successful degree completion. To date, few campus leaders have invested sufficient staff time and resources in efforts to improve these outcomes, or they have invested in approaches and initiatives that have failed to gain sufficient traction to affect these outcomes.

On most campuses, it seems the senior leadership has not matched its rhetorical emphasis on the importance of student retention with effective organizational efforts and investments to actually improve it. Research efforts have been inadequate to sufficiently assess the efficacy of campus-based initiatives intended to enhance rates of degree completion, or to enlighten campus decision mak-
ing about how best to do so. Furthermore, too few institutional policymakers have given sufficient attention to how best to organize their campus efforts to achieve these goals, or have the will to make the organizational changes that may be required to do so.

But emerging practice in the field does offer some clues and insights for how to do better. In our next essay on student retention, we will reflect on optimal organizational structures and processes for improving retention and successful degree completion, and what can be learned through extant action research regarding efforts to do exactly that.

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This Article describes the early outcomes of an ongoing project at the University of South Florida in Tampa that involves using a logistic regression formula derived from pre-matriculation characteristics to predict the risk of individual student attrition. The approach was first presented in the 83(2) issue of College and University (Miller 2007) and further detailed in the 83(3) issue (Miller and Herreid 2008). After risk of attrition was predicted for each entering first-time-in-college student, interventions were designed. The strategies for intervening with those at greatest risk of attrition were described in the 84(3) issue (Miller and Tyree 2009). A second model, based upon the students who entered in 2007, was described in the 84(4) issue (Herreid and Miller 2009). The project described in the 85(1) issue of C&U produced a model for predicting the risk of attrition of individual students between the beginning of the sophomore year and the beginning of the junior year. In this piece, the authors will describe the results of the prediction formula and the extent to which it appears to accurately predicts risk of student attrition. We will also describe the effect of the mentoring program, the applied intervention. Finally, we will present the current effort that is underway based upon what we learned, and the next steps in this effort to improve student success and persistence.
THE INSTITUTION

The University of South Florida (USF) is a large, public institution in a metropolitan setting. In 2006, when the USF project began, the total student population of the University was approximately 44,000, and the Tampa campus had an enrollment of about 36,000 students. In the current year, there are approximately 39,000 on the Tampa campus. The large population has provided USF with the opportunity to develop a statistical model relatively quickly. A cohort of over 4,000 first-time-in-college students is a sufficient population for a relatively reliable statistical model to be constructed. However, as far as the intervention with those at greatest risk of dropping out, USF does not easily give individual attention to students in any systematic way. It is simply too large an institution to do so in any regular fashion, and students do not expect it. Therefore, the institutional culture we had with the intervention will show that difficulty.
DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY
The College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) is commonly used to assess the expectations that students have of the college-going experience before they matriculate (Gonyea 2003; Kuh and Pace 1998). It is often used in conjunction with its predecessor instrument, the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) to compare the expectations of students with their real college-going experiences. What students expect of the college experience may be of value in gaining understanding of their chances of success (Miller 2005), and it is on that premise that this project is partially based.

A data set was created with CSXQ survey results for the approximately 900 students who entered USF in fall 2006, and provided personally identifying information (the student identification number). This process allowed the researchers to supplement the CSXQ data with demographic information, academic performance data, standardized test scores, and other data collected by the University and of potential worth in differentiating between dropouts andpersisters.

Logistic regression was used to determine which factors in the data set were of predictive value regarding risk of attrition of individual students. The logistic regression utility is the appropriate methodology when varying types of variables are used to predict a dichotomous one (persistence versus dropout).

RESULTS
The factors in the data set that demonstrated themselves to have merit in distinguishing between dropouts andpersisters and became part of the attrition prediction formula were:
- High school grade point average (positively related to persistence)
- Being Black versus being White (positive)
- Expecting to participate in student clubs and organizations (positive)
- Expecting to read many textbooks or assigned books (positive)
- Expecting to read many non-assigned books (negative)
- Expecting to work off campus (negative)

These variables are discussed further in the article in the 83(4) College and University (Miller and Herreid 2008). Further analysis demonstrated a number of other variables from the data set that had value in distinguishing between persisters and dropouts but did not have enough power to be included in the model. Those variables included gender (men are more at risk), plans to live on campus (a positive persistence factor), and the time between the date of application and the date of matriculation (a positive predictor of persistence). Whatever variance they contributed independently was absorbed by other factors that were in the model.

THE MENTORING PROGRAM, VERSION I
The project team decided to house the intervention program in the Office of New Student Connections (NSC), a department of the Division of Student Affairs. The NSC operation has general responsibility for providing support to new students through a Week of Welcome program that takes place at the start of the academic year. Students are also supported through the NSC Web site and a regular newsletter. Social events are part of the programming as are the delivery of services and programs for the families of new students.

The core program for intervention with students determined to be at greatest risk would be called the Mentoring Program, and it would begin as a pilot program from which the organizers would learn about effective interventions and strategies that work and that would lead to steps for improvement and expansion in the subsequent years. The Mentoring Program is described in detail in the 84(3), issue of College and University (Miller and Tyree 2009).

The model identified about 450 students at the greatest risk, and planners selected 22 professional staff to be in this pilot program, and the number of students served by each of them was an average of ten. This resulted in about half of the students most at risk being part of the Mentoring Program. An advantage of this is that the researches were left with convenient control and experimental groups of similar size, allowing for a test of the effect of the program, as we will demonstrate in following sections.

Some of the academic and student affairs administrators who became participants in the intervention were assigned students with whom they might already have a
connection, such as residence hall administrators being assigned groups of residence hall students, or instructors of the University Experience course being assigned students in their respective sections. Other mentors were assigned students, usually commuting students, with whom they had no relationship.

The staff members selected for the Mentoring Program were trained and oriented on the principles of the intended intervention and strategies proposed. The mentors were introduced to the model that predicted risk of attrition, giving them the assurance that they were being asked to assume duty that was based upon well-established science. The managers discussed some suggested ways to contact students. The first contact was seen as delicate, because students were not expecting it, and many of the mentors were strangers to them.

The managers and the researchers made it clear to the mentors that the prediction model did not suggest causation for any of the variables. For that reason the model was not to be the source for strategies to intervene. Rather, the mentors were given a set of reasons why students might drop out and were encouraged to elicit from the students any signs of concern in the conversations with them. The managers addressed risk issues associated with academic performance, such as a student exhibiting unclear or unreasonable goals about the college experience. A student with insufficient academic preparation would also be at risk, as would a student who was disengaged, bored, or disinterested in coursework.

Other signs of a potential disconnection that mentors were encouraged to look for were a student showing social isolation from peers or signals of stress or of concern for finances. Some students have challenges managing the new freedoms associated with going to college, and mentors were encouraged to watch for symptoms of that. Many students are at risk of attrition because of the distraction of conflicting commitments, such as off-campus employment, separation from significant others (family or friends), or even long commutes to campus. A final signal about which mentors were encouraged to converse with students is the

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American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
extent to which their expectations of the college experience were not met, and the ways in which that might be the case.

The training program included a discussion about the various departments at the University to which students with specific needs or concerns could be referred. The services and programs of each department were described to the mentors, so they could help students know what to expect, and the risk factors described previously were matched with departments that might provide specific support to students who show evidence of those conditions. Included among the referral departments were the counseling center, career services, the financial aid office, the tutoring and learning services/writing center, the center for student involvement, and the department of housing and residential education.

**ALTERNATIVE INTERVENTION SERVICES**

The project team for the Mentoring Program recognized that there were several specific programs and departments that already give close support and regular contact to the students they serve. As a result, students involved with those operations were excluded from the Mentoring Program, because the service would be redundant. However, each of those departments was very interested in having identified to them any of their students who were determined to be at risk, so they could be given special attention in addition to the regular service provided. Those departments and programs are the Academic Enrichment Center for Intercollegiate Athletics, the Freshman Summer Institute for students at risk, Student Support Services for a different collection of students at risk, the Honors College, and an additional collection of the freshman University Experience course instructors.

**EARLY LESSONS PRIOR TO RESULTS ANALYSIS**

At the mid-point of the academic year, the managers learned several things from the experience of mentors. First, many students did not immediately respond to the first contact, unless they knew the mentor. For that reason, University Experience and residence hall staff mentors were among the most successful in getting student responses.

Additionally, some mentors were not comfortable making cold phone calls and relied only on e-mail, with varying results. Also, some students did not respond immediately but did later, after mid-term grades. The managers believe that, irrespective of student response, there may be some good effect of the first contact from the mentor, as students are informed that somebody at the University is assigned to give them support, whether they take advantage of it or not.

**RESULTS FROM THE APPLICATION OF THE MODEL**

In the fall 2009 semester the project managers were able to assess the effectiveness of the model. At that point, the first-year persistence rate, to the beginning of the sophomore year, was determined. Establishing the accuracy of the model was essential in order to maintain the commitment of time and personnel to the intervention effort. This is true even though the model that was applied for the first year of this project is different from the model developed in the second year (Herreid and Miller 2009). The point is that, in order to continue to invest in the project, University officials need confidence in the process of the design of the model, not any particular formula for predicting attrition. Reassuring the USF community that the pre-matriculation variables that are included in model design are the right ones is very important. Also essential is that

<p>| Table 1 | Persistence: Predicted versus Actual Rates |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Row Percent</th>
<th>Dropped Out</th>
<th>Persisted</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predicted to Persist</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>12.99%</td>
<td>3021</td>
<td>87.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicted to Drop Out</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>19.61%</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>80.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>13.77%</td>
<td>3394</td>
<td>86.23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the logistic regression application is seen as effective and as an accurate application for predicting student persistence.

As Table 1 (on page 17) shows, the persistence rate of students in the study who were predicted by the model to be most likely to remain at USF was 87 percent, and the rate for students predicted to be least likely to persist was 80 percent. Therefore, from an overall perspective and unrelated to any effect of the intervention the model appeared to have some power in predicting student persistence. The persistence rate of the total cohort in this study was 86.23 percent, which compares favorably with the reported persistence rate of 86.6 percent for the full class. The cohort for model construction was based upon only new students who were eighteen or nineteen years old, and who enrolled on the Tampa campus.

These results are encouraging for several reasons. In general, predicting human behavior is risky, and in this project there was a substantial commitment of human resources and, to a lesser extent, financial and material resources. The substantial gap in the rates of persistence between those predicted most likely to persist and those predicted less likely points toward power in the model. That power exists because some attrition is impossible to predict (health difficulties, changing family circumstances, and so forth). Also, the experiences of those more prone to drop out are unpredictable (forming of special significant relationships, establishing a special bond to an organization, etc.). In the context of those sorts of unpredictable factors, the gap in persistence appears meaningful and reassuring about the model.

These results are promising and generate confidence in the use of future applications of the predictive model, as well as for the development of other models for predicting persistence of sophomores (Miller and Herreid 2009) and for predicting persistence of transfer students.

**RESULTS OF THE MENTORING PROGRAM INITIATIVE**

Having established the predictive worth of the logistic regression model, the project team turned its attention to the effect of the Mentoring Program, the intervention initiative. Those results were less encouraging. Of the students who were predicted to be at risk and who received no intervention, 81.25 percent of them persisted to the sophomore year. Surprisingly, of the students who received an intervention, only 79.0 percent of them were retained. It is incongruous that the Mentoring Program actually had a more negative effect than no intervention at all, so the project team explored the specific results more carefully.

The team learned that commuting students in the program had a low persistence rate (77.93%) as did resident students whose mentors were non-residential professional staff (75.0%). Further, of those who were in the Mentoring Program, the highest persistence rates were by students whose mentors were their University Experience Instructors (84.93%). Also, student athletes whose risk of attrition was high persisted at a rate of 93.31 percent. This clearly suggests that an intervention with a student at risk by a person with whom the student had no other reason for contact (commuters and residents supported by a staff member who did not live on campus) did not work. To the contrary, an intervention by a person with whom the student had a relationship (University Experience instructor or athletics academic advisor) was more effective. These lessons helped to shape the subsequent version of the intervention.

**THE MENTORING PROGRAM, VERSION II**

The pilot program provided helpful insight into opportunities for improvement as the Mentoring Program was modified for year two. The project team decided to take a slightly different approach in identifying and assigning mentors with the previous year’s results in mind. Feedback from the mentors suggested that students responded better to outreach from a person who had a natural connection to their student experience rather than what seemed like a random call from a university staff member. Thus, the team again removed students who were already participating in a program or activity that provides extra attention to their students (athletes, honors students and first-generation programs). These programs were notified of the predicted risk of attrition of their students so they were aware of their potential to be at risk for departing USF. Then, the remaining students were divided into three sections—those who lived on campus, those who were taking a section of the University Experience course, and those who commute to campus. Students in each group were assigned mentors based on their unique needs and points of connection to the University. This revised approach created a greater capacity for mentoring relationships such that 413 students were assigned a mentor in the current year, compared with about half that number last year.
Because the students mentored by their University Experience (UE) instructors were most likely to persist, the team decided to extend an invitation to all instructors to mentor their students who were identified as at risk for departure. Of the 35 UE instructors for the fall semester, 33 participated in the Mentoring Program. Seven who were teaching for the first time were not invited to participate to avoid undue pressure on their overall experience and five declined the invitation to participate. Ninety-three of the 413 students were assigned to their UE instructors; on average an instructor had three to four students assigned to him/her. Training was provided to the University Experience instructors to help them understand why their students were more at risk for departing the university, and to coach them on how they might provide unique support to these students, beyond perhaps what they already provide to their class.

The remaining students were divided by their residential experience. The 182 students living in the residence hall were assigned to a residence life staff member. The housing department agreed to incorporate the mentoring role in the job expectation for the residence life coordinators and faculty-in-residence. This approach seemed especially appropriate given that year two of the mentoring program coincided with the implementation of a new first-year residency requirement at the university. It is important to note, however, that students living in the three-county region that surrounds the university were allowed an exception to the requirement, and about 57 percent of those students chose to commute from home during their first year.

The commuting students were assigned to a student peer mentor. Using upper-class students in a mentoring role was a new approach to making connections with these at-risk students. Four peer mentors were selected, hired and trained to serve in this capacity. All of the students had previously served as orientation team leaders and thus were very knowledgeable about first-year students and the University. Working in New Student Connections for five hours per week in the fall and spring semesters, these upper-class students have dedicated significant time to reaching out to their students. In total, 138 students were assigned to the four mentors such that the average number of first-year students assigned to a single peer mentor was 35.

Because mentors had varied success in connecting with their assigned students in the pilot program, more time was spent preparing and supporting the housing staff. The Office of New Student Connections facilitated two workshops before the beginning of fall semester to help the residence life coordinators gear up for their work. Surprising to some, living in the residence halls with the students did not automatically make it easier to connect with them. More regular outreach and support by New Student Connections, including convening a mid-semester meeting, has helped the staff identify mechanisms and opportunities for reaching the students. Connecting with students in buildings where staff members do not live or work has been among the top challenges facing some staff. Another consideration was each mentor’s capacity for building a successful relationship with a manageable number of students. On average, mentors were assigned twelve students for initial contact.

For the residence life and peer mentors, reaching out to these students has been equated to “cold calling” in sales. The mentors had to find ways to reach the students that would engage them. This may continue to be the greatest problem at USF associated with intervening with students at risk of attrition. Unlike smaller institutions where norms may include student connections with staff and faculty, the size of the University and its culture make those connections less familiar ground.

**NEXT RESEARCH STEPS**

The researchers will continue to refine the prediction model on an annual basis. In the spring of 2008, the researchers developed a USF-specific survey that included only the items from CSXQ that had been found to be of predictive worth. A more powerful model is currently being constructed, because in the administration of that survey during the summer orientation of 2008 more than 4,100 students completed the instrument and provided personally identifiable information. That generated a large number of records on which the next model will be based, and that will permit the construction of a model in which the researchers will have much more confidence. The researchers will describe that model in future writing.

One more area for attention by the researchers is the very large population of transfer students that enters the institution every year. USF has one of the largest transfer student populations in the country, with more transfer students being admitted annually than first-time-in-college (FTIC) students. The rate at which they persist to de-
degree completion is better than that of FTIC students, but there are so many of them, any improvement in their rate of persistence may be impactful.

**SOPHOMORE ATRITION**

The original data set constructed from students entering the University in 2006 was used to develop a model to predict risk of sophomore-to-junior attrition, because that group was eligible to enter the junior year at the University in 2008 (Miller and Herreid 2009). There is reason to believe that attrition following the sophomore year is a significant problem for the University, because a number of selective colleges (such as Nursing, Business, and Education) govern admission to their programs in the junior year. Students who fail to gain admission to those colleges may choose other educational options outside of the University at that point.

At USF the various academic colleges assume the responsibility for providing academic advice to students who have declared or are tracking toward a specific major. The professional academic advisors in the colleges have accepted the responsibility for intervening with sophomores at risk of dropping out, and they are employing varying strategies for that effort. The researchers will track their respective efforts to determine which approaches have the best effect in the form of persistence to the junior year. Those results will inform best practice in intervention, as has been the case with first-time-in-college students.

**CONCLUSION**

The confirmation of the effectiveness of the logistic regression model using pre-matriculation data is the most positive and important result of this project. That application will be repeated and refined for the first-time-in-college cohorts over the coming years. The planners have confidence that the revised Mentoring Program has the potential to have a dramatic effect on student persistence. The effect of the changes in the program, using student peers and only mentors who have natural relationships with students at risk, will be closely monitored. If further refinements are called for, the planners will adapt the program accordingly.

The intervention by college-based academic advisors will be monitored, and adjustments in that approach will be implemented as determined necessary. The researchers will develop a plan for intervening with transfer students who are risk of attrition and monitor its effect, also. The multiple applications of logistic regression to anticipate risk of attrition will be an ongoing, iterative process at the University of South Florida. The plan, of course, is to demonstrate an improved rate of student persistence and degree attainment. Researchers remain confident that improvement is within reach and that it will be demonstrated in the years to come.

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This article gives attention to the essential need for enrollment management conceptual and organizational models to focus more intentionally and purposefully on efforts related to improving student learning, success, and persistence. This article connects dialogue about improving student learning and persistence to an institution’s SEM efforts.
Editor’s Note: This is the first in a series of two articles by Yale on SEM for College and University.

It’s now nearly ten years since I started participating in and presenting at national conferences related to strategic enrollment management (SEM). Having entered this profession with nearly 20 years of experience in transitional initiatives related to the first-year experience and academic advisement services, I have perceived an essential need for enrollment management conceptual and organizational models to focus more intentionally and purposefully on efforts related to improving student learning, success, and persistence. Oftentimes, SEM still is viewed from a conventional lens comprising marketing, recruitment and admissions, financial aid, and registrar-related student services functions.

Hossler (2005) notes that SEM retention efforts often have resulted in a “laundry list” approach to improving student persistence and that higher education institutions do not systemically assess the impact of these efforts. By design, this article is intended to consciously connect dialogue about improving student learning and persistence to an institution’s SEM efforts. It is my hope that this work will serve as a resource for those considering the complex task of systematically integrating efforts to improve student success and persistence with the more traditional institution-based strategic enrollment management enterprise. I hope to show through this process that a holistic SEM enterprise is greater than a laundry list of its programs and services.
STUDENT PERSISTENCE IS A COMPLEX CHALLENGE

Higher education nomenclature includes many terms for describing student success. "Retention," "persistence," "attrition," "student departure," and "improving student learning" are used synonymously to refer to whether students succeed in college. The literature on student retention and attrition is prolific with details on why and when students leave college. Tinto’s (1975, 1993) landmark studies have shaped how researchers and practitioners alike have come to understand the issue of student persistence. Having prompted nearly 35 years of dialogue on student retention and persistence in higher education, his attrition model, in particular, has become a foundation for most research regarding student persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1991, 2005) significant evidence links students’ first-year academic performance to both persistence and degree completion. Astin’s (1977, 1985) research details the connections of student involvement to student persistence. More than 30 years of research now exists on factors which influence student persistence and degree attainment, yet issues of student retention and persistence continue to be as pertinent today as they were in 1975, when Tinto first published his student integration model.

Swail (2001), in “The Art of Retention,” notes that in the 1970s and 1980s, public policy was focused primarily on access, with federal and state legislation aimed at reducing barriers to higher education. By the mid 1990s, this discussion moved from access to issues of choice, affordability, and persistence. Since 2000, much attention has been given to improving student success and learning and assessment in their first year and throughout the student’s undergraduate experience. Today’s public agenda is daunting: creating a culture for institutional and departmental assessment; improving institutional transparency and accountability; improving evidence-based decision-making efforts; reducing the costs of higher education; and increasing the numbers of higher education graduates, especially those from traditionally underrepresented and low-income groups.

Approximately 18.3 million students are attending higher education institutions this fall, representing an increase of nearly 3 million since fall 2000 (Hussar and Bailey 2008, p. 53). Despite this incredible increase, the reality is that one of every two students still will not complete a degree. Often, the graduation rate of an institution is used to define “student success.” Because public policy focuses on graduation rates, they seem to be the measure on which most people rely for determining student success. However, it is important to note that graduation rate is “one number in time” commonly used for a particular group of students who enter higher education as “first-time full-time students.” Unfortunately, many students are not in college long enough to realize the benefits of a college education. On average, four-year colleges and universities lose 29 percent of their first-year students before those students start their second year (ACT 2008). Student persistence research shows that of those students who leave higher education, most leave in the first year of college—especially during the first semester—with some leaving even during the first few weeks on campus (Tinto 1993).

Although the focus of this paper is not to highlight the amount of time students take to graduate, I thought I would draw your attention to some findings from the recent longitudinal study prepared by the Data Quality Campaign (DQC) (2009). The DQC study shows that on average, first-time recipients of bachelor’s degrees in 1999–2000 who had not stopped out of college for six months or more took approximately 55 months from first enrollment to degree completion. Additionally, the DQC study showed that graduates who had attended multiple institutions took longer to complete a degree. For example, those who attended only one institution averaged 51 months from postsecondary entry to completion of a bachelor’s degree, compared with 59 months for those who attended two institutions and 67 months for those who attended three or more institutions. This pattern was found among graduates of both public and private not-for-profit institutions.

The DQC also studied other factors related to time to degree completion. As parents’ education increases, the average time to degree completion decreases. As age and length of time between high school graduation and postsecondary entry increase, time to degree completion also increases. Further, the study shows that higher grade-point averages were associated with a shorter time to degree completion among graduates of public institutions but not among graduates of private not-for-profit institutions. The DQC study also examined data on transfer students from two-year colleges: Students who transferred took about a year and a half longer to complete a bachelor’s degree than students who began at public four-year institu-
tions (71 vs. 55 months) and almost two years longer than those who began at private not-for-profit four-year institutions (50 months). The type of institution from which graduates received a degree also was related to time-to-degree: graduates of public institutions averaged about six months longer to complete a degree than graduates of private not-for-profit institutions (57 vs. 51 months). Many institutions today are tracking graduation rates at four, five, and six years; a number of institutions also are tracking the graduation rates of their transfer-in students. The DQC study has produced useful information in helping us to understand degree completion data.

Retention and graduation rates are significant means by which university effectiveness is measured. We have known for years that students leave college for varying reasons and that their persistence is affected by pre-entry attributes, goals and commitments, institutional experiences, and academic and social integration factors (Tinto 1993). We know too that some students who leave an institution will go on to achieve success at another institution. We know that institutions are different from one another and that some institutions may have more part-time “mobile” students. And we know that many students who enter our campuses today are non-traditional and may choose to attend college on a part-time basis. Regardless of the type of student or institution, the pressure is on to enhance student success and persistence-to-degree rates and to account for these results in the public domain.

The study of student persistence is indeed a complex issue. While postsecondary enrollment has increased to more than eighteen million students, efforts to improve student persistence to graduation remain challenging. Federal and state government agencies as well as public college and university state systems have embraced this issue because the “institutional graduation rate” has held at a constant 50 percent for most of the past half century. As “one number in time,” the graduation rate represents only first-time full-time students—not students who transfer to and obtain degrees from other higher education institutions. It is not uncommon for today’s millennial student to attend multiple institutions before obtaining a degree. Graduation rates also do not take into consideration the non-traditional part-time student whose college attendance behavior often reveals a “stop-in-stop-out” enrollment pattern. Ask yourself how many transfer students your institution enrolls on an annual basis. The institution by which I am employed enrolls nearly 900 transfer students annually; they comprise nearly 35 percent of the institution’s new enrollment annually. Only about half of these students transfer from community colleges; the other half transfer from more than 100 baccalaureate-granting institutions annually.

While national college enrollments have increased over the years, other changes also have occurred—for example, in the nature of the student body and in the pathways to and through postsecondary education. Colleges and universities confront issues related to academic preparedness, greater diversity, stop-in/stop-out college-enrollment patterns, and many others not mentioned here. Data from the “Beginning Postsecondary Student Survey” (BPS:03/04) provides some insight into the student persistence debate:

### Attainment and persistence at any institution through 2006:

- 83 percent of beginning students who first enrolled full time in a postsecondary institution in 2003–04 with plans for a bachelor’s degree were still enrolled at a postsecondary institution three years later;
- 62 percent of beginning students who first enrolled at a public two-year institution in 2003–04 and then transferred to another institution had not yet attained a degree and were still enrolled at some postsecondary institution three years later;
- 50 percent of beginning independent students who first enrolled at a four-year institution in 2003–04 had not attained a degree and were no longer enrolled three years later.

### Attainment and retention at the first institution attended:

- 70 percent of beginning students who enrolled full time at a postsecondary institution in 2003–04 with plans for a bachelor’s degree were still enrolled at their first postsecondary institution without a degree three years later; 4 percent had attained a degree or certificate at their first institution; 20 percent had transferred elsewhere without a degree, and 7 percent had left the first institution attended without a degree or certificate and did not enroll anywhere else within three years.
Among students first enrolled at a public two-year institution in 2003–04 with associate degree plans, 23 percent attained an associate degree from that institution, 31 percent were still enrolled there without a degree, 24 percent had transferred elsewhere without a degree, and 21 percent had not attained a degree and were not enrolled there or anywhere else three years later.

One-quarter of all students who enter postsecondary education for the first time end up at another institution before attaining a postsecondary degree.

Almost half (46%) of first-time students who left their initial institution by the end of the first year never came back to postsecondary education.

Students who attended full time or whose attendance was continuous were much more likely to achieve their degree goals than other students. However, only about two-thirds of students were continuously enrolled;

50 percent of four-year students who did not delay entry into college earned their degree at their first institution, compared to only 27 percent of students who were delayed entrants;

42 percent of students whose first-year grade point average was 2.25 or less left postsecondary education permanently.

The data from this study support earlier studies indicating that continuous enrollment at the initial institution, full-time attendance, and more thorough academic preparation are key factors related to degree attainment.

A new rich empirically-based resource on college completion is also now available for college and university educators and policy-makers. Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson’s book, “Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America’s Public Universities,” is a timely, valuable, and insightful analysis of the challenges of college completion rates. Bowen and his colleagues assembled a substantial, longitudinal database of information on students at 21 public “flagship” universities and four state university systems. Their focus on public institutions is critical since these universities educate more than three-fourths of our nation’s students. Students who matriculated in 1999 were tracked for six years. The authors used regression analysis to assess the impact of various factors on college completion including features such as socioeconomic status, financial aid, and institutional selectivity. Their analysis adjusted for factors such as students’ high-school grades and test scores. Among their findings was the indisputable deduction that too many of our low-income, first generation, and minority students are not graduating from college. Their findings show that large disparities exist in graduation rates by gender, ethnicity, and family income, even after accounting for differences in standardized test scores and high-school preparation. The information available from the study was detailed enough for the authors to track not only graduation rates, but many other issues. For instance, the book raises questions about the following issues: (1) the under-emphasis of the four year graduation rate and the over-emphasis of the six-year graduation rate; (2) the challenge public universities have in doing a better job of graduating higher numbers of lower income and minority students; (3) the importance of high school grades and curriculum over standardized testing in predicting college success; (4) the importance of need-based aid over merit-based aid in getting essential funding to students in need; (5) the success of transfer students in attaining a degree. As Tinto’s research provided the foundation for understanding key factors on student retention, Bowen and his colleagues’ research make a major contribution on the students’ experiences and success at public higher education institutions.

Longitudinal studies have shown that first-time full-time student graduation rates changed little despite widespread and concerted efforts by many colleges and universities to increase them. ACT (2008) reports that the gaps in performance and persistence rates seem to endure despite significant institutional programming and service efforts to close them. Conversely, it is important to note that while retention rates have not improved over the last 30 years, neither did they decline. This is noteworthy considering both the increase in enrollment nationally and the diminished college readiness of incoming students during this time.

So what can institutions do to positively impact student success and learning such that student persistence and degree attainment are improved? A substantial degree of prescriptive literature exists to guide campus leaders in making decisions regarding the different types of programming and student support experiences being used to enhance the quality of students’ education (Upcraft et al.)
Many higher education institutions today offer an extensive catalog of student support services in the form of new student orientation, academic support services, tutoring, supplemental instruction, early alert programs, freshman seminar, learning community course clustering, living and learning community environments, developmental and proactive academic advising, proactive career counseling, leadership programming, community service learning, multicultural programming, developmental course work, mentoring programs, and many other programming initiatives. Many of our institutions have advanced their efforts by segmenting services to meet specific students’ needs (e.g., academically underprepared, underrepresented, student athletes, honor students, non-traditional students, residential students, commuter students, first-year, transfer, and other student groups). Many institutions work hard to retain students, typically relying on strategies that hinge upon their first-year experience. However, successful student persistence is not just a first-year issue: it is a multi-year issue that cuts across every year of a student’s undergraduate experience.

CASE STUDIES OF INTEREST ON IMPROVING RETENTION AND GRADUATION

I focus here on two major studies of student retention. The first was conducted in 2002, when the Lumina for Education Foundation sponsored a research study which looked at retention practices at nineteen public and private institutions that serve low-income students; half had a high six-year graduation rate and half had a low six-year graduation rate. The second study was conducted in 2005–06 and focused on the collaborative efforts of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), The Education Trust (Ed Trust), and The National Association of System Heads (NASH), which together sponsored a study to help campuses understand the reasons that some public four-year colleges and universities have an unusually good record of retaining and graduating students.

In the Lumina-sponsored study, teams met with presidents and CEOs, faculty, staff, and, most important, students (Swail 2001). Swail notes that they visited special programs and tried to get a feel for the climate and atmosphere on campus. The research team expected to find that schools with high graduation rates would have dedicated staff, would be committed to retaining students, and would utilize tried-and-true teaching and learning strategies that make a difference in the learning atmosphere and social climate of the institution. The researchers found what they expected. However, they were astonished to also find what they really didn’t want to find: Resources trumped all other factors. That is, they found that institutions with resources could implement almost any strategy they wanted to. And perhaps more important in so far as the retention debate was concerned, those institutions with resources were able to attract more qualified and competitive students—students who almost surely were going to graduate from college, even if they were from low-income backgrounds. Swail notes that lower-performing schools had staff at least as or even more dedicated than those at better performing schools and that they offered a high-quality education. Nevertheless, institutions with resources were able to use them to make the difference in who came, who stayed, and who completed a degree.

The second study sought to investigate the reasons that some public four-year colleges and universities have unusually good retention and graduation rates. A study team visited the twelve campuses selected for the study and submitted a campus report for each. The campus reports then were analyzed, and the final report was written by Peter Ewell of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, with the assistance and collaboration of team leaders, project directors, and others. The stories told about these colleges and universities underscore the diversity of successful approaches to retaining and graduating students. Half of the study institutions had recently raised their admissions requirements—surely a contributing factor in their success. But the other six had not changed admissions practices appreciably and yet still reported high graduation rates. What really distinguishes many of these campuses is the pervasive belief that demography is not destiny: all of the students they admit have the potential to graduate, and they all should be held to high levels of expectation. Good performance is not just the province of small, selective institutions. Clearly, the single most important lesson relates to the significance of institutional culture in shaping the day-to-day behavior of faculty and staff in their interactions with students. Consistent behavior builds retention—as one report put it, “one student at a time.”
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 for admission purposes. Our staff of professionals has evaluated thousands of 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.
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The AACRAO International Guide is your complete source for information on international education, comprising such core issues as policy, recruitment, technology, English proficiency, student visas and credential evaluation. As a critical part of any international reference library, it also provides a thorough look at study abroad program development and specific roles and issues for community colleges.
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THE AACRAO INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE ADMISSIONS GUIDE
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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 description 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)

COUNTRY GUIDES

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 for 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 education 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)

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FACTORS RELATED TO RETENTION

A number of factors related to retention have been found in the research literature over the last 30 years (Swail 2001):
- **Academic Preparedness.** Academic integration and preparation are primary features of many models of retention. Research shows that between 30 and 40 percent of all entering freshman are unprepared for college-level reading and writing, and approximately 44 percent of all college students who complete a two- or four-year degree had enrolled in at least one remedial/developmental course in math, writing, or reading.

- **Campus Climate.** While researchers agree that “institutional fit” and campus integration are important to retaining college students to degree completion, campus climate mediates undergraduates’ academic and social experiences in college. Minority and low-income students inadequately prepared for non-academic challenges can experience culture shock. Lack of diversity in the student population, faculty, staff, and curriculum, specifically with regard to income and race/ethnicity, often restrict the nature and quality of minority students’ interactions within and outside of the classroom, threatening their academic performance and social experiences.

- **Commitment to Educational Goals and the Institution.** Tinto (1993) hypothesizes that students’ commitment to their occupational and educational goals, as well as their commitment to the institution at which they enroll, significantly influence college performance and persistence outcomes: The stronger the goal and institutional commitment, the more likely the student will graduate. Research shows that congruence between student goals and institutional mission is mediated by academic and social components and that increased integration into academic and social campus communities results in greater institutional commitment and student persistence.

- **Social and Academic Integration.** The process of becoming integrated into the social fabric of a university has also been found to be both a cumulative and compounding process: that is, the level of social integration within a given year of study is part of a cumulative experience that continues to build throughout one’s college experience. Establishing peer relations and developing role models and mentors have both been identified in the literature as important factors in student integration, academically and socially.

- **Financial Aid.** Attending college and persisting to degree completion most often is rewarded with higher annual and lifetime earnings. But for many low-income and minority students, enrollment and persistence decisions are driven by the availability of financial aid.

Part II of this article, which will be published in the next issue of *C&U*, concentrates on what institutions can do to improve student progress and persistence. Aside of improving institutional selectivity and lowering the cost of obtaining a higher education degree through improved financial aid programs and scholarship opportunities, institutions still have much control over the outreach and support services provided to students once they are admitted and enrolled. “Expanding the Conversation about SEM: Advancing SEM Efforts to Improve Student Learning and Persistence—Part II” will provide some helpful strategies, questions to ponder, and thoughts for reflection on how an institution may work to enhance efforts to improve student learning and persistence. Given today’s economic conditions, which pose even greater fiscal challenges and limit the use of already scarce resources, it is even more important for our institutions to channel energies toward improving student learning and success.

REFERENCES


NCES. Sm National Center for Educational Statistics.


Other Supporting Resources


About the Author

DR. AMANDA YALE serves as the Associate Provost for Enrollment Services at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. Areas of responsibility in her position include Undergraduate and Graduate Admissions, Orientation, Financial Aid, Academic Records and Summer School, Retention Services, Academic Services (Academic Advisement, First Year Seminar, Learning Communities, Tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, EOF and TRIO programs, and developmental coursework), Career Services, and Services for Students with Disabilities. She has spent about two-thirds of her tenure in higher education working as a faculty member with first-year programs and academic advising services. As a leader in enrollment management, she guides a division focused on improving student learning and success through a process of considering best practices for recruiting and retaining students at the university. Dr. Yale presents nationally on issues related to first-year advisement, first-year transition, early-alert and intervention services, freshman seminar professional development, learning communities, academic support services for at-risk students, orientation programming, strategic enrollment management planning, leading an enrollment management division, and Millennial student characteristics. She piloted several initiatives that produced national awards and recognitions for exemplary programs and services related to marketing and recruitment initiatives, retention programming, first-year initiatives, and academic advisement for Slippery Rock University. Dr. Yale has served as a senior AACRAO consultant in these areas for higher education institutions interested in improving SEM efforts.
During the past several years, an ongoing debate about the value of merit-based aid has been aired in publications, at conferences, and on campuses. The debate originates with a belief that institutions should invest more resources to provide need-based aid for middle- and low-income students. With increasing college costs accompanied by stable or declining state and federal aid, pressure tends to shift to institutions to fund the shortfalls that needy students might experience.

Indiana University (IU) has several need-based financial aid programs in which institutional dollars are awarded solely on the basis of the standard analysis generated from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). However, it is incorrect to assume that merit-based aid fails to serve students with financial need. At IU, almost two-thirds of our freshman scholarship matriculants demonstrate general financial need. Although our studies have been specific to IU, it is likely that similar results might be found at other large, public research universities. It would be a very narrow strategic view that embraced an institutional aid program for merit-based aid targeted to “high-quality” students and separated need-based aid targeting to all others, with no crossover funding present for high-quality students who also have financial need. Within this context, we have examined how merit-based institutional aid at Indiana University is utilized not only to award top scholars and meritorious students, but also to assist in meeting affordability goals.

The funding of merit- and need-based aid by the institution is both deliberate and purposeful. The Office
of Enrollment Management (OEM), in concert with the academic deans, determines how best to use institutional funds in order to encourage the matriculation and continued enrollment of an undergraduate student body that reflects the academic mission as well as the role of the institution in the state and in the nation. Actually, given its significant number of enrollments by students from outside the United States, it perhaps is more accurate to state that IU enrolls a student body that reflects the institution’s role in the world.

Institutional scholarships and grants are cash awards directed precisely and specifically to cohorts of students; the results of those awards are measured in terms of desired yields. Awarding practices are refined and revised on the basis of the outcomes of previous packaging policies and business practices. Awarding strategies must align the institution’s financial aid goals with its overall enrollment goals, and the results of each awarding cycle must be assessed, measured, and revised against desired outcomes. Automatic institutional scholarships remain at the standard levels, with institutional grant money applied through packaging to meet remaining need. The amounts for automatic scholarships are not increased to reflect need; rather, the scholarship and grant categories remain “pure,” i.e., merit-based or need-based.
Following is a description of how these programs are managed through the Office of Enrollment Management at Indiana University Bloomington.

ALIGNING MERIT-BASED SCHOLARSHIPS WITH CAMPUS RECRUITMENT GOALS

Indiana University has four fundamental recruitment goals:

- Improve the quality of the freshman class as defined by grade point average and standardized test scores.
- Increase the diversity of the freshman class as defined by ethnicity and socio-economic status.
- Increase the international presence of Indiana University.
- Keep IU affordable, particularly for Indiana residents.

Admission to Indiana University is need blind, focusing on the academic record of the applicant without regard to financial status. The prospect has been sufficiently attracted to the University to proceed through the admissions process. In essence, when the student applies for admission, we have no indication whether he and his family have already determined that they can (or cannot) afford to pay college costs. With respect to international students, there is no conventional needs analysis system according to which their financial eligibility may be reviewed; rather, they are considered only for merit-based aid.

Research indicates that many students apply to multiple institutions and may decide — long before the federal and/or state aid application processes begin — whether they can afford to pursue enrollment at schools to which they have been admitted. As a result, one strategy for keeping IU affordable is to contain the educational costs of all students. Our price should be competitive with that of other schools of interest so the student continues to seriously consider enrollment. If the academic and social matches are good, then the student should continue to view IU as a purchase of value.

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Experts reveal the evolution of enrollment strategies implemented at their institutions, the results, and the lessons learned.

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Translates research into practical advice on attracting, retaining, and guiding transfer students.

Basic Guide to Enrollment Management
An in-depth primer on understanding and applying SEM best practices—a handy reference for newcomers as well as seasoned enrollment managers.

The Strategic Enrollment Management Revolution
Defines the theories behind enrollment management, considers their practical application, examines the architectural design of a SEM enterprise and explores the world of technology, the mainstay of any SEM operation.

Gen Xers Return to College:
Enrollment Strategies for a Maturing Population
Examines the critical issues facing colleges and universities as students from “Generation X” return to higher education.

For more SEM-related titles and information on AACRAO Consulting Services, visit www.aacrao.org
INTRODUCING MERIT-BASED SCHOLARSHIPS EARLY IN THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

At the core of IU's merit-based program are automatic scholarships. The automatic scholarship concept enables students and families early in the admissions process to know the level of merit-based award to which the student is entitled. Eligibility criteria are publicized on the Web and in brochures so that students, families, and high school guidance counselors can easily determine the amount of scholarship offered to certain cohorts of students within defined academic profiles. Renewal criteria are also widely publicized. Both sets of criteria are very simple: initially, students must meet high school grade point average (GPA) targets and must score at defined levels on the SAT or ACT. For grant renewal, they must maintain a defined GPA (the same GPA as for any automatic scholarship). The criteria are easy to understand and simple to explain, and they are published broadly. Once a scholarship award has been made, the renewal criteria for the recipient do not change. That said, the initial criteria for automatic scholarships might change for subsequent cohorts of new freshmen even as the renewal GPA criteria remain standard for all automatic scholarships. This facilitates students' understanding and the ease of processing the scholarships while allowing IU to adjust its enrollment strategies as appropriate for the institution.

Unlike state and federal aid notification, the student is notified at the time of admission of any automatic scholarship that has been awarded. No additional forms for automatic scholarships must be completed, although some top scholars are invited to submit an additional scholarship application for consideration for merit-based awards administered outside OEM. Automatic scholarships are not “estimated,” “expected,” or “anticipated,” as many forms of state and federal aid appearing on the spring award notifications to high school seniors are. (Even then, federal and/or state aid is a commitment for one year only, usually accompanied by caveats regarding future eligibility.) Automatic scholarships are guaranteed for renewal for a student’s subsequent three years of enrollment, based on criteria included in the admissions letter. Unlike eligibility criteria for most federal and state aid, eligibility criteria for automatic scholarships are not subject to change. Simply stated, to receive an automatic scholarship, no financial form (such as the FAFSA) is required. As a result, high school students are not required to wait until the middle of the spring semester of their senior year—or later—to learn the amount of the automatic scholarships they will receive. Prospective students receive written assurance of automatic scholarship funding early in the decision-making process.

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<th>Table 1. Gift Aid Recipients and Total Number of Students</th>
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<td><strong>Residents with Need</strong></td>
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<td>IU Automatic and OEM Scholarships</td>
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<td>Private Awards</td>
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<td><strong>Nonresidents with Need</strong></td>
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<td>Private Awards</td>
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<td><strong>Residents without Need or No FAFSA</strong></td>
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Merit-based scholarship offers can be highly effective in encouraging students to attend Indiana University, even in the midst of affordability issues. Students and their families can be retained during the fall and early spring decision timeframe when they otherwise might disengage due to the delay in state and federal aid notifications. After admission has been offered and during the months prior to the finalization of state and/or federal aid awards, students may enroll at schools they perceive they can afford without need-based financial assistance; or they may opt out of college altogether.

Department scholarship recipients are selected by the various IU academic units, which also manage the publicity of awards and the award selection process. Students entering this process have increased contact with IU faculty and staff, which also may increase their interest in attending and/or continuing at IU. Even if they do not receive a monetary award, participation in the process can inspire students to attend or to continue their enrollment.

According to Table 1 (on page 33), IU Department Scholarships and IU Automatic and IU OEM Scholarships provided almost 2,500 offers to state residents who later demonstrated financial need for the 2008–09 academic year, as well as to more than 1,600 nonresidents. For the 2007–08 academic year, the numbers of IU scholarship recipients later demonstrating financial need were comparable relative to cost. Later, in the FAFSA process, resident students were awarded significant amounts of institutional, federal, state, and private grants and/or scholarships. Relatively few nonresident students, in contrast, received federal grant aid, although they did matriculate and/or continue their enrollment at IU.

BLENDING MERIT-BASED SCHOLARSHIPS WITH NEED-BASED GRANTS FOR GREATER EFFECTIVENESS

It is important to remember that, unlike federal and state aid, institutional merit-based scholarships and need-based grants are aligned with the enrollment goals of a particular institution. This does not mean that the institution disregards a student’s eligibility for “outside” aid. Rather, the institution can capitalize on its possibility.

For example, Indiana students know as early as the 6th grade that they will qualify for the 21st Century Scholars Program through a state program which pays fees at any Indiana institution, as long as they continue to pursue an academic curriculum and remain in good standing through high school. Thus, it becomes possible for Indiana University to make a “covenant” with these students—as
early as the 6th grade—that all costs of attendance up to financial need will be met with gift aid if they meet our admissions criteria. We leverage state funding as well as state publicity of the 21st Century Scholars Program to encourage high-need students and students of diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds to include IU in their college enrollment plans.

In addition, students and their parents will learn of their eligibility for the federal Pell Grant through a plan for early notification by the federal government. One method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGI Range</th>
<th>Resident 2009 AY</th>
<th>Resident 2008 AY</th>
<th>Nonresident 2009 AY</th>
<th>Nonresident 2008 AY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGI $25,000 or less</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Automatic and OEM Scholarships</td>
<td>$507,146</td>
<td>$317,571</td>
<td>$443,375</td>
<td>$434,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Department Scholarships</td>
<td>$700,589</td>
<td>$766,002</td>
<td>$236,929</td>
<td>$258,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Grants</td>
<td>$2,414,820</td>
<td>$2,015,301</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$8,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Grants</td>
<td>$11,059,620</td>
<td>$9,364,044</td>
<td>$1,312,941</td>
<td>$999,961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Awards</td>
<td>$9,848,066</td>
<td>$9,143,696</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Awards</td>
<td>$844,308</td>
<td>$947,957</td>
<td>$178,697</td>
<td>$160,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGI $25,001 to $55,800</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Automatic and OEM Scholarships</td>
<td>$1,468,161</td>
<td>$782,459</td>
<td>$1,047,000</td>
<td>$983,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Department Scholarships</td>
<td>$962,810</td>
<td>$1,072,356</td>
<td>$469,222</td>
<td>$373,302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Grants</td>
<td>$3,266,874</td>
<td>$2,736,670</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$4,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Grants</td>
<td>$4,761,877</td>
<td>$3,759,272</td>
<td>$733,486</td>
<td>$532,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Awards</td>
<td>$8,131,488</td>
<td>$7,203,172</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Awards</td>
<td>$967,134</td>
<td>$1,034,042</td>
<td>$255,130</td>
<td>$218,746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGI $55,801 to $75,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Automatic and OEM Scholarships</td>
<td>$1,175,544</td>
<td>$641,807</td>
<td>$811,125</td>
<td>$839,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Department Scholarships</td>
<td>$800,088</td>
<td>$705,723</td>
<td>$362,132</td>
<td>$254,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Grants</td>
<td>$1,028,760</td>
<td>$983,572</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$7,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Grants</td>
<td>$336,822</td>
<td>$209,701</td>
<td>$50,323</td>
<td>$38,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Awards</td>
<td>$1,995,853</td>
<td>$1,494,740</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Awards</td>
<td>$784,667</td>
<td>$745,166</td>
<td>$128,856</td>
<td>$164,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGI $75,001 to $100,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Automatic and OEM Scholarships</td>
<td>$1,328,992</td>
<td>$694,295</td>
<td>$1,337,625</td>
<td>$1,273,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Department Scholarships</td>
<td>$691,181</td>
<td>$704,444</td>
<td>$441,985</td>
<td>$375,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Grants</td>
<td>$583,337</td>
<td>$596,381</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$11,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Grants</td>
<td>$15,606</td>
<td>$6,770</td>
<td>$7,383</td>
<td>$760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Awards</td>
<td>$914,367</td>
<td>$514,848</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Awards</td>
<td>$792,215</td>
<td>$662,696</td>
<td>$228,846</td>
<td>$160,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGI $100,001 and higher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Automatic and OEM Scholarships</td>
<td>$871,894</td>
<td>$506,893</td>
<td>$2,677,250</td>
<td>$2,361,762</td>
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<tr>
<td>IU Department Scholarships</td>
<td>$502,678</td>
<td>$360,799</td>
<td>$629,391</td>
<td>$615,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Grants</td>
<td>$284,949</td>
<td>$295,139</td>
<td>$300</td>
<td>$433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Grants</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$860</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Awards</td>
<td>$327,686</td>
<td>$245,746</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Awards</td>
<td>$396,818</td>
<td>$328,525</td>
<td>$303,222</td>
<td>$255,548</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of notification will accompany the filing of federal income tax returns. Indiana University offers the Pell Promise as a way for needy Indiana students to pay fees by leveraging the federal Pell Grant Program in a manner similar to that applied to the 21st Century Scholar Covenant. The “promise” to pay the cost of IU fees, up to the Pell Grant student’s remaining need, may produce sufficient incentive for the high-need middle or high school student to aspire to attend IU. Thus, we can identify students eligible for federal Pell Grants and remove one of the most significant and generally recognizable financial barriers to attending college—the cost of tuition and fees—while students are still in middle school or early high school.

According to Table 2 (on page 35), IU Department Scholarships and IU Automatic and IU OEM Scholarships provided more than $5 million to residents whose family incomes were between $25,000 and $55,800 and who later demonstrated financial need for the 2008–09 academic year. (The median income of a family in Indiana that year was $55,800.) These awards were based on students’ academic preparation and distinction—not their financial need. In essence, these meritorious students also had financial need. Later in the FAFSA process, resident students—particularly those with lower income levels—were awarded significant amounts of federal, state, and institutional grant aid.

Table 2 (on page 35) shows that IU Department Scholarships and IU Automatic and IU OEM Scholarships provided more than $2 million to nonresidents whose annual family incomes were more than $100,000. Later in the FAFSA process, nonresident students at the lower income levels were awarded significant amounts of federal grant aid.

Figure 3A (on page 38) demonstrates that it is possible for a resident student with financial need to meet the full cost of attendance with scholarships and grants. The average federal need-based loan borrowed by these resident students for 2008–09 was $4,396.

According to Figure 3B (on page 39), it is possible for the nonresident needy student to defray a significant portion of college costs in 2008–09 with scholarship and grant aid supplemented by federal need-based loans; however, a relatively large gap remains between financial aid and cost. Possible resources to meet this gap include private loans, the student’s work earnings, unsubsidized federal Stafford Loans, and/or a Federal PLUS Loan (taken out by the student’s parent).
For nonresident students, affordability presumes a significant payment by the student and his family, either with current funds or by borrowing against future income. At a public state university, the goal is to ensure affordability for in-state students. Thus, at Indiana University, our priority has been to keep IU affordable for resident students.

**Using Merit-Based Scholarships to Alleviate Affordability Concerns**

Affordability and financial need can be but are not always synonymous. Students and families need to perceive college costs as reasonable and affordable. Unfortunately, high-need families frequently assume that costs are far higher—and consequently less affordable—than they actually are. As a result, communicating the actual cost of attendance and how that cost may be paid becomes essential to the message of affordability. It is critical for universities to address affordability issues as early as possible in the recruitment process. Sharing information through marketing and communication about the cost of attendance, including the types and amounts of aid awards, is imperative. Paying for higher education today represents, for many families, the second largest investment they will make (the first being their home). Providing clear and concise information as early as possible is extremely important. When award notifications of federal and state aid are made, they should be easily understandable and pleasant in tone. At Indiana University, our paper notifications are accompanied by a link to a special Web site, Freshmen 101, which provides continuously updated information.

For the 2009–10 academic year, 76.5 percent of new freshman aid recipients with financial need were awarded institutional scholarships and grants. Of this cohort, 66.6 percent received state or federal aid commitments. Thus, almost 10 percent of students with need received only institutional aid, but 100 percent of these scholarship recipients learned of their merit-based aid in fall 2008—long before March and April award notifications specified state and federal aid awards. Of course, a significant number of freshman families worry about the affordability of college, even though they may not meet the FAFSA definition of need. By the time these families learn that they might qualify only for unsubsidized federal loans, their cost apprehensions have been assuaged by merit-based award commitments.

Awarding financial aid on a rolling basis—beginning with merit-based aid—enables a continuing estimate of net price—that is, the amount remaining for the student to pay. Rarely is need-based aid a four-year guarantee:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residents with Need</th>
<th>2009AY</th>
<th>2008AY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IU Automatic and OEM Scholarships</td>
<td>$5,351,737</td>
<td>$2,943,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Department Scholarships</td>
<td>$3,657,346</td>
<td>$3,609,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Grants</td>
<td>$7,578,740</td>
<td>$6,627,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Grants</td>
<td>$16,173,925</td>
<td>$13,340,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Awards</td>
<td>$21,217,460</td>
<td>$18,602,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Awards</td>
<td>$3,785,143</td>
<td>$3,718,385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residents without Need or No FAFSA</th>
<th>2009AY</th>
<th>2008AY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IU Automatic and OEM Scholarships</td>
<td>$9,016,129</td>
<td>$4,903,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Department Scholarships</td>
<td>$5,215,373</td>
<td>$4,816,233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Grants</td>
<td>$36,500</td>
<td>$86,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Grants</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$8,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Awards</td>
<td>$1,483,118</td>
<td>$1,380,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Awards</td>
<td>$2,671,927</td>
<td>$2,917,837</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonresidents with Need</th>
<th>2009AY</th>
<th>2008AY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IU Automatic and OEM Scholarships</td>
<td>$6,316,375</td>
<td>$5,892,703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Department Scholarships</td>
<td>$2,139,659</td>
<td>$1,876,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Grants</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$32,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Grants</td>
<td>$2,104,133</td>
<td>$1,572,291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Awards</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Awards</td>
<td>$1,094,750</td>
<td>$958,610</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonresidents without Need or No FAFSA</th>
<th>2009AY</th>
<th>2008AY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IU Automatic and OEM Scholarships</td>
<td>$14,787,000</td>
<td>$14,043,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Department Scholarships</td>
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<td>$2,943,983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU Grants</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Grants</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Awards</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Awards</td>
<td>$1,204,764</td>
<td>$1,136,640</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
eligibility derives from a new needs assessment each year, which can be accompanied by changes in federal and state funding that can vary unpredictably from year to year. Unlike need-based aid, scholarship amounts generally remain the same from year to year, and eligibility criteria are based on the continued presence of a defined level of academic performance. Scholarship amounts may be of sufficient comfort to students that they will continue their enrollment plans for the subsequent academic year, assuming that their federal and state aid will be sufficient to meet their needs.

Automatic scholarships require the maintenance of a defined GPA; the amounts of such awards are specified in students’ admission letters. Students know exactly what it takes to get their money back each year and how much money they will receive; federal, state, and other need-based aid carry no such assurance. The assurance of an automatic scholarship can relieve the uncertainty accompanying need-based aid from year to year. Also, leveraging federal


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Diane Lampe, Associate Vice President Student Services and Academic Advising
and state entitlement aid (such as the federal Pell Grant and the 21st Century Scholar Award from the State of Indiana with the covenant) reinforces the student’s assumption of the continuation of accompanying need-based institutional grant aid.

According to Table 3 (on page 37), IU Department Scholarships and IU Automatic and IU OEM Scholarships offered more than $9 million to resident students who later demonstrated financial need for the 2008–09 academic year, as well as more than $8 million to nonresidents. For the 2007–08 academic year, more than $6 million in IU scholarships was awarded to state residents who later demonstrated financial need; more than $7 million was awarded to nonresidents. Later in the FAFSA process, resident students were awarded significant amounts of institutional, federal, state, and private grants and/or scholarships.

MOVING TOWARD GREATER Crossover Between MERIT-BASED SCHOLARSHIPS AND NEED-BASED GRANTS

By mixing merit-based and need-based aid in the institutional formulas, we optimize the most positive characteristics of both categories, creating a stronger packaging commitment than from a single category of institutional aid. We can offer a level of certainty with merit-based scholarship aid that can be absent from need-based grant aid even as we offer some assurance that college affordability is an attainable goal for all Indiana students, regardless of family income.

As institutions across the country continue to consider how to align financial aid with enrollment goals, and as the debate about the value of merit-based aid and the proportion of need-based versus merit-based aid continues, one should not forget that students with need do receive merit-based aid. In searching for the right crossover of merit- and need-based aid, it is clear from our data that institutions should continually measure the level of crossover in their financial aid programs to ensure that outcomes support goals. At Indiana University, we believe our financial aid initiatives and programs do match our enrollment goals.

About the Authors

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DR. ROGER J. THOMPSON is Vice Provost for Enrollment Management at Indiana University, Bloomington.
This article describes efforts to improve retention and graduation rates at the University of Texas at San Antonio, a large Hispanic serving institution (HSI). One college within the university is focusing on increasing retention and graduation rates primarily by building relationships and capitalizing on university resources. In addition to discussion of the unique challenges HSIs face in improving retention and graduation rates, the article describes how the college formulated a thorough graduation improvement plan.
a Latina, is a sophomore at a large, urban university. She is the first person in her family and one of only a few of her high school classmates to attend college. Most of her classes are quite large—more than 100 students—and the study requirements are demanding. Learning the university language and navigating its system of policies and procedures are on-going challenges. To offset college costs, Blanca works part time and has financial aid. As her work hours cut into her study time, both the cost and the demands on her time are beginning to mount. Blanca sometimes feels overwhelmed by this “foreign land” we call the university; she wonders if she will be able to remain in school.

Although fictitious, “Blanca” is a typical undergraduate student at the University of Texas at San Antonio. In general terms, she and others like her are novices in unfamiliar territory. Regularly confronted with the new and unfamiliar culture of higher education, they are particularly at risk of dropping out. However, appropriate university support can increase the likelihood of acclimation to the academic milieu and of student success. Such support does not happen by accident, and it is especially challenging at large institutions where communication and coordinated efforts are complex and students are more likely to be lost in the shuffle. Therefore, it is imperative that university professionals be intentional and strategic in providing appropriate direction and support for students.

Increasing student success requires sustained effort from all directions and is not the sole responsibility of any single office or person. The Graduation Rates Outcomes Study in Texas concludes that “student success is more a product of an overarching shared culture than it is the result of a more narrowly conceived deliberate ‘retention’ or ‘graduation’ effort” (Hanson 2006). There is no magic bullet. Therefore, the question is, “How is a culture of support for student success created?” The purpose of this article is to chronicle efforts to lay a foundation that likely will result in increased student retention and graduation rates within one college at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), a large, public Hispanic serving institution (HSI).

BACKGROUND
Hanson (2006) outlines four objectives necessary for this to occur: (1) strong leadership with a clear message that graduation rates can and will improve; (2) involvement of the entire academic ‘village’ to change a graduation rate; (3) understanding why students fail to graduate in a timely
manner; and (4) determination of the aspects that need to be changed and that can be changed. To meet these goals, it is imperative that a comprehensive, concerted, and coordinated effort to support student success be implemented. It is equally important that any efforts to increase student success be tailored to the institution’s needs: What works for one student population may not work for another (Lopez-Mulnix and Mulnix 2006).

An extensive body of literature exists regarding increasing university student retention and graduation rates. Most notably, theory set forth by Tinto (1975, 1988, 1993) has been widely tested. Although facilitating student success is always challenging and multifaceted, there are additional components to address for “...minority students who have traditionally not fared well in institutions of higher education” (Maestas, Vaquera and Zehr 2007). Adjusting to college life may be especially difficult for Hispanic students for a variety of reasons, such as fiscal challenges (Olivas 1997), language barriers (Soto, Smrekar and Nekcovei 1999), insufficient academic preparation (Garcia 2001), and/or difficulty adjusting to the social and academic milieus (Hurtado, Carter and Spuler 1996).

To the extent that Hispanic students may need unique supports to be successful in college, the demand is growing. Due to demographic changes and population shifts, one of the country’s greatest needs is to increase the number of Hispanics who attend and graduate from college (Murdock et al. 2002). The Hispanic population is the fastest-growing minority group in the United States. In 2000, Hispanics accounted for 12.5 percent of the total U.S. population; by the year 2050, the percentage is projected to double (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). In fact, Hispanics already have surpassed African Americans to become the largest minority group in the United States.

Unfortunately, graduation rates for Hispanic college students lag behind those of all other ethnic groups (Astin and Oseguera 2003; Berkner, He and Cattaldi 2002; Fenske, Porter and DuBrock 2000; Fry 2002; Fry 2004) in spite of efforts focused on addressing the problem (Oseguera, Locks and Vega, 2009). In 2008, 33 percent...
of non-Hispanic whites in the United States had earned bachelor’s degrees, compared to only 20 percent of blacks and 13 percent of Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau 2009). Further, according to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), fewer than 10 percent of higher education institutions enroll more than two-thirds of all Hispanic students (2009). Clearly, HSIs play a critical role in meeting the country’s needs.

A number of national initiatives are in place to support these efforts. For example, Title V of the Higher Education Act of 1965, which provides financial assistance for HSIs to increase and strengthen services and programs for the benefit of low-income and Hispanic students, exists because of this significant need. Specifically, Title V seeks to address the disparity between the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of Hispanics and their white counterparts. The HACU and The W. K. Kellogg Foundation’s ENLACE initiative also provides a variety of programs and resources aimed at ameliorating these disparities. While some gains have been made, today’s reality is that HSIs face a unique set of challenges.

On HSI campuses, the central concern should be effectively addressing the challenges at hand. Oseguera, Locks, and Vega (2009) provide an overview of leading Hispanic student-focused frameworks that foster a comprehensive consideration of the university’s place in Hispanic student success. Rather than viewing Latino/a student success from a deficit paradigm, the most up-to-date approaches place the responsibility on the institution to address the needs of a diverse student body.

UNDERSTANDING RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) defines ‘graduation rate’ as “the number of completers within 150 percent of normal time divided by the revised cohort minus allowable exclusions” (National Center for Education Statistics 2008). The retention rate is “a measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time, full-time bachelor’s degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are enrolled again in the current fall” (National Center for Education Statistics 2008). At colleges and universities, the official cohort is made up of students who begin at an institution as first-time, full-time freshmen and intend to pursue a bachelor’s degree. Transfer students, students provisionally admitted, non-degree seekers, and part-time students are not included in retention and graduation rates reported to IPEDS, the Department of Education, and most states. Furthermore, because the six-year graduation rate is the rate used for most reporting, many schools do not calculate rates beyond six years.

At the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), 29.5 percent of all students were enrolled part time for the fall 2007 semester (UTSA 2007). The National Center for Education Statistics reports that part-time enrollments will increase in the coming years (Hussar 2008; Planty 2008). Nationally, 18 percent of students who began college at a four-year institution in 2003–04 were transfer students (Berkner and Choy 2008) compared to 31.5 percent who began college at UTSA that same year (UTSA 2007). At UTSA and at other HSIs (as well as HBCUs), this means that a large portion of the student population is omitted from the calculation of these rates. Nonetheless, these “official” institutional rates are widely published, reported, and used by policy makers in legislative, financial, and other resource allocation decisions.

RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES IN CONTEXT

These strictly defined rates are inadequate; they do not portray a thorough composite of retention status. In order to more accurately assess the situation, it is important to consider other rates, including subsets of the larger university rates and other quantitative data beyond officially reported rates. For example, in addition to the institutional rates, those students who began in and graduated from a particular college, as well as those who began in a college but graduated from anywhere within the university, also should be considered. Though not necessarily comprehensive, these measures are highly standardized, and they are useful for establishing baselines and benchmarks. In terms of assessing an institution’s success in producing college graduates, this methodology is valid and reliable.

UTSA enrolls more than 29,000 students and ranks fourth in the nation for bachelor’s degrees awarded to Hispanic students and tenth for master’s degrees awarded to Hispanic students (Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education 2008). The largest public university in the city, UTSA undergraduate students account for approximately 87 per-
percent of the institution’s total enrollment. The institution is composed of eight colleges and currently offers a total of 73 undergraduate degree programs, 46 master’s degree programs, and 21 doctoral degree programs. The majority of students (59%) are younger than 23, and 80% are younger than 28 years of age. Approximately 95% come from within the state, and half are local students who originate from within the county. More than 57 percent of the students come from groups that are underrepresented in higher education; many are first-generation college students. Latino/a students account for 43 percent of the overall university enrollment.

The College of Education and Human Development (COEHD) is the fourth largest college within the university, enrolling approximately 4,400 total students including just over 3,000 undergraduates. Within the COEHD, 49 percent of the student body is Latino/a. The ratio of female to male students within COEHD (76:23) is higher than that for the university at large (52:48). Approximately half of all students in COEHD are enrolled full time; this is significantly lower than the 70 percent of the student body that is enrolled full time in the university at large. COEHD faculty taught just short of 30,000 undergraduate semester credit hours (SCHs) in the fall 2007 term. Non–tenure track faculty taught the vast majority of those SCHs. Given the unique demographic profile of the college within the university, an approach tailored to COEHD was warranted.

### Increasing Graduation Rates

The university’s most recent six-year graduation rate for freshmen entering in fall 2001 was 31.3 percent. (See Table 1.) Comparisons to other HSIs across the nation are difficult because current HSI-specific data are unavailable. That said, increasing overall retention and graduation rates at UTSA would result in increases in the number of Hispanics persisting and graduating by virtue of the fact that the majority of students who attend UTSA are Hispanic. UTSA plays a critical role in increasing the number of degrees awarded to underserved populations. Thus, the university has committed to increasing its graduation rate to 40 percent by 2010 and to 53 percent no later than 2015. As displayed in Table 1, COEHD has lagged behind the university in terms of both retention and graduation rates.

#### The Process for Improvement: The UTSA Response

In order to meet these goals, carefully guided change must occur, and all units of the university must do their part. For retention and graduation rates to improve, change must be intentional, well thought out, well focused, and well informed. To that end, the University has approached the challenge systematically and head-on by implementing Hanson’s (2006) objectives as a framework.

- **Objective 1**: Strong leadership with a clear message that graduation rates can and will improve (Hanson 2006). The institution’s leadership has made a commitment to foster awareness of the problem within the university community and to provide the resources necessary for improvement (i.e., funding, personnel, and space). The effort began in March 2006 with a university-wide, one-day conference focused on issues related to improving student retention and graduation rates. The conference, organized by the president’s office, was the first of its kind at the university. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Commissioner served as the keynote speaker and emphasized the importance and urgency of increasing retention and graduation rates. The meeting was well attended by faculty and staff from across the institution; consisted of both plenary and breakout

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**Table 1.**

Retention and Six-Year Graduation Rates for Students Entering in 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First-Year Retention Rates (%)</th>
<th>Graduation Rates (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>Hispanic Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTSA</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COEHD</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
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</table>
meetings; and culminated in a small group, solution-oriented brainstorming session.

Objective 2: Involve the entire academic ‘village’ in the effort to improve the graduation rate. One outcome of this meeting was the creation of an office charged with improving retention and graduation rates. Rather than taking a centralized approach and working primarily from the top, a new team of professional staff was created to liaise with the various colleges across campus. Each full-time member of the team was assigned to a college within the university. Typical duties included working with faculty, academic advisors, and administrators to identify roadblocks encountered by students; analyzing and interpreting data gathered via research and other means; and working with students and advisors to facilitate smooth pathways to graduation. Analysts were (and continue to be) supervised, housed, and funded completely from university resources at no cost to the colleges. Therefore, each college was provided the benefit of resources at no expense to its individual budget.

Within this large and diverse university, each college presented unique sets of priorities, politics, and personalities. The diversity among and within the colleges was as great as that among the students they serve. Although analysts did not technically work for the college, they were challenged to find what works best and to identify obstacles to student persistence within their assigned college. At the same time, the colleges were expected to accept an “outsider” meeting with faculty, staff, and students for the purpose of discovering barriers and pathways to graduation. With this in mind, retention analysts were chosen carefully and were assigned to each college.

One of the most unique characteristics of the College of Education and Human Development (COEHD) is the formal dedication of one associate dean to undergraduate student success. The position of Associate Dean for Undergraduate Success was established just prior to creation of the university office and charged with improving retention and graduation rates within the COEHD. As a result, the COEHD was primed and ready to make real, positive change in the retention and graduation of its students.

The initial objective was to foster communication and build relationships within the college. The associate dean and analyst met one-on-one on a regular basis in order to strategize and to determine and prioritize first steps. In addition, the analyst was included in regularly scheduled monthly staff meetings led by the associate dean. The associate dean introduced the analyst to department chairs, faculty, and staff.

Objective 3: Understand why students fail to graduate in a timely manner. Demographic data were obtained from the University’s Office of Institutional Research. Enrollment trends for all undergraduates and cohort students, as well as institutional, college, and department retention and graduation rate trends, were analyzed. These descriptive data proved useful in educating college faculty and staff about the need for improvement. For example, many did not know (1) how retention and graduation rates were calculated or (2) the departments’ rates. Once informed, faculty members were more open to working to address the problem, a foundational key for improvement.

In order to develop a high-quality retention and graduation improvement plan, information specific to students’ experience and to the college climate had to be obtained. First, significant challenges had to be overcome. Obvious obstacles to discerning this information within the COEHD were the high percentage of students enrolled part time and the high number of part-time faculty.

Data collection included both quantitative and qualitative information gathered from a variety of sources. Within the COEHD, detailed interviews were conducted with the chairs of the three departments that house undergraduate degree programs, with tenure-track faculty who teach undergraduate courses, and with professional staff members. In addition, a considerable amount of student feedback was obtained.

The three departments that contain undergraduate degree programs vary greatly in size and complexity. After completing interviews with faculty, it was decided to begin a more in-depth investigation with the mid-sized department. This mid-sized department, with approximately 1,000 undergraduate majors, served as a pilot for the rest of the college for two reasons: First, though not so large as to be overwhelming, it is big enough to yield useful information; second, the department had formed a student retention task force and was poised to begin work on retention efforts.
Both the associate dean and the retention analyst met with the retention task force on several occasions. Together, the group decided on a two-pronged approach that utilized both quantitative and qualitative data. The task force, the associate dean, and the retention analyst collaborated on the development of an online student survey that was e-mailed to 1,041 students. The survey instrument solicited information about broad areas of relevance identified in the literature: in-class and faculty interaction experiences, peer group interactions and social connections, and satisfaction with financial aid, course availability, and academic advising. The final survey question asked if students were willing to participate in a focus group. A total of 220 surveys were analyzed; 51 respondents indicated interest in participating in a focus group.

To accommodate various schedules, three focus groups were scheduled to meet on different days of the week and at different times of the day. Those students who indicated an interest in participating in a focus group were contacted. Free lunch and sodas were provided. Unfortunately, the effort to convene focus groups proved unsuccessful: only one student attended the first session. Additional attempts to contact prospective participants were made, but there was little indication that attendance would improve. Subsequent focus groups therefore were cancelled.

Fortunately, three faculty members were able to allocate class time during which the retention analyst met with upper-level students. Because of the many part-time and working students enrolled, class time proved the best medium for data collection. The analyst, who was not known by the students, followed the same question path with each class. Three junior- and senior-level mandatory courses and the department-wide internship course were visited. A total of 93 students were interviewed in the classes as groups. Students in one junior-level course completed an open-ended pencil and paper survey. Finally, a small number (n=43) of COEDH majors who did not return to the university after their first year were surveyed by phone. Three questions were asked:

- How does the department help facilitate your degree progression?
- What frustrations have you experienced in your degree progression?
- What are some suggestions for the department, the College of Education, and the University that could improve your and/or future students’ success in these programs?

Follow-up questions were asked based on students’ responses to these initial questions.

Objective 4: Determine those aspects that need to be changed and that can be changed. In the on-line survey and in-class group discussion formats, students spoke openly, and consistent patterns of strengths and concerns emerged. (See Table 2.)

These findings provided a solid foundation upon which to start our work. As the retention and graduation improvement plan began to be developed, actionable areas of strength and weakness were clear.

A collaborative effort by the department, the associate dean, and the retention analyst was critical, and all parties benefited from the relationship. The department and associate dean benefited from the “free” services of a full-time professional who helped with logistics, implementation, analysis, and report writing. The analyst benefited by having a cooperative faculty with which to work on the project and by finding much of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Concern</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with faculty</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<td>Camraderie among students</td>
<td>☑️</td>
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<td>Academic advising</td>
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<td>Course scheduling and availability</td>
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<td>Internship requirement</td>
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Table 2. Results of Online Student Survey and In-Class Discussions

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preliminary leg-work for the student survey already complete. This approach proved fruitful as response patterns began to emerge regarding affordances and impediments to student success.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND PLAN FOR NEXT STEPS

At the present time, the corpus of information has been synthesized and a plan for improvement developed. This Graduation Improvement Plan is the result of collaborative efforts (Objective 2) and includes a general overview of the problem and explanation of how various rates are calculated (Objective 3). Beyond being grounded in the appropriate literature, the plan provides an enrollment profile specific to the College, including demographic statistics on enrolled students, faculty tenure status, and retention and graduation rates. Perhaps most important, the plan focuses on current affordances for and impediments to success (Objectives 3 and 4). The plan identifies various programs, qualities, and practices that positively affect students and their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree, as well as barriers to success and corresponding strategies and resources for alleviating each such barrier. Anticipated outcomes, anticipated measures, and specific activities with a timeline for completion also are included in the plan. The Graduation Improvement Plan provides a detailed, thorough starting point for improvement in coming semesters.

Further, an action plan identifies aspects that can be changed (Objective 4) and includes specific recommendations for improvement and steps needed for completion. Examples of the action items in our plan include producing and distributing a two-year academic calendar of course offerings; considering new modes of course delivery in order to increase course availability; educating stu-
dents about academic advising; and re-evaluating current internship policies. (See Figure 1 for a detailed listing.)

All of these items are being actively addressed within the College’s student support offices and departments (Objective 2). For Hispanic students, who are likely to be first-generation college students, to work off campus, and to attend part-time, issues related to the time and frequency of classes offered, accessibility of academic advisors, and availability of faculty are particularly important.

In the journey toward increased student success, our next steps are clear. Within the next year, we will implement initiatives based on preliminary findings while simultaneously broadening our efforts by replicating a similar fact-finding procedure with the largest department in the College.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Change in persistence and graduation rates comes slowly. The action items identified here are not a quick fix; some of the associated timelines indicate that it will take years to fully implement them. It will take even longer for significant increases in persistence and graduation rates to be realized. However, if the process of improvement does not begin now, the increases never will be realized.

Increasing student persistence and graduation rates is a concern for institutions of higher education across the United States. Given the country’s shifting demographics and economic needs, such efforts are especially important for those universities whose mission focuses on educating traditionally under-served populations.

This article chronicles the efforts at one large, urban Hispanic serving institution. The University’s degree of success will be known in the coming years only as additional student outcome data become available. Yet preliminary data are encouraging. The most recent six-year graduation rate for students who began at the University as COEHD majors and graduated from the COEHD has increased by 3.3 percent.

Further, useful preliminary implications have already surfaced. If real change is to begin, a variety of factors must be in place: First, a clear and focused effort from top administration must be set in motion. Well-articulated goals and resources to support them must be provided. These include, but are not limited to, the addition of appropriate professional staff and the infrastructure to support them. Without the backing of the upper administration, nothing can change. University presidents, provosts, and deans must be in agreement and must be focused on increasing student persistence if rates are to improve.

Administrative support is just a beginning. For real change to occur, it is imperative to bear in mind the myriad complexities involved. Institutions are bureaucracies made up of personalities, politics, and priorities; change cannot be handed down from the top. Faculty, staff, and students must be both invested and involved in the process.

Students, faculty, and staff hold the answers to important questions regarding the pathways and the barriers to success. garnering the most illuminating information requires frequent communication and trusting relationships. These will not occur by accident. Although it is potentially intimidating to bring in someone from outside the unit, it is important to do so in order to obtain a fresh perspective. Intentional, timely, and appropriate introductions from administrators within the college and/or department can go a long way toward welcoming someone from the outside and can facilitate the collection of rich information regarding student needs. However, simple introduction is not enough. The best professional staff members are those with not only the research skills necessary to ask the right questions and draw sound conclusions but also the interpersonal skills to establish trust and build foundational relationships.

Once appropriate goals, resources, and personnel are in place, it is important to mine quantitative and qualitative data from all relevant constituencies. It is dangerous to assume that we know what the issues or solutions are. Implementing “success” initiatives without carefully collected objective data is shortsighted and unlikely to be successful.

In planning data collection, it is important to carefully consider student demographic and enrollment information. Approximately 50 percent of undergraduate students in this College were enrolled part time. Therefore, those methods of data collection that afforded students the greatest amount of flexibility—such as online surveys and in-class discussions—proved the most successful. Conversely, and perhaps most disheartening, was the initial failure of student focus groups. Despite students’ expressed interest in participating and incentives such as food and soda, focus groups were cancelled because of non-participation. Fortunately, we were able to find a way to meet with students in classes; this method proved cumbersome but was very fruitful.
Finally, as surveys are developed and as student group interviews are conducted, it is important to identify what the institution is doing well. Verify what you are doing right. A complete picture of the student experience is necessary so that strengths are cultivated and weaknesses ameliorated. Existing initiatives that foster student success are as important as the obstacles that impede it.

The four objectives described in this article are of equal importance and work in concert with one another. Without all the necessary ingredients, success cannot occur. However, it is important to note that support from the top administration and full campus collaboration (Objectives One and Two) are clear prerequisites for understanding the circumstances and determining what can be changed (Objectives Three and Four). Still, these objectives are simply precursors for improvement and do not automatically equal success.

The need to increase retention and graduation rates—especially for Hispanic and underserved populations—is a growing issue of interest for universities across the nation and is more than a sentimental notion. If institutions of higher education are to be practical contributors to the health and welfare of society, systemic and strategic initiatives must be in place. Our mandate is clear: We must be more effective in helping students graduate.

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Those who come in contact with students at the post-secondary level face a myriad of potential legal challenges in their interactions with students and others. All members of the academic community should be familiar with the more common legal issues and to plan accordingly to avoid future problems. This article explores FERPA in the classroom, reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, concerns about the transferability of course work, the syllabus and related issues, copyright violations, document retention, and situations involving student and faculty misconduct. An annual professional development seminar addressing these legal concerns should be provided to those new to the academy and for higher education veterans.
Those who come in contact with students at the postsecondary level face a myriad of potential legal challenges in their interactions with students and others. It is important for all members of the academic community to be familiar with the more common legal issues and to plan accordingly to avoid future problems. While any concern could result in a legal matter, very few actually do. Nevertheless, the threat of litigation is always present. Thus, the best preventive defense is to have well-written academic policies and to follow them. Proper preparation and decision making based on sound policies can help individuals avoid lengthy future meetings, investigations, and potential litigation.

Colleges and universities should consider how best to provide for the professional development of their registrars and admissions officers—as well as faculty—with regard to informing them about common legal issues. This article proposes that colleges and universities should provide annually a professional development seminar for professional staff that utilizes as a template the information provided below. There are several areas in which legal implications could affect the decisions that professionals in the academic setting—registrars and admissions officers, in particular—make on a daily basis. This information also can assist professional staff members in responding to students’ questions regarding these issues.

Among the legal issues explored in this article are FERPA in the classroom, reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, concerns about the transferability of course work, the syllabus and related issues, copyright violations, document retention, and situations involving student and faculty misconduct. These are some of the most significant academically related legal concerns that college campuses confront. APPLICATION OF FERPA IN THE CLASSROOM

Anyone employed in a university admissions or registrar’s office knows the importance of the privacy of student educational records. (Note that this article will address only the effects of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [FERPA] on classroom practices.) For example, exams and quizzes are considered education records; consequently, student performance on such may not be disclosed even to another student without the prior written consent of the parent or eligible student. Therefore, a professor must take precautions to guard the privacy of grades on papers or examinations. Grades should not be posted such that others may see them, even if student names are not used. Further, the posting of grades by college identification numbers, code names, or other attempts at confidentiality is risky and unnecessary when BlackBoard, Sakai, and other course management programs can be (and commonly are) used to communicate grades and other information. Similarly, grades should not be e-mailed to students; certainly, they never should be given to roommates or friends.

Parents often contact private colleges and universities regarding their children’s grades. FERPA provides that grades may be disclosed to parents if the student is their dependent for federal income tax purposes. However, parents who inquire about their student’s grades are best directed to the registrar’s office so the university can ascertain whether they in fact are entitled to the information. If so, the student’s professors can be informed directly that the information may be provided to the parent.

It is not uncommon for students to request letters of reference or recommendation from staff or faculty members. Students employed on campus may wish to have their immediate supervisor(s) write letters of reference. Students also often request that faculty members write letters of recommendation for inclusion in graduate school
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applications and/or for future employment. In either situation, it is wise—and in compliance with FERPA—to get a student’s consent in writing before preparing any such letters. A university should have a form readily available for students to complete in advance of making such a request.

**Reasonable Accommodations**

Higher education institutions must provide students with disabilities with reasonable accommodations. The two laws that apply are the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (for institutions receiving federal funding) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Individuals with disabilities are responsible for identifying themselves and for documenting and requesting specific academic adjustments or accommodations in accordance with their needs. Students who self-identify as having a disability should be referred to the appropriate office at the university so the disability can be documented and reasonable accommodation(s) can be discussed and implemented in consultation with faculty members teaching the student’s courses. Information about services for students with disabilities should be made available to all students and staff.

Eligibility for reasonable accommodations in post-secondary institutions is driven by the federal definition of ‘disability’ as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits or restricts the conditions, manner, or duration under which an average person in the general population can perform a major life activity such as walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, or taking care of oneself.” Examples of accommodations that might be made in higher education include adjustable lighting, sound amplification, note takers, American Sign Language interpretation, speech to text interpretation, use of a computer for in-class exams and in-class writing assignments, a distraction-free environment (whenever possible) for in-class exams, extra time for in-class examinations and in-class writing assignments, and alternative book and test formats.

To illustrate the results of legal action in cases of alleged failure to provide reasonable accommodations, consider the case of Toledo v. University of Puerto Rico (2008): a former University of Puerto Rico School of Architecture student filed a lawsuit alleging violations of both the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. During the student’s freshman and sophomore years, he was under treatment for a schizoaffective disorder that interfered with his ability to fulfill his academic commitments. The student requested time extensions to complete work but was denied by several of his professors. In fact, one professor publicly ridiculed the student in front of the entire class and indicated that he should reconsider his course of study.

During his first semester, the student met with his academic counselor in order to describe the situation. The counselor recommended that the student drop the course, but the student explained that this would interfere with future course sequencing and would affect his financial aid adversely. The counselor offered no advice or accommodation other than to drop the course. During his sophomore year, when he found himself unable to pre-register for classes, the student finally contacted the university’s Office of the Disabled. His request for assistance with registration led to intervention by a dean and the institution’s legal counsel. By way of accommodations, some time extensions were offered. However, the student’s work was still deficient. The student left the institution during his sophomore year, alleging a hostile academic environment and intentional discrimination. (It was unclear from the facts of the case why the professors had not referred the student to the Office of the Disabled.)

How might a university avoid such a scenario? Law stipulates that it is the student’s responsibility to self-identify and to contact the university’s office for persons with disabilities. To assist students and to avoid legal proceedings, the university should provide early information to incoming students about the office and/or counseling and should encourage any affected students to seek services. The office for disability or counseling should have processes in place to evaluate students and/or their medical information and should begin a dialogue with students’ professors to determine an accommodation that meets the student’s needs without unnecessarily disrupting the professor’s course. In the illustrative case, the student did not contact the disability office that could have properly intervened in the situation in a timely manner. Nevertheless, it appears that the faculty involved lacked—and therefore needed—training on disability issues.
**TRANSFERABILITY OF COURSE WORK**

Students often begin their studies at one institution with the intent of transferring to another institution. Of primary concern to the student is the transferability of course credit from one institution to another. General statements of course transferability should be made in the catalog, as a university cannot control the acceptance of transfer credit by another university. To avoid confusion, universities should subscribe to online services, programs, and databases of course equivalencies as part of an effort to allow admissions and registration professionals to determine the specific courses that are accepted by other state (or networks of) universities. A cautionary statement should stipulate that all credits are not transferable to every education institution; students wishing to transfer credit to another university should contact that university prior to beginning the course.

*Daghlian v. DeVry University, Inc.* (2007) illustrates the potential legal concerns associated with this situation. The student brought an action against the university upon realizing that his course credit would not transfer to another institution. (A critical flaw in the student's case was that he did not actually attempt to transfer any of the credits to another university.) The court dismissed the student's claim against the university of false advertising because of the student's lack of evidence of the actual falsity or misleading nature of purported statements by the university. Nevertheless, the court indicated that had there been sufficient evidence, such a claim could have been sustained.

**THE SYLLABUS**

Often, the syllabus is the first communication of specific information that a student in a particular course receives. The importance of the syllabus cannot be overstated. Regarded by many as a formal contract between the instructor and students, the syllabus may be binding in student (or faculty) appeal proceedings (Altman 1999; Matejk and Kurke 1994). Syllabi vary significantly from instructor to instructor and are inconsistent in their construction. Nevertheless, all usually describe course expectations and outcomes. Communicating sound classroom policy in the syllabus is the best preventative defense against legal issues. Because students and their parents may raise questions during summer orientation sessions, it is helpful to understand some of the components of a sound course syllabus.

**Attendance Policies**

Classroom attendance policies vary from course to course. Students usually are expected to attend classes in order to reap the full benefit of a course. Instructors may even include class attendance as part of the measure of academic performance. A course syllabus thus should define those things that will affect the evaluation of student performance. A good syllabus details all of the instructor’s attendance policies. Then, should questions arise in the course of advising students, the registrar or admissions officer can direct the student to refer to the course syllabus.

The course attendance policy should take into account the need of student athletes and others involved in sanctioned events to miss class occasionally because of their activities. Many universities have campus-wide policies. Designated staff members may provide information to instructors regarding the dates of sanctioned events. It is important for registrars and admissions representatives to understand variations in instructors’ attendance policies because it is they who are likely to field students’ questions during new student and transfer student orientations.

**Other Useful Information**

In addition to attendance policy, the syllabus should provide other useful information, for example, about group work, examination schedules, participation, evaluation, and other topics. Advance notice of quiz and exam dates as well as due dates for papers allows students to plan their studies accordingly. It is important to clearly describe the process that will be used to evaluate student performance in the course. This is considered a “contract-like” area of the syllabus that should not be altered once the course is under way (Altman 1999, Matejk and Kurke 1994). Changing the syllabus mid-semester can result in student disputes. For example, in *Keen v. Penson* (1992), a public university professor listed a book report as “optional” in the syllabus and yet assigned it a weight of 10 percent of the final course grade. The syllabus stated that students could ask questions of and provide comments to the instructor at the beginning of every class. A student complained about the book report as well as “spot quizzes” the syllabus described. The student’s persistence led the professor to believe that the student’s comments created a negative classroom atmosphere and so tentatively assigned the
The professor sued the chancellor of the university, alleging infringement on his First Amendment right of free speech and his Fourteenth Amendment right to due process. The trial court found no constitutional deprivations, and its decision was affirmed on appeal. The Court of Appeals noted that the professor “abused his power as a professor in his dealings with his former student and deserves sanctions” (Keen v. Penson 257).

AVOIDING COPYRIGHT VIOLATIONS
Staff members may find it useful to share photocopied materials with students and/or parents as part of their effort to help them understand issues likely to arise in the university setting. (Orientation sessions are a prime time when such materials are shared.) Many universities have policies regarding the reproduction of copyrighted materials for educational and research purposes. It is important to know your university’s particular policies.

Limit your use of copyrighted materials or seek the permission of copyright holders before posting copyrighted material online. This is imperative as more and more universities are using social networking tools such as Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace to communicate with students and prospective students. Note that all university-owned copyrights can be used without fear of copyright violations.

Staff should understand that the use of reproductions of copyrighted materials should follow the spirit of United States Copyright Law (2008). With the single exception of “fair use,” an individual who possesses a copyright generally can exclude others from using the material without permission (see Sony Corp. of Am. v. Universal City Studios, Inc. 1984). According to Title 17, § 107, reproduction of copyrighted material is allowable for criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research. There is a four-part test to determine if fair use has been met: (1) the purpose and character of the use, (2) the nature of the copyrighted work, (3) the amount used, and (4) the effect of the use on the potential market. If fair use is exceeded, the university and/or the user may be held liable. Orientation sessions facilitate the missions of teaching, research, and public service. However, copying should not be a substitute for purchase of the material. Items in the public domain—including publications by the U.S. government—are not subject to copyright protection. If there is any question, seek permission from the owner of the copyright.

DOCUMENT RETENTION
Most universities have document retention policies to which all employees must adhere. Policies are put in place in order to eliminate the possibility of accidental or innocent destruction of documents that may prove pertinent to grade disputes. It is particularly important for faculty members to know their institutions’ grade appeal policies and the length of time that exams and other materials must be kept.

STUDENT AND FACULTY MISCONDUCT

Students
Student misconduct can range from breach of academic integrity standards, by engaging in plagiarism and cheating, to threatening faculty members or students or engaging in sexual harassment. Professional staff members and faculty should be made aware of their institution’s policies on plagiarism and cheating and the location of those policies in the university’s catalog, faculty handbook, and/or student handbook. Anyone who becomes aware of a breach of academic integrity should consult with her supervisors prior to any action to ensure that all university disciplinary policies are adhered to. Those administering placement examinations should prevent cheating during examinations through proper proctoring and ensuring that there is ample space between and among test takers.
Effective communication by an institution of the importance of academic integrity and good character may deter cheating. McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (2001) describe ten principles of academic integrity:

- Affirm the importance of academic integrity.
- Foster a love of learning.
- Treat students as an end in themselves.
- Foster an environment of trust in the classroom.
- Encourage student responsibility for academic integrity.
- Clarify expectations for students.
- Develop fair and relevant forms of assessment.
- Reduce opportunities to engage in academic dishonesty.
- Challenge academic dishonesty when it occurs.
- Help define and support campus-wide academic integrity standards.

Communication of these ten principles to students and their parents, as well as their inclusion in official institutional policy, will emphasize the centrality of academic integrity.

A second area in which student misconduct may occur is in harassment of university staff members. If a member of the campus community believes a student is threatening him or other students or that the student is sexually harassing the staff member or other students, the student should be reported in accordance with the student disciplinary system. In Plaza-Torres v. Rey (2005), a federal court addressed whether a school can be held liable for misconduct or sexual harassment perpetrated by one of its students against a teacher/employee of the school. The court answered yes, holding that a school can be held liable under Title VII. If an employee is troubled by student behavior, his/her supervisor can and should advise as to the best course of action.

Faculty

Unfair Grading

Proper preparation of the syllabus such that it details required coursework and grading policies will go a long way toward eliminating grounds for future allegations of unfair grading. All students should be treated equally. Proper record keeping is essential to justify grades assigned—particularly in case of any future grade disputes.

The grade a professor assigns may be a matter of free speech entitled to some protection at public universities. In Parate v. Isibor (1989), the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals stated, “[B]ecause the assignment of a letter grade is symbolic communication intended to send a specific message to the student, the individual professor’s communicative act is entitled to some measure of First Amendment protection” (Parate 1989). The court stated that any constitutional violation of the professor’s free speech rights would occur only if the university ordered the professor to change the grade against his will. The university could change the grade on its own without asking the professor to do it. Similarly, the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that a university may change a student’s grade and the professor will have no claim of constitutional violation. “Because grading is pedagogic, the assignment of the grade is subsumed under the university’s freedom to determine how a course is to be taught. We therefore conclude that a public university professor does not have a First Amendment right to expression via the school’s grade assignment procedures” (Brown v. Armenti 2001).

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment can occur both inside and outside of class. Certainly, any quid pro quo sexual harassment such as trading sexual favors for a grade would involve both unfairness in grading and misconduct by the professor. “Hostile environment” sexual harassment can occur when students are made uncomfortable in class as a result of sexually explicit discussions not pedagogically necessary or outside of class by behaviors such as inappropriate touching or comments. Faculty members should keep their office doors open when interacting with students unless there is an overriding need for confidentiality in discussion with the student.

Every new employee should be made aware of his institution’s sexual harassment policy. Although some public university policies have been found constitutionally void because of vagueness (see Cohen v. San Bernardino Valley College 1996), the general inquiry by the court is whether it was reasonable, “based on existing regulations, policies, discussions, and other forms of communication between school administration and teachers,” for the university to expect the professor to know what conduct was prohibited (Silva v. The University of New Hampshire 1994).
In *Silva*, the professor used an analogy that “to focus was like sex” in describing the nature of technical writing. Over many years at the university, he had used the analogies in many classes and never had been told that they were inappropriate. The court found that, at least for purposes of preliminary injunction, the analogies were made for legitimate pedagogical purposes related to the subject matter of the course (*Silva v. The University of New Hampshire* 1994).

In *Hayut v. SUNY* (2003), a 30-year veteran professor of political science was accused of sexually harassing a female student who resembled Monica Lewinsky during the then unfolding scandal involving her and President Clinton. In addition to calling the student “Monica” on numerous occasions, the professor asked her in front of the class about “her weekend with Bill” and told her in front of the class to “be quiet, Monica. I will give you a cigar later” (*Hayut v. SUNY* 2003). The court vacated a summary judgment in favor of the professor and remanded the case for trial on the issue of hostile environment sexual harassment.

In *Piggee v. Carl Sandburg College* (2006), a part-time cosmetology instructor was found to have sexually harassed a gay student by giving him two religious pamphlets on the sinfulness of homosexuality. The faculty member was directed to keep personal discussions about sexual orientation or religion out of the classroom or clinic. When she was not retained as a teacher, she sued the college, alleging violations of her First Amendment rights in the form of freedom of speech and free exercise of religion and her Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection. She was unsuccessful on all claims. The court stated that “[e]ven though the sexual harassment policy may not have been a perfect fit for the behavior at issue here, the responsible college officials were not unreasonable when they told Piggee that her actions had a harassing effect on [the student] and that this fell within the ambit of their anti-harassment policy” (*Piggee v. Carl Sandburg College* 2006).

**Defense/Indemnification**

A university typically will provide for the defense of professional staff members who are sued on the basis of matters arising out of and in the course of their employment. However, if the staff member has not behaved in a manner that the university supports, then he may find that the university in fact will not defend his actions. From a legal standpoint, how such situations play out can be complicated; outcomes usually are dependent upon the facts and circumstances of the particular situation. University legal counsel should advise staff members of the institution’s policies regarding legal defense and indemnification.

**ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, TRAINING, OR ORIENTATION**

Higher education professionals should be trained annually, and new employees should be required to participate in an orientation session that addresses potential legal concerns related to working with students. A convenient time for such training would be the week prior to the start of classes; training may be provided as a part of other required training. One to two hours — allowing time for questions — should prove sufficient. Remember: Awareness of potential legal issues is the best tool for preventing penalties.

Preferred presenters would be attorney-professors teaching at the university. These faculty members are most likely to be housed in the college of business or in the political science department. Faculty members who are attorneys will be best able both to present this material and to respond to “what if” questions. A conservative interpretation of the law should be presented as part of an overall effort to provide maximum protection for professional staff and the university. While this seminar necessarily will constitute more of a survey of the issues than an in-depth discussion, it may provide impetus to learn more about institutional policies and procedures, including where to locate further information and advice about problems that are almost certain to arise.

**CONCLUSION**

It is important to identify, understand, and prevent the top areas in which legal issues can arise when dealing with students. The following list may prove useful to all who respond to inquiries by students, parents, and others on campus:

- Make accurate statements.
- Check institutional policy.
- Keep all records and documents in accordance with university retention policy.
- Individual course policies should be included in the syllabus.
- When copying materials, make sure the university has permission to do so from the copyright owner.
Do not disclose protected student records without student permission.

Involve the appropriate university office in special student issues.

Treat everyone fairly, regardless of sex, age, disability, race, color, sexual orientation, and other legally protected groups.

Provide an environment that promotes academic integrity.

If you do not know the answer, find someone who does.

All members of the academic community must be familiar with the more common legal issues and must plan accordingly to avoid problems. An annual professional development seminar addressing prospective legal concerns of those who interact with students can provide important ideas and information both for those new to the academy and for higher education veterans.

REFERENCES


Hayut v. SUNY, 352 F. 3d 735 (2d Cir. 2003).

Keen v. Person, 970 F. 2d 252 (7th Cir. 1992).


Additional Useful Resources

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. n.d. Online FERPA Guide. Available at: <www.acraro.org/ferpa>

American Association of University Professors. n.d. Policy document Online Transfer and State Articulation Web Sites. Available at: <www.acraro.org/pro_development/transfer.cf>

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Realities and Myths of the Top 10 Percent Rule

By Troy Johnson

Since its inception in Texas a baker’s dozen years ago, we look forward with every new legislative session to another round of discussion about the “top 10 percent rule,” which guarantees admission to the state’s public universities for these talented high school graduates. Originally passed as a way to increase enrollment of under-represented students at the state’s two public national research universities, the law has drawn both praise and criticism: Praise for breaking down such barriers as test score bias or high school bias (as when otherwise hard-working, ambitious, and motivated students were denied admission); criticism for blocking access by otherwise bright students not in the top 10 percent but who have exceptional test scores or top talent.

Critics who argued successfully for changing the rule claim that the changes will increase access by students who previously were denied—for example, a top 18 percent student with musical talents extraordinaire. However, those who praised the rule as it originally was written have fought changes, arguing that the very students intended to be provided access now will lose their opportunity to enroll, particularly at the University of Texas at Austin (UT). To be fair, both camps speak truth. It therefore is not surprising that several myths have emerged from the debate.

MYTHS PROMULGATED BY THE TOP 10 PERCENT DEBATE

Myth #1
Changing the rule will assure that the “talented pianist in the top 18 percent” now will be admitted.

_Reality_: The change in the rule only improves such a student’s odds of admission. It does not guarantee that such a student will be admitted.

Myth #2
Academically weak students are admitted because of the rule.

_Reality_: This myth can be debunked by at least four different measures. First, the average SAT score for the entering class at UT is very high (as is expected at a flagship research university). Second, the prima facie fact that students were in the top 10 percent of their high school class indicates a high level of academic preparation. Though it may be argued that a top 10 percent student occasionally is less academically prepared than students from lower percentiles of another school’s class, it is spurious to argue that very many students in the top 10 percent lack the aca-
Academic motivation to strive for and achieve success in college. Third, though assured admission, even top 10 percent students still have to demonstrate a strong desire to enroll. These students must meet relatively early application dates for Texas universities, must complete essays, and must pay an application fee as high as any public university in Texas. In summary, they don’t just fall onto the doorstep the day before classes. Like all other admitted students, they must plan and perform. Fourth, university performance data are a reliable measure of student ability. Numerous studies have found that under the rule, the freshman class does very well in terms of freshman progress, GPA, and graduation rates.

Myth #3

Changing the rule will stop the complaints that “my child didn’t get in.”

Reality: This complaint will continue because it is an inherent condition of selective admissions. The fact is that UT forever will say “denied” to many students who apply. A significant difference given the revised law is that UT now may say “no” to students in the top 10 percent—perhaps even to valedictorians who previously were guaranteed a slot—if they wanted it. But this is not all that new; it is what happened before the law, when UT had a rightful duty to build its own freshman class apart from legislative mandate. So the admissions office at UT will continue to send denial letters that will disappoint and even unnerve applicants and their parents. Legislators will continue to hear about those letters. Further, demographic evidence suggests convincingly that complaints are sure to increase in coming years (see Myth #6, below).

Myth #4

Changing the rule doesn’t crush dreams.

Reality: Despite understandable criticisms, the top 10 percent rule has had an historic impact through its consistent and very simple message. It was a message of hope to any student from any town, small or large; private or public high school; wealthy or poor family; and any ethnic background, that achieving a level of excellence in high school (a sphere of the educational process within which students and families have little control or choice) would assure admission to his or her choice of public university. Through its simplicity and power, this universal message was heard. Now that the law has been changed, however, the converse is true: Just as some students beyond the top 10 percent have a bit more hope, some students in the top 10 percent know already that their dream is being tampered with. Though they know that they are hard working and that they will be in the top 10 percent of their class, they may foresee that they may be passed over for admission, perhaps because of test scores or limited curricular offerings at their school.

Myth #5

The most important reason to change the rule is to increase admission odds for talented students below the top 10 percent.

Reality: The most important reason for a change in the rule is to take steps in a direction that returns fundamental decision-making responsibility, authority, and accountability (i.e., selecting students to build the best class as they can) to universities. The worthy and important goal of the top 10 percent rule to increase enrollment of underrepresented groups can and should be achieved by the commitment of universities, through scholarships, campus desirability efforts, community involvement, etc., rather than by arbitrary and nationally uncommon legislation.

Myth #6

Changing the rule fixes the root problem.

Reality: The truth is that current arguments to change the rule are focused on treating symptoms rather than the true problem. The true problem is neither access nor equity; it’s capacity—of seats at national research universities in the state. The state continues on a growth trajectory of high school graduates while the number of seats at its research universities remains flat. This trend means that relative capacity isn’t flat at all; rather, it’s declining. Talented students will continue to flee the state. The capacity problem will continue to worsen for years to come.

Myth #7

Now that the law is being changed, the debate is over.

Reality: If for no other reason than that it’s in our blood, the biennial debate will continue. Critics claim that revisions to the law didn’t change it enough: UT now is limited to admitting no more than 75 percent of its freshman class under the 10 percent rule. Proponents will
be watching forthcoming enrollment reports more closely than ever to ensure that the goal of diverse representation in the freshman class is being met. Finally, the addition of arbitrary caps on out-of-state and international student enrollments (again adding legislative input into institutional decisions) is sure to provoke future conversation.

Myth #8

The most valuable lesson from the “Top 10 percent” debate relates to admission policies.

Reality: The most valuable lesson stemming from the top 10 percent debate relates to having too few top-tier Texas university choices for the increasing number of talented high school graduates in the state. In as much as the top 10 percent debate can fuel the drive for more seats at national research universities in the state, it has the hope of satisfying the demands and the dreams of talented young students.

About the Author

DR. TROY JOHNSON is Vice Provost at the University of North Texas, a Dallas/Ft. Worth area institution of more than 36,000 students. Johnson has worked at universities in California and Texas.
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Distorted Reflections: Fixing What’s Wrong with Recruiting of Adult Students

By Chris Tilghman

THE PROBLEM

It might seem axiomatic that the character of a university’s academic experience would be reflected in the character of its admissions processes. Unfortunately, it is not—at least, not in the world of continuing and adult education. Universities that offer rich academic programs, high-quality student/faculty relationships, and top-quality learning environments do themselves the remarkable disservice of creating admissions processes that are overly automated, impersonal, and distressingly bureaucratic. Why is this happening, and how can it be fixed?

Consider this example: A well-known university in a major metropolitan area faces strong competition for enrollment of adult students. The university prides itself on its “community” feel. “We aren’t like those other schools,” senior administrators say. “Here, students get to know their professors well. Our class sizes are small, we have a beautiful campus, and students really enjoy their experience.”

Accordingly, the school’s Web site promises “a personalized approach. Small classes. Great professors. Convenient schedules. Online options.” The message is clear: This university provides a rich, individual experience for every student, and its programs are flexible enough to suit working adults.

Many adult-serving and continuing education institutions promote themselves similarly. But the trouble starts when prospective students start inquiring, often by visiting the school’s Web site and requesting more information. Eight days after doing so, a large packet marked “media mail” arrives in their mailbox. The packet is filled with forms and flyers from various departments—a grab-bag of information and action items that can be overwhelming. To begin an application, prospective students are asked to visit a Web site that is hosted by a third-party service, looks generic, and has a poor version of the school’s logo pasted in the top corner. Prospects create an account on the new site and receive an e-mail thanking them for beginning an application on “ApplyHere” (the third-party service) to our heretofore “personalized” university.

If more than two weeks elapse before the prospective student logs into the application system, she receives an automated e-mail reminding her that the next application deadline is fast approaching. The message includes a list of steps required to complete the process. If our prospect has a question, she is free to call the university, though the phones are manned only from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. weekdays, and the automated voice response is careful to point
out that staffing is thin during the lunch hour. Fortunately, when our imaginary prospect gets a staff member on the line, he is friendly and helpful. But it’s been up to the prospect to initiate contact. No one from the university has been proactive in seeking to contact her.

Finally, when she is accepted, our student receives a form letter on school letterhead, along with a second packet that includes more forms. During the week before classes start, she receives an e-mail from the bursar’s office reminding her that tuition is due. On the first day of class, she arrives in the classroom, virtual or otherwise, where she meets her professor and classmates for the first time.

Thus, having been largely ignored (save for some automated communication) and left to her own devices throughout the admissions process, our student crosses the metaphorical enrollment precipice, ready to participate in her university’s “personalized” academic experience. What a shame.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

At many universities, the contrast between the character of the admissions process and the academic experience for adults is striking. Somehow—and without anyone intending it—a gap has developed between what universities promise to adults in their academic programs and the experience that they model during the admissions process. Entry into an academic program that promises to be personally engaging, professionally enriching, and intellectually transformative is preceded by an admissions process that is highly transactional, mostly impersonal, potentially destructive to students’ perceptions of the school, and a discredit to the university brand.

How did we get here? The explanations are straightforward. First, recruiting new students is not easy. And when competition is a factor, it’s even harder. Deans as well as marketing and admissions directors—everyone, really—is looking for an edge, and many of the automated CRM tools that have flooded the market over the
past fifteen years have promised an advantage with little more than incremental staffing increases. Second, senior administrators can’t help keeping up with the Joneses. No school wants to be caught behind the curve on an emerging technology, and no staff member wants the reputation of a dinosaur. Add to this the fact that so much technology actually is helpful. Great CRM implementations do improve process efficiency and consistency, and they can help streamline operations. It is easy to see how university administrators have fallen into the trap of thinking that automation of any process is good.

But is it? Not if it results in the loss of prospective students. Had you been a prospective student who experienced the admissions process described above, you might have found yourself anticipating an academic experience equally impersonal, automated, and inflexible. Surely no school intends to send this message.

**HOW CAN WE IMPROVE?**

If you are looking for practical solutions, start with the following: Divide your inquiry pool in half. For the first group, change nothing about your institution’s current process. For the second group, call within 24 hours every prospective student who requests information. If possible, call within two hours. Have your admissions staff introduce themselves individually to each prospective student (provided they can get them on the phone). Find out each prospect’s reasons for contacting the university. Develop a case file. Find out what is happening in each prospect’s life. Discuss various program options that might meet their needs, and create a hypothetical study plan with them. Make clear that as a working adult there is no “perfect time” to come back to school; everyone faces challenges in getting started. Help prospective students plan how they will get their coursework done and how they can make adjustments in their work and family lives in order to accommodate their academic commitment. And let them know that they are not alone. Millions of adults in the United States go to school part-time and online while maintaining full-time jobs and raising healthy families.

Among the prospective students who are receiving “high-touch” treatment, ensure that communication is consistent. Talk with them frequently, and assign each prospect to a single staff member. Finish each conversation with a set of action steps and personal deadlines—things like submitting their FAFSA or requesting transcripts. Make special calls if a key deadline is approaching. Do all of this with an eye toward the student’s own development through the process.

In summary, act as if the admissions process is a course unto itself: an opportunity for introspection, new connections, and intellectual transformation among prospective students. Your admissions staff thereby will become an instructional unit. They are “coaches” responsible for the appropriate advancement of prospective students through the admissions process, and they are facilitators of reflection and planning that students ought to do before taking

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### Table 1.

**Sample Financial Analysis of Strong Relationship Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pool A (Control)</th>
<th>Pool B (Add Personal Relationship)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inquiries (n)</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per Inquiry</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inquiry: Application Rate</strong></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications (n)</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application: Start Rate</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starts (n)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental Cost</td>
<td>$ (240,000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental Revenue</td>
<td>$ 397,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Gain</strong></td>
<td>$157,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Two relationship staff members, 4 years; assumes average annual staff cost of $60,000
2. Assumes average student tenure of 4 years and lifetime student tuition of $15,000
on the challenges of balancing an academic program with family lives and full-time jobs.

To finish the experiment, compare the enrollment and admissions pipeline conversion results of the group that received extra attention with the group that did not (the “control” group). Then, calculate your cost to generate and service inquiries in each group against the average lifetime tuition value of a new student. (See Figure 1, on page 65.) You may be surprised by the results. In my experience, it is quite common to discover such a significant increase in conversion rates among the “high-touch” group that the revenue generated through incremental enrollment increases easily balances out the higher cost of service. And at least as important, prospective students have a much better experience with this approach.

Treating the admissions process as a “course” requires admissions officers to have more—not less—personal contact with prospects. It is fundamentally relationship-driven. It is human, and it is hard. It relies on automated technology selectively but not exclusively. Next to the admissions officers who form relationships with prospective students, the most valuable technology in this model is that which helps those admissions officers maintain the discipline required to do personal outreach consistently on a large scale. It prioritizes ongoing personal contact on the premise that not only will prospective students think more highly of the university, but they also will be more likely to enroll as a result. The net financial impact will be positive as a result of increases in enrollment.

**CONCLUSION**

Adult education divisions often are the most entrepreneurial and business-minded on campus. They employ thoughtful, caring administrators who are eager to help prospective adult students have a positive experience with the university. Leaders of these units recognized long ago that good will is not enough. Great systems are necessary to manage waves of prospective students on a large scale. Accordingly, CRM systems were implemented. The value of such systems is that they allow a measure of automation and reliability in process management and communication with prospective students. But they remain software; they do not replace real staff developing real relationships with prospective students in the course of recruiting and admissions. Relying on software alone to manage “relationships” with prospects sends a message that students, and not prospects only, will be treated impersonally. No administrator wants to leave this impression. Instead, each must take Marshall McLuhan’s words to heart: “The medium is the message.” What is your “medium” saying to prospective students? The thinking leader will decide that the time is right to re-evaluate the role of managed, ongoing personal contact with every prospective adult student during the admissions process.

**About the Author**

**CHRIS TILGHMAN** is Director of Program Development at InsideTrack.
Hail to the Chief: 
A Survivor’s Guide to Presidential Egos

By Richard J. Riehl

I once was a student in a graduate seminar taught by the president of the university where I was a mid-level administrator. The course focused on what it takes to be the chief executive of a university. He was the only one of the ten presidents under whom I served who embraced the role of a college administrator; the only one with formal training in educational leadership; and the only one to have risen to his position from the ranks of student affairs. He believed that presidents must possess unusually strong egos, since their power begins to wane upon their second day in office. A new president has to have an ego strong enough to withstand the criticism that grows incrementally with each executive decision.

Although I never had the pleasure of reporting directly to a president, I came to know over the years the size and shape of their egos and how they affected my daily work. Those of us in the trenches are well aware of how executive effluent flows downhill.

You may recognize your own chief executive among the four types of campus leaders described below, but you’re more likely to find your president to be a hybrid. I regret that I was unable to observe a more diverse group. All ten were white males. (That explains my exclusive use of the male pronoun.) I suspect that executive egos transcend race, ethnicity, and gender, but the narrowness of my experience necessarily limits the validity of my conclusions.

THE RELUCTANT ADMINISTRATOR

Reluctant Administrators (RA) consider themselves, first and foremost, members of the faculty—displaced scholars thrust into the most powerful position in the campus bureaucracy. They long for the day they can return to their first love: scholarly work. Whatever presidential miscues they make can be blamed on the bungling of bureaucratic underlings or on being distracted by the daily burden of administrivia. I had three RA presidents in my career. The first rose to his position after having been a scholar respected by faculty colleagues and a teacher beloved by his students. He ran into trouble when he hired a provost from a distant state and charged him with combining academic departments into “areas of inquiry” more “relevant” to the issues of the day. It was the 1970s—the age of Aquarius, Woodstock, and waffle stompers. What he didn’t realize was that dismantling academic fiefdoms is as hard as moving graveyards.

His next mistake was to oppose the creation of a college of ethnic studies. He asked his new provost to run inter-
ference on both issues, but that didn’t protect him from
the wrath of both tenured faculty and bell-bottomed un-
dergraduates.

I had very little direct exposure to this president. So I
panicked the day the registrar, my boss’s boss, summoned
me to his office to tell me the president was not pleased I had
given a telephone interview to Newsweek the day my boss
was away from his office. (It was heady stuff for this rookie
administrator to be interviewed by a national magazine!) But
when I read the article about the assistant director of
admissions who explained that budget cuts could cause the
layoff of up to 30 faculty members, I figured I’d soon be
returning as a high school English teacher to my first love. I
was relieved the president didn’t fire me for that rather sig-
nificant indiscretion. Instead, he informed me through the
chain of command that interviews with the national media
are what presidents do, not first-year administrators.

My next RA president, a scientist drawn from the ranks
of the faculty, called me shortly after he was appointed
interim president. He wanted my opinion of what his
presidential priorities should be. A geologist trained in
England, where universities have neither general edu-
cation requirements nor athletic departments, he was
comparatively clueless about the hot issues facing most
American college presidents. At the time, I was director
of admissions. Though flattered to have been asked for my
advice, I was wise enough by then to limit my response to
splendid generalities.

My least favorite RA president was a literary scholar
who loved to complain about his bureaucratic burdens.
His way of solving the financial challenges caused by an
enrollment downturn was to gather his vice presidents,
call in the admissions director, pound the table, and shout
that he wanted more students NOW! The next day he’d
greet everyone with a smile and inquire gently, “How’s re-
cruitment going?” A thick skin and a short memory are
the best strategies for surviving this type of RA.

**THE SMARTEST GUY IN THE ROOM**

Presidents who regard themselves as the Smartest Guy in
the Room (SGIR) have the most tender of all presidential
egos, often requiring self-administered stroking.

I served under two SGIR presidents in my career. One
liked to tell me how ineffective my boss—the provost—was.
It was then that I practiced my half-smile, glazed-eyes look.

I knew his tirade was a no-winner for me: to nod in agree-
ment would be not only disloyal, but I also knew he’d tell
my boss about it; to defend my boss would be to dispute
the president’s status as the Smartest Guy in the Room.
By maintaining my zombie-like gaze, I only risked being
thought of as not the shiniest penny in the drawer—which
is the safest place to be in the company of an SGIR.

My other SGIR stroked his ego by arranging to land the
leading role in the school musical, “The Student Prince,”
giving rise to suspicion among the deans about the size
of the theater department’s future budget allocations. He
turned out to be passably good in the part, but the balding
40-year-old looked a little strange on stage amid the cast
of 20-year-olds playing his fellow students.

This president also had the distinction of being the
shortest administrator on campus. I once met with him
one on one in his office. Knowing he was about three inches
shorter than I, I was puzzled to find myself looking up at
him as we sat across from each other. Assuming the cus-
tomary eyes-lowered posture of a supplicant, I noticed that
his feet barely reached the floor: His lofty ego had been
boosted by the height adjustment on his executive chair.

The SGIR is often the target of the hallway whisperings
of lower-level administrators and support staff that “the
emperor has no clothes.” And regardless of your place in
the administrative pecking order, the SGIR will keep you
captive with stories about his own achievements and the
failures of previous presidents and other administrators.
But do feel free to send irate students to the SGIR. Those
with whom I worked were unlikely to give such a student
the time of day.

**THE GOOD OLD BOY**

The Good Old Boy (GOB) is comfortable in his own skin,
often giving the impression of being dumb like a fox. His
folksy ways should not be mistaken for weakness, how-
ever: GOBs take pleasure in being underestimated.

Some GOBs crave to be loved by all. They hate to say no,
often getting others to say no for them. Whenever pos-
sible, avoid sending an irate student to a GOB—that is, un-
less you don’t mind having your decisions overruled.

I served under three GOBs. The first was a very large
man, a Texan reminiscent of Lyndon Johnson. Once, dur-
ing a faculty Senate meeting, he became the target of a bar-
rage of criticism in response to his plan to create a school
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of technology. He simply smiled and nodded through the entire attack. After the smoke had cleared, he drawled that all the criticism leveled at him might be valid, but he was the guy in charge and his decision would stand.

Another of my GOBs was a president straight from central casting: square-jawed, tall, and white-haired, with a perpetual smile and a warm southern accent. His ego was fed by never turning anybody down. When it came to competing interests among faculty and staff, he believed in social Darwinism. “The best will rise to the top,” he told me during my job interview. He was fond of giving hugs to women—especially the support staff he encountered in the halls and offices. He once brought to my office a student to whom we’d denied admission. With his arm around the student’s shoulder, he told me with a broad smile, “I’ll bet Mr. Richl can help you.”

My third GOB infuriated the faculty by siding with students on every issue. He was a short-term interim president, so the faculty held their collective breath until his appointment ended. Not one to believe in written speeches, he’d wing it. Literally. In his first speech to the community, he busted a Charleston dance move, featuring the famous exchanging hands-on-knees bit. It was a pretty weird sight. (“Dancing with the Stars” had not yet made its television debut.)

Just don’t make the mistake of thinking the GOB is your pal. Underneath all that surface warmth is an ego needing constant attention.

THE COMPLEAT [SIC] ADMINISTRATOR

I served under two Compleat [sic] Administrator (CA) presidents in my 30-year career in enrollment services. My favorite was a scholar of organizational leadership. He relied on data to make decisions and was a careful planner. Best of all, he knew how to handle people. He made his subordinates want to work harder while not pressuring them with anything but expectations for excellence. He openly admitted he had a substantial ego, but it didn’t get in the way of his decision making. He was never apologetic for being an administrator. He believed the quality of administrative leadership could either enhance or hinder teaching and learning.

He also understood that even the most skillful of campus leaders cannot succeed without the support of their academic communities. If they don’t make hard decisions soon after being appointed to office, they’re unlikely to make them at all. In his case, proud of firing an incompetent vice president early in his presidency, he regretted not eliminating the football program, a perennial loser on the field and in the budget office. By the time he gained the courage to kill the program, he’d lost the clout to pull it off.

The other CA was not so warm and fuzzy. The essence of his plan to build a more diverse student body was to add a minority recruiter to the admissions staff. I suggested to my vice president that it would be better to bring in a higher-level administrator responsible for helping to create a campus climate that would both retain and attract more minority students. When I got word that the president wanted to give me money and wondered why I didn’t want it, I agreed it would be best to add another recruiter to my staff.

Presidential egos come in all shapes and sizes. Here are a few survival strategies:

- Never bend the truth, either to make your president happy or to make yourself look good.
- In the company of a president, there’s room enough for only one ego.
- Propose at least two alternatives in response to a crisis. That way your president will be able both to take credit for what works and to blame you for what doesn’t.
- Don’t make a habit of painting a bleaker picture than it is, hoping that if things don’t turn out so badly everyone will be happier. “Sky-is-falling” types soon lose their credibility with ego-driven presidents.
- When enrollment is up, credit the faculty, not your nifty new recruitment strategies.
- Be wary of becoming the president’s pal. (See above regarding “space for egos.”)
- Make friends with a chief of staff who has the ear of the president.

Most important, keep your perspective. Do not attempt to make yourself the indispensable administrator. Cemeteries are filled with indispensable people.

About the Author

RICHARD J. RIEHL is a freelance op-ed columnist for San Diego’s North County Times. Throughout his 33-year career in higher education administration, he was an active AACRAO member, including service on the College and University Editorial Board.
HAS THIS HAPPENED TO YOU?
It is Monday morning, and you walk into work, turn on the computer, and get ready to take your first sip of coffee. Suddenly, your boss stomps into your office and in a burst of anger demands to know why the department’s budget is late. As soon as that fire cools, you ask your student worker if she has finished the report she said she would have done in time for your meeting that starts in 20 minutes. Your student worker apologizes profusely but admits she did not have time to complete the report because she had been busy working on two other projects for your coworkers. As a result, you arrive late to your meeting only to overhear a coworker make a sarcastic comment under her breath about your tardiness. (Everyone starts to laugh.) Once that meeting is over, you walk back into your office; before you can even sit down, another coworker appears and starts to complain about the lack of funding available for him to run his office effectively. He uses this as an excuse for his failure to complete his portion of the department’s budget. Once your coworker finally ends his whining, you get the chance to take your second sip of coffee. This is when you realize that it is only Monday morning: You have the entire week ahead in which to deal with people you cannot stand.

Effective Strategies for Dealing with People You Can’t Stand

By Jerry Vance and Lisa Leonard

We all have found ourselves in similar situations—where we feel frustrated and confused by certain behaviors that make our lives difficult. Fortunately, in their international bestseller, Dealing with People You Can’t Stand: How to Bring Out the Best in People at Their Worst (2002), Dr. Rick Brinksman and Dr. Rick Kirschner provide a strategy for dealing with ten of the most “unwanted behaviors” of colleagues. Their strategy is focused on assuming the best in others and identifying the positive intent that fuels these ten undesirable behaviors. Once we identify the positive intent, we can apply communication strategies and self-adjust our own attitude in order to “bring out the best in people at their worst” and, ultimately, make our lives easier.

KEY COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
Perhaps the most valuable point this book consistently reinforces is the importance of developing and applying communication techniques in order to get along with and understand others. After all, we know that issues can arise quickly on the heels of a simple misunderstanding. The authors convey the importance of clear communication by highlighting a 1967 study by Dr. Albert Mehrabian, a UCLA professor who wanted to gain a better understanding of how people interpret meaning through communication.
Mehrabian’s findings led him to develop the “55–38–7” communication rule. According to Mehrabian (1990), 55 percent of communication is based on what people see (facial expressions and posture); 38 percent is based on how communication sounds (tone, speed, volume); and only 7 percent of meaning is based on actual words spoken. This study underscores the importance of the verbal and non-verbal messages we communicate when interacting with others. This concept is of extreme importance when communicating over the phone and via e-mail because those technologies eliminate non-verbal cues that could help us better understand the messages they convey.

Following are three key techniques that incorporate both verbal and non-verbal communication:

- **Backtracking:** Repeating some of the actual words that another person uses while reiterating her point.
- **Blending:** Using any behavior—such as matching posture or voice volume—that reduces the differences between two people and that helps to establish common ground.
- **Redirecting:** Using common ground and rapport to redirect communication to a positive outcome.

**THE FOUR POSITIVE INTENTS THAT DRIVE UNWANTED BEHAVIOR**

According to Dr. Brinksman and Dr. Kirschner (2007), the four positive intents driving the ten unwanted behaviors are...

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**FIGURE 1. Lens of Understanding**
Depending on whether his intent is more task-focused or more people-focused, intent will lead a person to present with a certain behavior ranging from passive to aggressive. For example, someone who is focused on getting a task done likely will exhibit a controlling and assertive behavior that is both time- and task-focused. In contrast, someone who has the key intent of getting along with others will be more people-focused and likely will exhibit more passive behavior focused on earning others’ approval.

THE 10 MOST UNWANTED BEHAVIORS
Following is a brief summary of each of the ten “unwanted behaviors” described in the book:

THE TANK
Positive Intent: Get the task done.
Characteristics: Tanks are controlling, assertive, aggressive, and confrontational, and have short attention spans.
Your Goal: Command the Tank’s respect.
Communication Plan:
- Hold your ground when she approaches.
- Tactfully interrupt the attack by repeating her name. Do not counterattack.
- Quickly backtrack the main point to show that you understand the situation.
- Redirect the Tank by showing how you share a common goal of getting the task done.
- Maintain peace and earn her respect by assigning a time and conditions for following up on the issue once she has cooled down.

For example, “Boss, Boss, Boss. I understand that you think the budget should be finished by now, but I believe that the extra time I’m investing in the budget now will end up saving us time and money in the future. I’ll be finished with the budget by 10 am tomorrow, and I look forward to your feedback.”

THE SNIPER
Positive Intent: Get the task done and/or get appreciation.
Characteristics: Snipers try to make you look foolish through rude comments, sarcastic behavior, and focusing negative attention on you.
Your Goal: Bring the Sniper out of hiding.
Communication Plan:
- As soon as the Sniper snipes, stop what you’re doing, and backtrack whatever he said.
- Remain calm and ask questions to determine the relevancy or meaning of his snide comment(s).
- Determine why the Sniper may have a grudge against you.
- Suggest solutions for a civil future.

There is also “Friendly Sniping,” which typically is done in a playful way. In such cases, the Sniper’s primary intention is getting appreciation through attention-getting comments. In this type of situation, it is best to address the Sniper in private by communicating your feelings directly. The Sniper may not have realized he was upsetting you and may change his behavior quickly.

THE KNOW-IT-ALL
Positive Intent: Get the task done.
Characteristics: Know-It-Alls are confident, knowledgeable, and competent. They have a low tolerance for errors and contradictions, and they often view new ideas unfavorably.
Your Goal: Open the person’s mind to new ideas.
Communication Plan:
- Be prepared by knowing your stuff.
- Backtrack her views respectfully to acknowledge her expertise.
- Address your own doubts about your idea before the Know-It-All has a chance to do so, and then present a solution or reasoning for backing your ideas.
- Present your views indirectly: “I believe…,” “Perhaps…,” “Maybe….”
- Turn the person into a mentor.

THE GRENADE
Positive Intent: Be appreciated.
Characteristics: Grenades unexpectedly blow up about things that do not relate to the current situation because they do not feel appreciated. Grenades typically feel remorse over their actions after the blow-up.
Your Goal: Take control of the situation.
Communication Plan:
- Get the Grenade’s attention by using a friendly tone and language.
- Aim for the Grenade’s heart by showing your genuine concern for his problem.
- Reduce the intensity of the blow-up by talking him down to a normal level of communication.
- Give the Grenade time to cool off before pursuing a discussion or resolution.
- Prevent future grenade attacks by finding out what sets him off.

THE THINK-THEY-KNows-IT-ALL
Positive Intent: Be appreciated.
Characteristics: Think-They-Know-It-Alls are assertive and attention-seeking. They learn just enough about a subject to sound as if they know it all. They exaggerate often and may believe what they say.

Your Goal: Catch her in the act, and stop the flow of wrong information.
Communication Plan:
- Give the person a little attention through backtracking.
- Ask some revealing clarification questions in order to get specifics: Who, specifically? What day?
- Tell the facts using documented information.
- Give her a break and resist the temptation to embarrass her. Have compassion.
- Break the cycle through gentle confrontation.

THE ‘YES’ PERSON
Positive Intent: To get along with others.
Characteristics: The Yes Person says “yes” to everything in an attempt to gain approval from others. He commits to too many things and then has difficulty following through.
Your Goal: Get commitments you can count on.

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Communication Plan:
- Make it safe for him to be honest with you when he cannot commit to helping you.
- Acknowledge his honesty and clear communication.
- Help him learn how to plan.
- Ensure commitment by having him summarize the commitment, write down the commitment, and/or write down the negative consequences if he does not follow through.
- Strengthen the relationship by having him talk about his feelings; focus on what he does correctly; and project positive intent.

For example: “Student worker, I know you are expected to help many different people in our department, so please come talk to me whenever you are overburdened with projects. We can work together to figure out how you can prioritize your time and finish your projects. Also, I will not be upset if you cannot help me with my report on Monday. However, if you tell me you can finish my report in time for my meeting but end up not having time to do it, I’ll be very disappointed. I will look unprepared for my meeting and will lose the respect of my coworkers. I know you are a hard worker and do so much for our department, so I want you to know you can always talk to me.”

THE MAYBE PERSON
Positive Intent: Get along with others.
Characteristics: The Maybe Person cannot make decisions for fear of the consequences and procrastinates to the point where the decision makes itself.
Your Goal: Help the person learn to think decisively.
Communication Plan:
- Establish and maintain a comfort zone and listen to her concerns.
- Surface conflicts and clarify her options.
- Use a decision-making system such as listing the pros and cons of a certain decision.
- Reassure her that there are no perfect decisions and then ensure follow-through of her decision.

THE NOTHING PERSON
Positive Intent: Get along with others and/or be appreciated.
Characteristics: Nothing Persons give no verbal feedback.
Your Goal: Persuade the person to talk.
Communication Plan:
- Plan enough time and be patient. The Nothing Person may take time to open up.
- Ask open-ended questions expectantly: “What are your thoughts on this issue?”
- Use humor and outlandish exaggerations or suggestions to get him to react and to ease any tension.
- Propose a certain answer and wait to see if he responds.
- Reference future consequences if he decides to remain silent.

THE NO PERSON
Positive Intent: Get the task right.
Characteristics: The No Person is focused on perfection, fearful of making mistakes, and believes everything will go wrong. The No Person finds the negative in everything and everyone and passes her negativity on to others.
Your Goal: Transition to problem solving.
Communication Plan:
- Do not waste your time trying to make her be positive. Do not let her bring you down.
- Use her as a resource. She can be your early warning system for potential issues since she always looks for the negative anyway.
- Do not push her to take action; this will only slow her down. Give her time to change her mind and communicate her thoughts.
- Assume the worst before she has the chance to do so. For example, bring up the negatives before she does; this may force her to see some of the positives.
- Acknowledge her good intent by praising her for her concern for details and for her high standards. This may change her outlook on issues, events, and morale.

THE WHINER
Positive Intent: Get the task right.
Characteristics: Whiners are unable to focus on what is right in any given situation. Whiners wallow in their worries and rarely offer solutions.
Your Goal: Form a problem-solving alliance.
Communication Plan:

- Listen for the main points and write them down. This shows the Whiner that you are listening, and it can prevent the Whiner from having the opportunity to repeat what was already said.
- Tactfully interrupt and ask the Whiner for help in clarifying the specifics of his issue.
- Shift the focus to solutions by asking him what he wants accomplished; then, develop a solution that focuses on the immediate future. For example, “Whiner, let’s meet again next month to see whether it is feasible to cut $200 weekly from your budget.”
- Draw the line: If he is unwilling to work toward a solution and continues to whine, tell him through verbal and non-verbal communication that you do not want to hear his complaints. For example, “Whiner, your concerns are important to me, but there is no point in discussing this issue further if nothing can be resolved.”

Now that you have more background on each of the ten “unwanted behaviors” discussed in the book, can you identify the four behaviors and their intents in the opening scenario? The boss is a Tank whose positive intent is focused on getting the task done. The student worker is a Yes Person whose primary intent is to get along with others. The coworker with the snide comment about being tardy is a typical Sniper who seeks attention from others. Finally, your coworker who complains about the budget is a Whiner whose intent is to get things right and to seek perfection.

CONCLUSION

Although it would be easier to believe that all of the difficult behaviors we encounter can be categorized easily in accordance with one of the ten behaviors listed in this book, it is important to note that behaviors may fall simultaneously into more than one category, depending on the situation and the environment. Furthermore, these unwanted behaviors can emerge in everyone—including our family, friends, and, most important, us. We all need to evaluate our intents and behaviors to determine whether we also are guilty of making life difficult for our coworkers, family, and friends.

This book is a great investment for everyone: Inevitably, we all will encounter the ten behaviors it discusses. The communication techniques the authors incorporate in their strategies for dealing with difficult behaviors can be applied to everyone with whom we interact, whether in the workplace or in our personal lives. Most important, the authors describe how we can take control of any situation by improving our communication and changing our attitude toward others. By reading and applying the techniques in this book, we will be better able to face Monday mornings and any of our colleagues—even those with behaviors we cannot stand.

REFERENCES

About the Authors

JERRY VANCE served as Assistant Registrar of Scheduling at The Ohio State University until his retirement in July 2009. He chaired an AACRAO committee for two years and served on various other committees for fourteen years. His advice is to get involved, get to know your colleagues, and have fun!

LISA LEONARD is Registrar at Lexington College (Chicago). She earned her B.S. in Business Administration from the University of Iowa and her M.S. in Adult and Higher Education from Northern Illinois University. Her research interests include student mentoring and retention.

NOTE: This article was based on a presentation given at the 2009 Annual AACRAO conference. The AACRAO Mentor Committee was responsible for proposing this topic and book to serve as a resource for all managers and staff to use when mentoring others in the workplace. Both Lisa Leonard and Jerry Vance serve on the Mentor Committee and were co-presenters of this topic.
How to Make Evaluation Time Stress-free!

By Kristy Peterson

When it’s annual review time, are you frustrated or overwhelmed by the task of remembering an employee’s performance throughout the year? Do you ever feel that if you took notes on each task set within the year, it would be easier for you to summarize the evaluation? There is a way to make everyone’s life a little easier when giving or receiving an evaluation: It’s called the After Action Review, or “AAR.”

The After Action Review (AAR) is a structured review or debrief process for analyzing what happened, why it happened, and how it can be done better, by participants and those responsible for a project or event. After-action reviews, in the formal sense, were developed originally by the U.S. Army, although less structured debriefs have existed since time immemorial. Formal AARs are used by all U.S. military services and by many other non-U.S. organizations. Their use has extended to business as a knowledge management tool and as a way to build a culture of accountability.

The AAR occurs within a cycle of establishing the leader’s intent, planning, preparation, action, and review. An AAR is distinct in that it begins with a clear comparison of intended versus actual results achieved; its focus is on the participant’s own action—that is, learning from the review is carried forward by the participant. Recommendations for others are not produced. AARs in larger operations can be cascaded in order to keep each level of the organization focused on its own performance within a particular event or project.

The mission of the After Action Review is to help make the annual evaluation process less tedious and stressful by ensuring that tasks, goals, and/or projects are recorded by streaming or detailing the task, as well as ensuring that all parties, i.e., supervisor and the employee, is aware of their performance throughout the year. If you follow the instructions to the AAR you will notice that as you refer back it will give you a clear and concise memory of their performance to evaluate them for review.

Instructions: A task/goal/project is presented by the supervisor along with a completion date. Before the completion date arrives, a meeting is scheduled for the purpose of reviewing the task. During the meeting, the components of the AAR are discussed.

The AAR comprises of two components: (1) list three things that went well with the task/goal/project, and (2) list three things that need improvement (if any).

First, the supervisor will review the task that was originally set. The employee will discuss the task and the com-
ponents of the Action Review. Finally, the supervisor will elaborate on the employee’s accomplishment and will describe improvements needed (if any); the employee may comment (as necessary). Thus, the AAR strongly incorporates the value of collaboration.

The AAR process inspires and supports teamwork and unity in the workplace. You will be amazed at the outcome—including the positive atmosphere that will accrue to your work environment.

About the Author

KRISTY PETERSON, M.ED., serves as a tenured admission counselor and recruiter for Rush University. A community activist, Peterson is involved in diversity initiatives run by the multicultural affairs committee at Rush and works closely with the multicultural affairs director on various projects as it relates to the University and Medical Center Building diversity. She created Education Concepts, a program whose mission is to continuously provide resources, personal guidance, a professional educator track, and a strong mentorship component that will allow students to matriculate through pre- and post-high school to prepare them for quality higher education. Peterson is a Researcher for the School Finance Adequacy Longitudinal Field-Test Project for the Renaissance 2010 project under the University of Illinois at Chicago. She received a B.A. from DePaul University and a Master’s in Education from the University of Illinois at Chicago, both in Educational Leadership.
CROSSING THE FINISH LINE: COMPLETING COLLEGE AT AMERICA’S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

WILLIAM G. BOWEN, MATTHEW M. CHINGOS, AND MICHAEL S. MCPHERSON, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009, 392 PP.

Reviewed by Chris J. Foley

In publishing, timing is key to success. Books that hit the shelves at critical junctures can seize upon the opportunities presented by public discourse and rise to the top. A few of them, if given the right authoritative voice and credibility, can even shape that discourse. Bowen et al.’s Crossing the Finish Line is one such book. With authoritative experts and leaders as authors, a strong press, and national press releases, the book made quite a splash upon its publication in fall 2009. With national conversations about increasing enrollments at two- and four-year colleges, maintaining diversity and access, improving outcomes, and containing costs, the timing couldn’t have been better for a book that analyzes the effectiveness of public universities in generating graduates.

The authors are no strangers to making a splash. In The Shape of the River, Bowen took on the topic of selective admissions and affirmative action. As a past president of Princeton and president emeritus of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Bowen has the national and authoritative reputation to get the attention of policy makers. A former university president and current president of the Spencer Foundation, McPherson, too, is a heavyweight. He had significant impact on public policy through College Access: Opportunity or Privilege? Together with graduate student Matthew S. Chingos, Bowen and McPherson have assembled a mass of data from which to draw conclusions as well as the platform from which to broadcast them.

In Crossing the Finish Line, the authors turn their analytical lenses to the obstacles to the “finish line” in higher education: timely graduation. By mining data from the College Board, ACT, HERI, NSC, institutional as well as other sources (although this is only made clear by going to the additional content made available only online), the authors look at the correlations between graduation rates and other independent variables. They rely heavily upon Tinto’s theory of student departure to develop their models. However, because of the longitudinal nature of their datasets, their analyses often are not limited only to success during the first year, nor to success at a single institution.
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In all ways, the measure of success is timely graduation. To the authors, retention—or, simply, graduation—is not sufficient. Rather, they are interested in what types of institutions graduate students in four- to six-year timelines and also (but of no less importance) what types of students are graduated.

To this end, the authors have included data pertaining to students enrolled at 68 institutions: 21 “prestigious research-intensive universities” and 47 “state system schools.” HB-CUs were included as a subset of the state system schools. The universities were divided into five groups based upon their selectivity (three groups for the flagship schools and two for the state system schools). This classification of institutions is fundamental to the authors’ analysis: Given that graduation rates generally are better at prestigious research-intensive universities, the authors are interested in determining whether it is the quality/type of the student or the quality (based on selectivity) of the institution that is responsible for the improved graduation rates.

Taken at face value, their analysis based on institutional selectivity alone is clear…and dangerous. It is the authors’ finding that when background characteristics are equal, students from groups historically underrepresented in higher education graduate at higher rates from the more prestigious institutions. This finding leads them to recommend that students from all backgrounds should attend the most selective institutions to which they can gain entrance.

However, the authors’ method of classifying institutions is overly simplistic and obscures many issues. Given that most of them are flagship institutions, the sample of prestigious research-intensive universities are most likely to receive the most funding from the state as well as from tuition revenue, research grants, and donations. Moreover, the prestigious institutions are located across the nation whereas the state system schools are drawn from only four states. This undermines the validity of the authors’ analysis. For example, the authors’ inclusion of two prestigious institutions from California (UCLA and Berkeley) but not the state’s other public institutions leading me to question the validity of comparing the performance of their underrepresented ethnic populations to those of Ohio. It’s a pity that the authors used selectivity rather than other more meaningful criteria (for example, measures of engagement) as the means by which to group the institutions. In short, what is surprising about students graduating at higher rates from highly selective institutions that have the most funding and support?

As noted above, central to the authors’ conclusions is the concept of “overmatching/undermatching” which has gained significant attention since the book’s publication. This is the idea that a student selects an institution whose selectivity does not match the student’s academic profile. That is, the student enrolls at an institution that is “too easy” or “too hard.” Though not necessarily a new theory (student development theorists have suggested “+1” or “reach” programs to be an effective way of encouraging student success), the authors do provide some statistical evidence that such programs may indeed be supportive of student graduation rates. The authors then review some of the research around the development of special programs (such as the Posse Foundation program or the Meyerhoff Scholarship Program at UMBC). However, the cost of such programs is significant—even prohibitive—for expansion beyond a handful of students.

Conversely, the authors state that the inverse is also true: Students who opt for less selective institutions than those they are eligible to attend have lower than expected graduation rates. This finding counters one of the common arguments against affirmative action: that students who are admitted to more selective institutions on the basis of affirmative action policies are set up for failure. Instead, Bowen et al. found the opposite to be true: The overmatch concept trend indicates that students do best when they attend the most academically demanding institution to which they can gain admission.

The most refreshing analysis in the book is that relating to the graduation rates of transfer students. Not only do the authors include transfer students—all too often ignored—but they also differentiate the students into groups that transfer via two-year and four-year institutions. To generate new graduates in a cost-effective way, the United States will need to depend upon the two- to four-year higher education pipeline. Although students who matriculate at two-year institutions do not complete associate degrees at rates similar to those who start at four-year institutions, those who do transfer to a four-year institution fare well. The key is to help students make the transition.

Let me be clear: I agree with many of the authors’ recommendations as well as commend them on their effort to analyze these critical questions. However, the research
findings do not stand up to my questions regarding the validity of the research methodology. The institutions selected for inclusion in the study were not randomly selected: The state system schools were from the eastern United States (Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina, and Maryland) while the flagship schools were from nineteen different states. Though this hand-picking of institutions doubtless was well-intentioned, it leads to questions regarding the validity of findings comparing the populations of these institutions.

At other times, the authors are conscious of the limitations of their data. For example, in looking at the characteristics of transfer students, the authors indicate that students who start at two-year colleges and then transfer to four-year institutions may exhibit selection bias. The authors briefly state the limitations of their data, but they are not shy about making recommendations based on their analysis.

As a result, the authors’ analyses are of limited usefulness and are far from definitive. Though powerfully written and inclusive of strong suggestions, the book lacks the strength of either solid recommendations or definitive analyses. Most problematic is the authors’ classification of universities in such a way that less selective institutions are portrayed as deficient. The most powerful concepts (classification of institutions according to selectivity and over-/under-matching) are likely to justify the continued concentration of public and private resources at public flagship institutions and the neglect of the larger number of state institutions and community colleges that currently serve the majority of underrepresented populations in higher education. Policy makers should look to these latter institutions to serve the growing numbers of students they seek to enroll; the solution to increasing such populations’ graduation rates most likely is not making public flagship institutions more selective or expecting them to serve all underrepresented populations. Although Bowen et al. wonderfully highlight many of the issues that accompany growing the numbers of graduates (and for this I applaud them), their work should represent the beginning—not the end—of the conversation about outcomes, access and equity in higher education.

About the Author

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