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REVIEWED BY MATTHEW FIFOLT, PH.D.
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When polled in 2015, AACRAO members identified their primary areas of responsibility to include records and registration, admissions, enrollment, advising, transfer and articulation, international admissions, financial aid, and institutional research. I’m pleased to report that most of those areas, as well as some big-picture higher-education topics, are covered in this diverse edition of *College & University*.

This edition includes three feature articles. In “International Freshman Performance: GPA, Retention, Graduation,” Terri Ward, Jonathan Jacobs, and Roger J. Thompson report on a study comparing international student performance at the University of Oregon with that of Oregon residents and other domestic students, looking at ten years of retention, coursework performance and graduation rate data.

In “Directed Self-Placement and Digital Literacy: Helping At-Risk Students Negotiate the Transition to College Communication,” Michael S. Knievel examines how placement practices in freshman communication courses help shape the transition to postsecondary education.

In “Star Power: Elevating Prospective Student Interest through Expert and Celebrity Endorsements—Relevant Message, Relevant Media,” Kristy Tucciarone describes an investigation of the effects of featuring experts and celebrities who attended the institution in marketing campaigns.

Also included are three commentaries. Kenneth McGhee concludes his two-part series, the first of which appeared in Volume 90, Number 3, on “The Financial Aid Office’s Role in Enrollment Management.” Rodney L. Parks and Melissa T. Holmes, in “Registrars and Admissions Officers: Build Undergraduate Research Experiences in Your Offices,” discuss creative ways the Registrar’s Office at Elon University has successfully engaged student workers through involvement in research activities and publication. In “Reflections on Finally Becoming a Professor after Forty Years,” J. Foster Watkins, President Emeritus of Gainesville State College and retired Professor of Educational Leadership/Higher Education at Auburn University, the University of Alabama, and the University of Alabama–Birmingham, reflected on his transition to a faculty role after a long and productive career in higher education administration.

The Campus Viewpoint article, “Strategic Alignment: Recruiting Students in a Highly Decentralized Environment,” by Richard Levin, from the University of Toronto, describes the challenges and lessons learned of managing student recruitment at Canada’s largest university.


Not long ago I was asked how best to prepare for a career as a registrar. Included in my advice was to be curious and read broadly on higher education topics, developing a big-picture view. *C & U* is a good place to start!

Jeff von Munkwitz-Smith, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief
jvon@aacrao.org
International students accounted for 10 percent of the University of Oregon’s freshman class in fall 2012. To learn more about them, the current study compared them to Oregon resident and domestic nonresident students on the basis of characteristics before they enrolled; how they performed academically; and what proportion graduated.
enrolling at U.S. higher education institutions has increased dramatically in the last 20 years. U.S. institutions welcome these students as they affirm their academic reputation and their claims to provide a global experience for domestic students. But is this student group being served effectively? The increase in international enrollments begged exploration of this question from an institutional perspective. Specifically, how does the academic success of new international freshmen at the University of Oregon (UO) compare to that of their domestic peers? Are international freshmen at an academic disadvantage?

To answer the research questions, ten years of retention, coursework performance, and graduation rate data for international undergraduate students at UO were analyzed. Three groups of new first-time freshmen between 2002 and 2012 were compared: international students, students who were residents of Oregon, and students who were from other U.S. states (i.e., nonresident domestic freshmen).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Researchers who focus on international students’ success at U.S. colleges target a few specific areas of interest. Some consider why U.S. institutions admit students from other countries. The answer appears to be twofold: International students frequently pay higher tuition (like nonresident domestic students at public, state-supported institutions), a clear fiscal incentive for institutions; second, institutions assume that enrolling international students provides a global learning experience that enhances U.S. students’ learning (Breuning 2007).

A second area of interest is why international students seek U.S. bachelor’s degrees. Even 30 years ago, as international students sought to enroll at U.S. higher education institutions, Altbach, Kelly, and Lulat (1985) presented two primary explanations: the first, push factors, posits that poor-quality education facilities, competition, and discrimination push students out of their home countries; the second, pull factors, posits that the U.S. colleges and universities offer good educational quality, positive learning environments, and favorable life experiences (Roberts 2009).

The third area of interest is second-language (i.e., English) acquisition, a correlate of international students’ academic success in U.S. undergraduate degree programs. Johnson (1988) found that lower scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) are negatively correlated with international undergraduate students’ academic success. But Johnson (1988) also cautioned that at a certain point, TOEFL scores are not correlated with increased academic success. Some of these issues are included in the design of the current study, which considers the academic
success of international undergraduate students at the University of Oregon as compared to that of their peers from the U.S.

Fass-Holmes and Vaughn (2014) assessed whether international undergraduate students struggled academically at greater rates than their domestic peers. They found quite the opposite: Although the number of international students had increased dramatically in the three years of data used for the analysis (2009–11), Fass-Holmes and Vaughn (2014) found low percentages of students struggling academically, especially in the fields of mathematics, computer science, economics, and engineering (fields in which knowledge of English is less critical to students’ learning).

**METHODOLOGY**

Using 11 years of data related to first-time, full-time freshmen who entered the University of Oregon in the fall term, variables were identified from the literature that may influence the academic success and retention of international students enrolled in undergraduate degree programs at U.S. higher education institutions. Among them are their TOEFL scores, course-taking choices, earned course grades, high school GPA, university GPA, SAT/ACT test scores, annual retention rates, and four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates. Data for each variable were compared to those for domestic non-residents and Oregon residents enrolled at this Association of American Universities (AAU) member institution. For this exploratory study, analyses were conducted using frequencies, correlations, and crosstabs with chi-square tests of significance.

International students come to the University of Oregon from a variety of countries. From 2002 to 2012, a few countries—Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea—annually sent consistent but modest numbers of new freshmen (between 14 and 18). Others, like China, sent widely varying number of students. For example, between 2002 and 2006, fewer than seven students from China enrolled each year, but the number has increased steadily in recent years—to 329 in 2012 (the majority of the entire international cohort at UO that year). Most countries send only one or two first-time, full-time freshmen each fall. The total number of international students enrolling each fall at UO ranged from 65 (2.1 percent of the incoming freshman cohort) to 398 (10.3 percent of the incoming freshman cohort) between 2002 and 2012.

**GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- How does the academic success of new international freshmen at the University of Oregon compare to that of their domestic peers?
- Are international freshmen at an academic disadvantage?
FINDINGS
Retirement and Graduation: Best Measures of Success

A clear pattern is evident in the graduation rates of incoming first-time full-time freshman international students between 2002 and 2006: They were less likely than their resident or nonresident peers to graduate in four years, but they were more likely than their peers to graduate in six years. This cohort of international students was also more likely than its resident and nonresident domestic peers to be retained to the spring of its first year and to return to UO for its second year.

**How do the high school GPAs of UO international freshmen compare with those of domestic freshmen? Are they equally predictive of success in college?**

High school GPAs have been shown to be predictive of college students' academic success, degree completion, and labor market earnings. Thus, the question was considered in two ways: First, is there a significant difference in the high school GPAs of new international freshmen as compared to those of new domestic freshmen, and second, does that difference result in international students' being at an advantage or disadvantage in terms of their academic preparation for college? Table 1 shows significant differences in the high school GPAs of the three types of entering freshmen from 2002 to 2012, with international students having the lowest GPAs and resident Oregon students having the highest.

Does a lower average high school GPA mean that international students are at a disadvantage when they enroll in college? High school GPA is not standardized, so it is important to ask whether it is as good a predictor of college success for international students as it is for domestic students. Table 2 shows that high school GPA and first-year UO GPA show a significant correlation for both domestic student groups as well as for all international students, although the correlation for domestic students is greater than that for international students. The correlation describes the extent to which high school GPA predicts students' academic performance during their first year at UO.

So what does this mean? While significant in both cases, it is more difficult to use high school GPA as an effective predictor of college success for international students. Anecdotally, there are at least two explanations for this: First, the translation of grades from international secondary schools to the American 4.0 scale is imperfect. Transcripts from international secondary schools are not calibrated to U.S.

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1 According to French, Homer, and Robins (2010), “In quantitative terms, we estimate that a one-unit increase in [high school] GPA leads to nearly a full category jump in educational attainment for boys and girls. Similarly, an equivalent increase in high school GPA raises annual earnings in adulthood by an estimated 12.2 percent for males and 14.1 percent for females.”

**Table 1.**
Average High School GPA of New Entering Freshmen, by Residency, 2002–12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>International</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Nonresident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average High School GPA</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 All comparisons with international students were significant at p=0.001

**Table 2.**
Correlations for New Entering Freshmen, by Residency, of Average High School GPA, Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Score, and First-Year GPA (Cohorts 2002 through 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation with First Year GPA</th>
<th>International¹²</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Nonresident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School GPA</td>
<td>0.197</td>
<td>0.494</td>
<td>0.467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL Score</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Significant at p<0.001
² Excludes students from the American English Institute who transition as new freshmen after intensive English instruction. Students who place into this program take non-credit intensive English language courses prior to enrolling in regular coursework as freshmen.
secondary schools are not calibrated to each other. Second, international student success at U.S. colleges is based not only on students’ academic preparation, but also on their ability to understand English and American culture. An international student’s English language proficiency is not represented by her high school GPA; rather, the best measure of English language proficiency is a student’s TOEFL score, which is significantly correlated with the first-year UO GPA—a correlation not quite as strong as high school GPA at predicting performance (see Table 2, on page 5).

Do scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) predict college success?

The University of Oregon utilizes students’ TOEFL scores as the primary means of assessing English language proficiency. Of the 1,648 international freshmen who enrolled at UO between 2002 and 2012, 1,341 (81.4%) submitted TOEFL scores, and 135 (8.2%) submitted IELTS scores. (International students from English-speaking countries are not required to demonstrate English language proficiency.)

TOEFL scores have a significant positive correlation with first-year international students’ GPA (0.175). IELTS scores are not significantly correlated with UO GPA, but this may be attributable to the small sample size.

The TOEFL includes four subscores, for speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Recent analysis suggests that the higher TOEFL subscores of enrolled UO students in speaking and writing are highly correlated with the students’ grades during their first year at UO. That is, English proficiency in speaking and writing is more closely correlated with international students’ academic success than their proficiency in listening or reading.

---

Table 3.
First-Year GPA* and Retention to Second Year for Students Entering in Fall 2011 and 2012, by Residency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshmen GPA</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Nonresident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Retained to 2nd Year (%)</td>
<td>89.30</td>
<td>85.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The sum of all GPA points divided by the sum of all GPA hours for courses taken in the first fall, winter, spring, and summer terms for first-time, full-time fall freshmen.

Table 4.
Students Who Enrolled for Their First Terms, by Residency (Fall 2002 through 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshmen GPA</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Nonresident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent Retained to...</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1st Year</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2nd Year</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>81.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 3rd Year</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 4th Year</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Graduated in...</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Years</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Years</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>67.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Years</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>10,534</td>
<td>4,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total in Cohort (n)</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>10,534</td>
<td>4,290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 International Students significantly different than Resident students for Retained to Spring, 2nd Year and 4th Year = 0.01
2 International Students significantly different than Nonresident students for Retained to Spring, 2nd Year and 3rd Year and Graduated in 4 Years = 0.001

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2 Jacobs, J. 14 February 2013. Draft analysis of entering international freshmen to support policy work of the University of Oregon Admissions Office, Office of Enrollment Management Research.
Some are concerned that international students may cheat on the English proficiency test. Testing services have anti-fraud processes in place to confirm identity, and audits occur if there is any suspicion that a student's score is not legitimate. University of Oregon staff work closely with the testing service and international students whenever such an audit is needed.

How should these results be interpreted? The correlation of international freshman students’ high school GPAs and TOEFL scores with their academic success during their first year in college means that the Office of Admission’s consideration of these factors is appropriate. Yet neither has the strong predictive value of high school GPA for domestic students’ academic success. Nevertheless, these seem to be the best quantitative measures available for helping discern the academic preparedness of international students for UO.

Do international freshmen succeed in their first year at rates comparable to those of their domestic peers?

To answer this question, data from only the most recent UO cohorts—fall 2011 and fall 2012—were analyzed. (The demographics of international freshmen have changed dramatically over the last ten years, so it seemed advisable to focus on UO’s most recently admitted students.) The average first-year university GPA for international freshmen is less success than those of their resident and domestic nonresident peers. For students who performed in the “2.0 and below” range and who therefore were subject to academic probation, international students represented the largest proportion—10.5 percent of first-time full-time freshmen—compared to 7.7 percent of resident and 4.7 percent of domestic nonresident first-year students. International students also were more likely to have a first-year GPA between 2.01 and 2.49, just above the 2.0 that triggers academic probation. This suggests that as a population, international students may have greater academic difficulty, at least in their first year at UO. Nevertheless, they are persistent and retain at rates greater than those of their domestic peers (see Table 3, on page 6).

Does the academic performance of international and domestic freshmen in specific commonly taken courses differ?

Final GPAs in typical freshman courses were compared by residency—i.e., international, resident, and nonresident domestic. Course grades were included if 30 or more international students (fall 2011 and fall 2012 cohorts combined) took the course for a grade. (Despite having recorded final grades for only 28 international students, Journalism 201 was included because of the course’s unique grade distribution.) Analysis was limited to the entering fall 2011 and fall 2012 cohorts (the most recent for which data were available) and to courses taken in students’ first year of college. (Findings for all 26 courses are available upon request.)
In 13 of the 26 courses analyzed (50%), international students earned an average grade of A at the same or at a greater rate than either group of domestic peers. In fact, many international students perform at the highest levels in courses taken during their first term freshman year in which the “language” includes symbols, formulas, and/or numbers, as in music, mathematics, chemistry, and physics. International students perform less well, on average, than their domestic resident and nonresident peers in business administration, economics, education studies, journalism, Japanese, linguistics, psychology, and writing courses, as well as two of the six mathematics courses included in the analysis.

Interesting trends among grade distributions are evident in the three most common courses in which first-year international students enroll: Business Administration 101, Math 111, and Writing 121. International first-year students enrolled in these courses were more likely than either group of their classmates, resident or nonresident, to receive a grade of A or F.

Business Administration 101 (BA101) was the course most commonly taken by international freshmen in these cohorts. Of international freshmen who took BA101 for a grade (i.e., not pass/fail), 88.8 percent earned an A, compared to 26.9 percent of domestic resident and 25.4 percent of nonresident first-year students. But international students also were more likely to earn a grade of D or F than their domestic resident and nonresident peers.

In Math 111, international students did comparatively well, with 84.3 percent receiving a grade of C or better, compared to 83.9 percent of their resident classmates and 88.8 percent of their domestic nonresident classmates. International students achieved academic success just greater than that of their Oregon resident counterparts. The most notable pattern in the Math 111 grades of the different populations was the greater proportion of international freshmen who received a grade of A—39.0 percent—more than 10 percentage points higher than their domestic peers.

Fewer international students enrolled in Writing 121, the customary freshman writing course. Those who did performed well, with 95.6 percent earning a grade of C or better, compared to 96.4 percent of resident students and 97.6 percent of domestic nonresident students.

What are the four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates of international students? How do these compare to the graduation rates of Oregon resident and nonresident domestic students who also attend UO?

In reviewing six-year graduation rates, the cohorts were isolated so as to include only students who had been at UO a sufficient number of terms to graduate in the respective number of years presented in Table 4, on page 6. In other words, a student had to have been a first-term freshman in a fall term between 2001 and 2006. (The average retention rates and first-year college GPAs for each group are also presented.)
International students are retained at higher rates than their domestic counterparts through the spring of their freshman year. This is not unexpected because many likely committed to staying in the U.S. (at UO) for the entirety of the nine-month academic year. Consistent with results presented above, international freshmen are retained to the fall of their sophomore year at rates greater than those for either Oregon resident or domestic nonresident freshmen.

It is possible that international students might graduate later if, on average, they take fewer credits per term than resident or nonresident domestic students. In fact, international students enrolled in more credits, on average, in their first year—68 percent enrolled in more than 45 credits in their first year (including summer terms)—compared to only 54 percent of resident and 61 percent of domestic nonresident students. This suggests that international students have larger course loads and take more summer courses during their freshman year than their domestic peers.

Could the differences be attributed to international students transferring fewer credits from courses taken elsewhere—for example, while they attended high school (or their country’s equivalent)? Whereas 18 percent of international freshmen had transfer credit, 46 percent of nonresidents and 53 percent of residents had transfer credit. Domestic students transferred in significantly more credit; this would have helped them decrease their time to graduation.

While retention is important, graduation rates are more so and are considered one of the best measures of student success. International students had the lowest four-year graduation rate. However, their five- and six-year graduation rates did not differ significantly from those of their resident and domestic nonresident counterparts. What is particularly notable is that 66 percent of international students returned for their fourth year of college, yet only 41 percent graduated at the end of that year. Two years later—by the end of six years—nearly 69 percent had graduated, a slightly greater percentage (though not significantly so) than those for their resident and nonresident classmates.

This analysis indicates that international students are not at a disadvantage in terms of their ability to graduate from UO; the complication is that the population first enrolled as freshmen at least six years prior. Evidence was provided previously for how the demographics of the international student population have changed during the past six years—change that makes it difficult to project these results onto more recent entering international freshmen. Nevertheless, it is still important to note that international students graduated at rates at least equal to those of their domestic peers who first enrolled in the fall terms 2002 through 2006.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

Perhaps the most salient finding is that international students did not follow the pattern set by their domestic peers. While their journey was different, the outcomes were similar. International freshman success may be related to characteristics for which no quantitative institutional data exist—characteristics such as motivation, familiarity with U.S. culture and teaching styles, family values in support of education acquisition, English comprehension beyond that measured by the TOEFL, and individual goals, all important variables for future research on international undergraduates enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions.
CONCLUSION
The current study asked, “Are international freshmen at an academic disadvantage compared to their resident and domestic nonresident peers?” This question proved difficult to answer. The data indicate that a traditionally at-risk population suffered from lower university GPAs as well as lower retention and lower completion rates. International students did not earn grades comparable to those of their domestic peers (2011 and 2012 cohorts), yet they performed better than their peers in terms of retention (2011 and 2012 cohorts) and six-year graduation rates (2002 through 2006 cohorts). In terms of the ultimate university outcome—graduation—international students were successful and were not at a disadvantage. It will be important to monitor the graduation rates of more recent cohorts to determine whether students continue to succeed (as measured by graduation) at rates slightly greater than those of their domestic peers.

REFERENCES

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Institutions using directed self-placement to assign incoming students to composition courses may seem more welcoming toward new students—especially those deemed “at risk”—by explicitly embracing students’ digital literacy backgrounds.

For many new college students, enrolling in a first-year composition course remains a key marker of the transition to postsecondary education. Such a course frequently focuses on writing skills that incoming students will require for academic success during their college careers. And because new students often enroll in such a course during their first year (or semester) of college, it plays a unique role in many students’ first-year experience—especially because it typically is characterized by small class size and close interaction with faculty, factors that may enhance retention efforts and student acclimation (Powell 2009).

Even though a first-year writing course remains a near-standard component of the college experience, its content and the path students take to enroll in it are not so standard. Two recent changes at a public, land-grant institution with a selective admission policy and an undergraduate population of approximately 10,000 spotlight these variables (Indiana University 2015, University of Wyoming 2015a).

First, the university revised and refocused its general education program (the new program launched in fall 2015). One change involved shifting away from a university-wide vertical writing requirement to a communication requirement, which reflects a national trend toward rethinking the role and definition of writing curricula, including the first-year composition course (see, for example, University of Kentucky 2015). “Communication” courses at the university will now feature consolidated instruction in writing, oral communication, and digital literacy.
communication. Second, in 2013, the university’s program for students admitted conditionally and deemed at risk launched a directed self-placement (DSP) process. The DSP enables incoming students to self-determine an appropriate, desired level of academic support for the cohort-based cluster of general education courses they take during their first year, including (but not limited to) the first-year composition course.

The convergence of these two changes, which occurred independently, challenges the institutional community to begin to consider two key questions of broader national importance—as well as a possible relationship between them:

- **What** do students experience in a first-year writing—now “communication”—course in the context of this particular university?
- **How** do students who are admitted conditionally come to enroll in composition courses, whether their emphases are traditional print or digital? How, in other words, are they “placed?”

Changes in the definition of “composition” and the move toward a more expansively defined “communication”—changes driven by emerging digital technologies—can complicate curricular placement for institutions and students alike. Moreover, these changes highlight literacy parallels with students’ increasingly digital lives, as well as affective dimensions of placement practices as students make the challenging transition from secondary to post-secondary education. Support and hope, especially for at-risk students (considered here to be students who are statistically less likely to succeed in college for any of a host of possible reasons), is crucial (Harding and Miller 2013). As Alfred Lubrano (2003) remarks in his discussion of class, mobility, education, and the anxiety of coming to college from a working-class background, “People moving from the working class to the middle class need a strategy, a way to figure out the rules, the food, the language, and the music” (p. 10). For many at-risk students, a parallel sense of movement from a past experience to higher education—or an integration or reconciliation of the two—transpires. How might institutions using placement in a composition course best facilitate a transition that helps at-risk students imagine themselves—their literate selves—as both belonging in college and bringing something to that experience upon which they might build?

This article considers the value of linking more explicitly incoming students’ experience as digital communicators with their increasingly digital postsecondary communication futures. Doing so can help new students—and, perhaps, at-risk students, in particular—visualize success at a key transitional moment: the directed self-placement test. First, the impact of digital technologies on definitions of college-level writing and literacy practices is explored. Next, directed self-placement and its role as a literacy “barometer” for students are described. Finally, an argument is made as to how—and why—to reimagine directed self-placement in a way that more explicitly accommodates digital literacy as a larger effort to help at-risk students visualize success at a key transitional moment. These issues are increasingly important, not only for new at-risk students, but also for administrators and teachers concerned with retention and student success and with cultivating an inclusive institutional environment.

**Changes in College-Level Literacy: Digital Impact on Definitions of Writing**

The methods, processes, and rationale behind the first-year writing course in U.S. higher education—the so-called
“freshman comp” course—are ever evolving and highly dynamic (Luna 2003). However, the artifact around which the course has coalesced has remained remarkably stable. Dating back to English A at Harvard in the 1800s, the freshman writing course has taken as its object of attention “good writing” in the traditional print-based, alphabetical text sense, remaining rooted in the belief that while philosophies of writing, teaching methods, and thematic emphases might change, students need to improve their writing in order to participate in higher education (Berlin 1984). Traditionally, this has meant that instruction has focused on helping students gain facility with words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and written genres (most often the essay) within a range of contexts. In class, students might work on grammar, combining sentences, thesis writing, and using research and evidence. They might study and emulate the styles of great writers. They might develop their skills as peer reviewers, serving as a responsive audience for their peers. While some teachers and institutions might emphasize writing and literacy as key to good citizenship, others might highlight how writing facility could position students for success in college. Still others might emphasize creative writing or self-discovery through personal writing. In short, although a host of variables has influenced the nature of the course and the motives behind the act of composition, at the center has been a focus on writing competent prose—most often essays.

But as tools for writing have shifted from pens and typewriters to personal computers and mobile communication devices such as tablets and smartphones, so, too, has the unchallenged status of “written” printed prose as the sole means of communication across time and distance. This change is obvious and visible in daily life, as writing is routinely blended with other modes (e.g., video, images, sound) by which to communicate (e.g., texting, Twitter, Instagram, email, Facebook, Snapchat, etc.).

Within composition instruction, societal and technological changes were presented initially as questions about how computers could improve traditional prose and the writing process. Over the past two decades, such a view...
has evolved as scholars and teachers have begun to recognize more fully digital technologies’ impact on writing and communication. And as composition as a discipline has expanded to include so much more than the traditional and exclusively print/prose model of writing, it has also pressed on the definition of literacy—the behaviors and experiences assumed to define how people consume and create communications—that is at the heart of the first-year writing course.

Consequently, researchers in composition studies have argued for expanded definitions of composition and literacy that reflect what is taught in “writing” courses. For example, Selfe (2007) writes, "If composition instruction is to remain relevant, the definition of composition and texts needs to grow and change to reflect people’s literacy practices in new digital communication environments” (p. 3, emphasis added). More recently, Wysocki and Lynch (2012) note, "Because of changes in communication technologies, compositionists have over the last years been broadening their options of composition...to include thinking about photographs, typography, and color and about how pages and screens on which alphabetic characters are mixed with drawings (for example) make sense to others” (p. 4). Such sentiments may have been focused most directly as a disciplinary mission by Yancey (2004), who announced, “New composition includes the literacy of print: it adds on to it and brings the notions of practice and activity and circulation and media and screen and networking to our conceptions of process” (p. 320). Literacy, then, from the standpoint of communication production encompasses the abilities to find and utilize the materials and tools of composition and to compose using different modes for different audiences and different sites of publication, respectively.

As this definition of writing and textual production expands, it is worth noting that definitions of literacy must also accommodate a complementary and expanding view of reading—of textual consumption. While it is often fashionable in education circles to lament the loss of reading (and some kinds of reading likely are endangered), studies pointing in such a direction often focus on particular kinds of reading, such as novels, books, or newspapers and magazines (Weissmann 2014). Other studies show that people are actually reading a lot, but not in ways traditionally used to define literacy (Rosenwald 2014, Zickuhr and Rainie 2014).

In short, the way in which compositions of all kinds are created, disseminated, and consumed is undergoing a sea change in the digital age. This has had a profound impact on how legitimate communication practices are defined—and, in many ways, taught. To help incoming students understand their places and possibilities within the postsecondary learning environment—and to position them to succeed—we must examine how we directly and indirectly articulate this evolving sense of what “communication” means. Placement processes for incoming students constitute one opportunity for articulating such definitions and values.

PLACEMENT AND FIRST-YEAR WRITING COURSES

Colleges and universities with liberal admissions standards accommodate students with wide-ranging writing backgrounds and abilities and often utilize placement and curricular options to create a point of access for student. For instance, many institutions offer a sequence of first-year writing courses, ranging from developmental (sometimes non-credit bearing) to advanced, as well as some means of placing students in the course best suited to their abilities. To be sure, not all institutions have a process for placing students in the appropriate writing course. Some, for instance, offer a single composition course and require that all (or nearly all) students enroll in it; others do not require a composition course at all. Still other institutions might utilize a placement method for certain student populations, such as non-native speakers of English, but not for native English speakers (Ruecker 2011, pp. 92–94).

For those institutions that do utilize a broader approach to placement, the process unfolds in a variety of ways (White 2008, pp. 133–139). Often, placement involves some type of performance-based evaluation, such as writing a timed essay, which is subsequently judged by trained readers or by computer software. These activities take place in various settings, such as online or at orientation, or sometimes just before classes begin. Other schools and writing programs use SAT, ACT, or AP scores to guide placement (Elliot et al. 2012, Isaacs and Molloy 2010). Although methods vary, then, what seems common is an evaluation of student writing and comparison to a performance benchmark.

Those involved in writing placement face a host of complexities in trying to render judgments that have
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Item #9026 $95 nonmembers | $70 members (2004)

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

THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
A study of the educational system of the People’s Republic of China, from preschool through graduate and professional studies. Includes detailed information on entrance examinations, vocational education, and a thorough guide to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States.
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INDIA
A study of the educational system of India, including the different types of universities, computer and management education, and a detailed list of professional associations in India. Also includes guidelines to the academic placement of students in educational institutions in the United States.
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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 accreditation 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 #5339 $95 nonmembers | $70 members (2004)

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

UNITED KINGDOM
Offers guidance on the structure and content of the United Kingdom’s education system. The five-chapter guide includes a historical look at major legislative and policy changes affecting the system as a whole, and offers details on the country’s Further Education, Secondary Education, and Professional Qualifications frameworks. Additionally, helpful reference information can be found in the book’s five appendices, including: a key to system-related acronyms; listings of the UK’s higher education institutions and further education colleges; details on the National Qualifications Framework; and a comprehensive listing of professional bodies and learned societies.
Item #9027 $95 nonmembers | $70 members (2006)

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strong predictive value for student success (see, for example, Perelman 2013 and Balf 2014). Consequently, some programs have sought alternatives, such as directed self-placement (DSP). In this model, the student chooses a writing course, typically after engaging in a representative writing activity (such as writing an essay that might be required in a first-year writing course) and reflecting on her reading and writing habits and skills; the self-placement experience is coordinated by the program in order to help students make decisions informed by both their own self-knowledge and the information provided to them about available course options. Student reflection is a crucial component of DSP, extending the placement process beyond a single writing performance (e.g., drafting an essay) by fostering critical self-appraisal of literacy habits, strengths, and gaps, with consideration of how these, in the aggregate, might inform as to a suitable course choice. Royer and Gilles (1998, p. 56), often credited as the originators of DSP, drafted statements about literacy practices that are intended to help students evaluate their preparedness for different course options:

- I read newspapers and magazines regularly.
- In the past year, I have read books for my own enjoyment.
- In high school, I wrote several essays per year.
- I have used computers for drafting and revising essays.
- I consider myself a good reader and writer.

Other institutions use similar statements to help students assess their past literacy experiences (Toth and Aull 2014). And while several scholars have identified concerns about how writing programs might enhance placement by complementing student self-investigation with institutional support and expertise (Bedore and Rossen-Knill 2004, Isaacs and Keohand 2012, Lewiecki-Wilson, Sommers, and Tassoni 2000), most continue to recognize and value the potential of DSP for promoting student self-efficacy (Reynolds 2003) and agency (Royer and Gilles 2000).

As part of one university’s online process for placing students in writing courses and program cohorts, incoming conditionally admitted students read selected research, write an essay that draws on the research, and then answer a battery of questions and respond to statements designed to prompt self-reflection on individual literacy practices. At the end of this process, students decide which program cohort to join (cohorts are defined by varied levels of academic support). Students respond to reflective statements such as the following after they finish their essays:

- In high school I regularly wrote essays that required me, as this DSP essay did, to use readings to inform my understanding and discussion of an issue.
- In high school I wrote a variety of essays that required me to locate and connect information from different sources to support my ideas.
- When writing my DSP essay, I had questions about how to integrate and properly cite information from the reading to support my argument.

These reflective statements are part of a slightly different type of directed self-placement exercise tied to a distinctive context—that is, again, placement into a program for conditionally admitted students. Nevertheless, like other more typical DSP processes focused exclusively on composition course placement, much of the focus is on helping students connect their past literacy experiences with the kinds of writing and reading behaviors they will require in order to be successful in college. In the sample reflection prompts cited here, the placement instrument focuses on a rather traditional, print-based view of writing and reading because that is the kind of composition curriculum with which most students will engage at these respective institutions. And, it should be noted, composition program administrators routinely adjust their DSP instruments as curricular objectives evolve.

As broader cultural reading and writing practices skew toward the digital and multimodal, and as college and university writing curricula shift accordingly, institutions using DSP may risk framing college-level writing and communication too traditionally or too narrowly. Indeed, despite creeping changes in definitions of literacy and explicit and implicit changes to composition curricula, DSP processes tend to underrepresent digital technologies in their depictions of writing and reading behaviors. As Toth and Aull (2014) note, “...digital writing seems to be a major blind spot in current DSP questionnaires,” and questions about the role of digital writing technologies in students’ writing experiences “...have changed little since Royer and Gilles asked whether students had ‘used computers for drafting and revising issues’” in 1998. Underrepresenting digital com-
posing in DSP can mean sidestepping the expansiveness and significance of emerging digital literacy possibilities while reducing writing to something with which many at-risk students may have had little positive experience—and missing out on a key opportunity for student empowerment.

**MAKING SENSE OF THE CONVERGENCE: THE RISING DIGITAL V. WRITING PLACEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON AT-RISK STUDENTS**

In summary, a typical DSP asks students to inventory their relevant literacy experiences and demonstrate literacy skills so an informed decision can be made about the kind of coursework for which they are prepared. But like any placement process, DSP also sends important messages to incoming students, framing definitions of literacy while positioning students’ own literacy backgrounds in relation to it. As Royer and Gilles (2000) note, DSP “fosters student agency, particularly for basic writers who have historically been given very little control over the shape and focus of their college careers.” While placement tools usually make clear statements about the kinds of writing behaviors that will be expected of matriculated students, it is important to consider what directed self-placement processes communicate about students’ literate lives—and, thus, the capacity to “foster student agency.” Programs and institutions using DSP must consider the method’s capacity to (1) project suitable curricular placements for incoming students and (2) serve as a bridge between students’ past and future literacy practices, mindful that the process makes a strong statement about the nature and value of those practices. Both capacities can influence student success.

Programs, of course, must build placement processes—stemming from course and program objectives—that robustly and accurately address what is “next” for students. In places where academic writing definitions remain largely unchanged, traditional print-based DSP processes may be appropriate. Yet it is worth noting that even in the most traditional composition programs, while students may be expected to read and write prose-based essays, they are likely to conduct research using digital tools and to produce text using digital word processors. In composition and communication programs with greater digital emphases, students might create multimodal texts and/or compose for online audiences rather than write essays only for the teacher. In either case, a traditional DSP featuring only essay writing and student reflection upon print-based reading behaviors has the potential to create a disconnect between placement practices and college classrooms, as well as between academic literacy and students’ own literacy backgrounds. A process that accommodates digital composition practices and that values related behaviors may help students begin to think more robustly of communication and of writing and to begin drawing more liberal connections between their literate lives and what they will do in college literacy environments. Consider the hypothetical revision of the reflective portion of the DSP shown in Table 1, working from the Royer and Gilles (1998) sample above.

### Table 1.

**Inviting the Digital into Directed Self-Placement Reflection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print/Linear (Royer and Gilles 1998, p.56)</th>
<th>Sample Digital/Multimodal Revision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I read newspapers and magazines regularly.</td>
<td>I read news online. I watch news videos online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past year, I have read books for my own enjoyment.</td>
<td>In the past year, I have watched online videos and/or listened to podcasts for my own enjoyment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In high school, I wrote several essays per year.</td>
<td>In high school, I sent text messages every day/tweeted daily/posted to Instagram regularly/updated my Facebook page/developed a web page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have used computers for drafting and revising essays.</td>
<td>I have used computers for making and editing videos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider myself a good reader and writer.</td>
<td>I consider myself a savvy Web user.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indeed, many at-risk students, even those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, may have developed new forms of communication proficiency in the digital world: only 3 percent of adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine years are not online, and in 2013, 97 percent of adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four years owned a cell phone. Some may have done so to rebel against or to work outside the conventions of a print-based and traditional academic culture that has not been a consistent source of joy or reward (Anderson and Perrin 2015, Rainie 2013). Not accommodating these “extra-academic” (though increasingly academic) rhetorical skills in placement practice can mean missing an opportunity to fully identify the literacy strengths of incoming students deemed to be at risk. A caveat: Local contexts are so important, as residual gaps associated with the digital divide could cause further problems or have unintended adverse consequences and exacerbate some incoming students’ sense of distance in certain institutional contexts. More research and implementation of digitally inclusive DSPs would help clarify these complexities. Nevertheless, DSPs can facilitate incoming students’ identification with the educational enterprise—as well as their sense of “I can do this”—rather than evoking feelings of doubt and alienation.

Placement processes expose gaps in students’ preparation for higher education. For many at-risk students, these gaps constitute practical and perceptual obstacles to success. This is not to suggest that such gaps are not meaningful or a source of difficulty in college—they are. But a digitally inclusive placement approach—one sensitive to local demographics and digital access—might offer a more balanced approach, reflecting contemporary practice and curriculum while helping incoming students more readily see themselves within the college value structure.

**CONCLUSION**

As one of incoming students’ first explicit encounters with college expectations and performance, placement practices can help shape the transition to postsecondary life and the manner in which students envision a realistic future in college. Put another way, placement practices constitute an “identification” moment when students begin to imagine themselves as “college”—or “not college”—material. More and more, college and university communication curricula will accommodate digital communication practices; in truth, many already are. Consequently, placement
ment instruments must offer a fair assessment both of what has transpired in students’ digital lives and of what is to come in college. Negotiating the space between can make a significant difference for all students who are trying to understand how their strengths as composers, readers, and thinkers have purchase and value in the academy, workplace, and society.

REFERENCES


About the Author

MICHAEL KNIEVEL teaches composition and professional writing in the English department and Synergy Program at the University of Wyoming. His research focuses on professional writing programs and police use of force policy as organizational discourse.
This study investigates how universities can increase the effectiveness of the search process by featuring in their advertisements expert and celebrity endorsers who attended the institution. How can universities gain the attention of prospective students using the star power of experts and celebrities? Experts and celebrities promoting a university offer prospective students an element of truth: the endorsers themselves enrolled at the institution. High school students are attracted to star power, which can be leveraged to elevate the level of attention paid to a university during the search process. Using the qualitative research method of focus-group interviewing, the current research reveals that millennials believe that experts and celebrities are ideal spokespersons for their alma maters; “follow” expert and celebrity endorsers because they are relevant to their personality and lifestyle; and gravitate toward messages within integrated media campaigns that feature the expert or the celebrity’s personal collegiate journey.

StarPower

Elevating Prospective Student Interest through Expert and Celebrity Endorsements—Relevant Message, Relevant Media
Star power will guide admission and recruitment officers as they strive to garner the attention of prospective students. John F. Kennedy, Jr. (lawyer, journalist, magazine publisher), J.D. Salinger (writer), Katherine Hepburn (actress), Paul Tagliabue (National Football League commissioner), and Franklin D. Roosevelt (32nd president of the United States) are expert and celebrity names that echo in the halls of U.S. universities (Rooney 2003). The following expert and celebrity names may be more effective in vying for the attention of today's high school students and soon-to-be graduates: Serena van der Woodsen (“Gossip Girl”), Brian Griffin (“Family Guy”), Alexander Ludwig (“Hunger Games”), Dakota Fanning (“Twilight”), Dylan and Cole Sprouse (“Suite Life of Zach and Cody”), Emma Watson (“Harry Potter”), Jameis Watson (quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner), Missy Franklin (gold medalist, U.S. Olympic swim team), Jessica Springsteen (competitive horseback rider), Patrick Schwarzenegger (actor and model), and Scout Willis (actress) (Robinson and Stanger 2014). These expert and celebrity names offer prospective students the ability to follow in their footsteps and “room” with them by enrolling at the colleges they attended.

Expert and celebrity appeal is not a new advertising strategy. This is especially true of star athletes who promote a university. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) “insists college players not be used as sales tools,” but this does not prevent institutions from courting advertisers and sponsors alike (Wieberg and Berkowitz 2009, p. 2). Like athletes, expert and celebrity endorsers have a unique ability to initiate and perpetuate product conversations and to engage consumers in a narrative—one desired by consumers because they are part of the brand’s message. A recent study of celebrity endorsements indicated “that sales for some brands increased up to 20 percent” (Crutchfield 2010, p. 1).

Consumers are exposed to more than 3,000 advertisements each day through multiple channels (e.g., apps, billboards, magazines, radio, social media, television, and websites). One hundred and fifty of the 3,000 advertisements reach the subconscious mind, and approximately 900 (30%) reach the conscious mind (Crutchfield 2010). Featuring experts and celebrities may “dramatically accelerate the potential for your brand to reach the conscious mind of the consumer” (Crutchfield 2010, p. 1). Currently, more than 5,000 colleges and universities operate in the United States (Cook 2014), “each with its own unique purpose, history, student body, and faculty” (Nafukho and Burnett 2002, p. 3) and vying for the attention of college seekers.

Gaining the attention of high school graduates is a primary goal of higher education admission officers. Although the number of students enrolled at U.S. degree-granting institutions is expected to increase by 13.9 percent between now and 2022 (Lederman 2014), admission representatives strive to garner attention for their institutions—that is, to be included on prospective students’ lists of schools they are considering. Competition is surging because students have more choices “thanks to easier-to-access airline transportation and telecommunications. Parents are more willing to send their kids across state lines. Students apply to more colleges now, because of this and because of the Common Application, which has made applying to multiple schools as simple as a few more clicks” (Cook 2014, p. 2). Currently enrolled and alumni expert and celebrity endorsers have the ability to give these soon-to-be college students the opportunity to “room” with star power and to advance their search process to college choice (or enrollment). A 2012 study con-
cluded that millennials were twice as likely as Gen-Xers (individuals between the ages of 35 and 49 years), four times more likely than boomers (individuals between the ages of 50 and 69 years), and ten times more likely than silents (individuals age 70 years and older) to be influenced by celebrities (Barton, Koslow and Beauchamp 2014). Since then, the influence of celebrities on millennials appears to have increased, especially when it comes to apparel, lifestyle, and luxury categories and brands.

Education is linked to lifestyle: higher education leads to better-paying jobs (Debusmann 2011). In addition, celebrities appeal to and bolster relationships with millennials because both talk in the same language (Hoffman 2014). Millennials also see elements of their personality in celebrities, creating a personal connection. Millennials will support and share a product when they feel a personal connection. "Millennials don’t want to be spoken to; they demand to be spoken with. Brands must embrace a two-way dialogue in the form of story-doing, which means giving consumers the opportunity to co-create products, services; the experiences by which the products/services/ ideas are delivered and enjoyed..." (Fromm 2013, p. 3).

The advertising market for millennials can be over-saturated due to their exposure to all types of media. So it is particularly important to grab college seekers’ attention. More than three-quarters (77%) of participants in the current research paid attention to colleges’ and universities’ advertisements. Yet only 41 percent thought that advertising was effective. This research describes how universities can gain the attention of prospective students using the star power of expert and celebrity endorsers.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Currently, there are approximately 1.8 billion millennials (individuals born between 1980 and the early 2000s) in the world. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 25 million are between the ages of twelve and seventeen; 31.5 million are between the ages of eighteen and 24; and 42.5 million are between the ages of 25 and 34 (Marketing Charts 2014). These ages represent the greatest proportion of aspiring college students; they are the age group that is ripe for attending college. By the year 2018, millennials will outpace boomers in terms of earnings as well as education (Bruell 2012). Millennials are the most educated generation in U.S. history. Far more members of this generation than of past generations are going to college (Pew Research Center 2010).

But how do millennials decide at which colleges to enroll? The list of factors influencing high school graduates’ college choice is lengthy. University choice is a “high involvement” purchase (Tellis 2004). Factors include an institution’s size (Jortner 2001), proximity to home (Hoover 2006; Jortner 2001; Wilson 1971), convenience (Wilson 1971), cost (Hoover 2006; Johnson and Stewart 1991; Jortner 2001; Wilson 1971), academic programs (Hoover 2006; Johnson and Stewart 1991; Jortner 2001), social life (Jortner 2001), athletics (Pope 2006), scholarships and financial aid (Hoover 2006), rank (Mortland 2003), professor in aspiring major (Johnston and Stewart 1991; Winzenberg 2006), campus visits (Cole 2006; Fluter and Fluter 2001), college fairs (Clayton 1999; Gordon 2006), meeting with a professor in a prospective major area of study (Winzenberg 2006), literature (Cole 2006), evidence that graduates get good jobs (Marklein 2007), reputation (Hoover 2006; Johnston and Stewart 1999; Jortner 2001), and perceived image (Grunde 1976). Social forces have the ability to influence behaviors because they provide information, offer a means of comparison, and lend guidance (Wells, Moriarty and Burnett 2006). Other social forces include high school counselors and teachers, adult acquaintances, older siblings, peer groups (Cole 2006; Johnston and Stewart 1991; Wilson 1971), and college admission consultants (Clayton 1999). Finally, college choice may be dictated by family legacy (Wingert 2003).

Advertising initiatives are another pivotal force driving how students learn about college options; only 3 percent of millennials think advertising is boring (Bruell 2012). They are the first generation to be part of the brand’s message—a message that allows them to be involved. Involvement offers millennials the opportunity to be co-creators of messages rather than bystanders. Millennials desire a two-way dialogue defined as “story doing.” Brands that understand story doing “understand that consumers acting as participants, who feel better about themselves when they support a brand and share with their peers, are the most influential and passionate consumers” (Fromm 2013, p. 3).

One brand that consumers are willing to share passionately is where they went to college—their alma mater. Colleges offer community, culture, and connectedness. A
college with a defined brand “transfers” to those looking to attend as well as to those attending and those who have graduated. For example, Brown University is known for its friendly environment, liberating curriculum, and rigorous academics (Alvarez 2010). For hundreds of years, institutions of higher learning have attracted students by touting their expert faculty, lush amenities, winning sports teams, and niche curricula. Traditionally, this approach worked. However, two key factors hinder the traditional approach from working today: affordability and declining benefits (Dooley 2013).

The cost of a four-year university education has left some families wondering how they will afford it. The amount of financial aid available to families has decreased as a result of lower state subsidies, fewer donations, and lower rates of return on endowments (Dooley 2013). In addition, there is no guarantee that a college degree will secure a student a career upon graduation.

Concerns about affordability and declining benefits have increased education institutions’ competition for prospective students. Students now can choose between online education and specialized training. To compete, four-year universities need to add branding to their initiatives. Branding is central to a college’s message because it conveys quality, credibility, and experience (Goodson 2012). Each of these can differentiate one college from another. Colleges can amplify the brand experience by offering brand ambassadors (i.e., experts and celebrities). Brand ambassadors put a human face not only on corporations but also on higher education.

Brand ambassadors for higher education are current expert and/or celebrity students or alumni. Millennials relate to expert and/or celebrity college attendees and graduates because they are relevant to the brand; the celebrity chose to attend this institution out of hundreds of others. The expert and/or celebrity is not simply marketing a product (i.e., college); he used the product.

Brand ambassadors or endorsers represent a brand in a positive way. They embody the corporate identity in appearance, demeanor, values, and ethics; essentially, they are the brand. Brand ambassadors are a hybrid between public relations and human resources: Public relations practitioners develop relationships, and human resource representatives educate. An effective brand ambassador is the walking and talking embodiment of the product she represents.

Brand ambassadors understand the brand as well as the company; they are well-versed in the brand history, brand identity, brand differentiation, and brand promise. A brand ambassador infuses the product with human aspects as well as the lifestyle that accompanies the product.

There are two types of endorsers: expert and celebrity. Expert endorsers are individuals or organizations that the target population perceives as having specialized knowledge in a particular area—for example, Venus Williams for tennis and Bill Gates for technology. An organization expert is the American Medical Association “seals of approval” and the Better Business Bureau. Celebrity endorsers are individuals well-known to the population because of the publicity associated with their lives. They include entertainers, athletes, business professionals, politicians, reporters, consumer advocates, and religious leaders. Brand ambassadors or endorsers are key to influencing college search and, ultimately, choice; they “set the mood [and provide reason] to bond over a universal human experience” (Hoffmann 2014, p. 2).

For years, higher education institutions have used athletic celebrities to win the enrollment game. According to DiMaria and Pullano (2004),

Athletic programs play a significant role in outreach strategies and image building for the institution and its constituents.

Furthermore, a quality athletics program can enhance the image of the institution and provide credibility for its programs. Athletics aid in developing a positive community relationship with external constituents. By means of a comprehensive marketing and public relations campaign, athletics programs and the benefits they bring to an institution can be highlighted. Examples of highlights include athletic schedules, game results, student achievement that includes awards, signing professional contracts, academic transfer opportunities, and graduation rates (pp. 1–2).

Nick Saban, head football coach at the University of Alabama since 2007, exemplifies the power of athletics to boost enrollment. Saban’s coaching has positively affected enrollment, new construction, and generous alumni donations (Van Riper 2013). “Since 2007, Tuscaloosa has swelled its undergraduate ranks by 33 percent to over 28,000 students. According to the school, less than a third of the 2007 freshman class of 4,538 students hailed from
Baylor University also experienced a record-breaking increase in enrollment, thanks in part to the Washington Redskins’ quarterback, Robert Griffin III. In 2012, the university “released its enrollment total for [the] semester, and the 15,364 enrolled students [was] the highest enrollment in the 167-year history of the school” (Friemel 2012, p. 1). University spokesperson Lori Fogleman told the media that a better athletic program equates to more applications (Friemel 2012).

Expert coaches and athletes have been highlighted as one example of star power. Non-athletic star power can have significant effects too. According to “Attention Brands: This Is How You Get Millennials to Like You” (2014), “Spotlight pop culture, especially using nostalgia nods, superfandom, and celebrity musings” (Hoffmann 2014, p. 2). The key to featuring expert or celebrity endorsers in advertisements is relevance. The endorser must have a connection to the brand (Marketing Charts 2014).

The following examples illustrate the search and enrollment power that expert endorsers lend colleges. Fisk University experienced a surge in enrollment after then Vice President Al Gore taught a journalism course there. Gore’s 100-seat class was fully enrolled, and many others sought to enroll in the course. Overall freshman enrollment increased from 151 students to 220 students. Fisk’s provost commented, “Gore’s decision to teach at the school thrust the school’s name into the limelight. I am sure there were people who didn’t know about Fisk that became introduced to us by virtue of his being here, and we are forever grateful for that” (Turner 2007, p. 1). Similarly, Emory University drew attention when novelist Salman Rushdie signed a five-year teaching contract. According to school officials, the phone rang constantly with current and prospective students wanting to enroll in Rushdie’s course. One student said, “Studying with the author was like being in the classroom with a rock star. …having such a high-profile thinker on campus gives students a sense that they picked the right place to go to college” (Turner 2007, 1). Other expert endorsers, such as Oprah Winfrey (Northwestern University), Clarence Thomas (Creighton University), and Madeleine Albright (Georgetown University), are also lending their “star power” to higher education (Turner 2007).

Celebrity endorsers also wield power in the college search and enrollment process. Brown University boasts notable alumni dating back to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who graduated in 1897. Brown maintained its reputation for admitting celebrity students. John F. Kennedy, Jr., was a member of the class of 1983. The Ivy-league institution experienced an unprecedented 20.6 percent increase in undergraduate applications (Alvarez 2010). One parent who participated in Brown’s admission tour said, “People go there looking for Emma Watson (’13). And if they don’t find Emma Watson, they want Scout Willis (’13), and if they can’t find Scout Willis, they look for other people on the celebrity list. Brown is known for that” (Alvarez 2010, p. 2). Admission representatives contend that having celebrity names on campus elevates the level of attention paid to the university and ultimately increases the number of prospective students (Alvarez 2010). Hollywood box-office actor Kal Penn, who starred in Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle, has had students line up to take his course in Asian American studies in the media at the University of Pennsylvania. “[I] have been flooded with inquiries from students wanting to take the classes,” said the director of the Asian American studies program (Turner 2007, p. 1). Brown’s appearance in such popular television programs as “The Simpsons,” “Family Guy,” and “The O.C.” may be another reason that Brown has experienced an increase in applications.

Several college students shared their experiences of bunking in the same room of expert and celebrity graduates. Aarsi Sagar, a student at Bryn Mawr College, reportedly sleeps in the room that was Katharine Hepburn’s (Hepburn earned a degree in history and philosophy in 1928). “My room is shown to prospective students a lot,” Sagar said (Rooney 2003, p. 1). “FDR is one of my heroes,” said Stephen Stromberg, a sophomore at Harvard Uni-
versity (Rooney 2003, p. 2). Roosevelt, a 1904 graduate of Harvard, lived in the room now occupied by Stromberg—and now shown to visitors (Rooney 2003). Tara Mead, a student at Georgetown University, said that several students and family members were impressed to learn that her room was once occupied by former National Football League Commissioner Paul Tagliabue (Rooney 2003).

If “rooming” with a celebrity does not garner attention, then being awarded a scholarship by a celebrity does. Expert and celebrity endorsers are promoting search and college choice by offering scholarships. For example, David Letterman offers scholarships to select students studying telecommunications at Ball State University. Rapper 50 Cent provides scholarships to students attending Queensborough or LaGuardia Community College. Tish School of the Arts, at New York University, Alec Baldwin’s alma mater, offers drama students the opportunity to earn a scholarship from the actor (Kristof 2011).

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In 2014, Nielsen reported that millennials are “most responsive to messages that use celebrity endorsement or related characters/themes.” In addition, “they do believe and admire celebrities who are social and engage with their fans, so celebrity endorsements presented in a real/authentic way do appeal to them” (p. 38). Three theories seek to articulate why endorsers work: (1) source credibility theory; (2) source attractiveness theory; and (3) meaning transfer theory. Source credibility theory is based on the premise that “acceptance of the message depends on the qualities of the source. Expertness and trustworthiness are two key qualities” that lead the consumer to accept the message (Tellis 2004, p. 181). Tellis (2004) defines expertness as the ability of the source (i.e., celebrity college graduates) to make true claims. The more the endorser is perceived as an expert, the more likely consumers are to accept the claim. Trustworthiness is the willingness of the source to make true claims.

Source attractiveness theory defines acceptance of the message as dependent on the attractiveness of the source, which is based on familiarity, likability, and similarity. Familiarity is the audience’s knowledge of the source through exposure; likability is affection for the source’s physical appearance and behavior; and similarity is the resemblance between source and receiver. Meaning transfer theory is based on the premise that a celebrity encodes a set of meanings, which, if well-used, can be transferred to the endorsed product. Meaning transfer theory can result in meaning capture—that is, when consumers buy the endorsed product with the intention of capturing some of the desirable meanings with which celebrities have imbued the product. The theory assumes that consumers purchase products not merely for their functional value but also for their cultural and symbolic value.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three-stage model of college choice is used in the current study. The first stage, predisposition, “refers to the plans students develop for education or work after they graduate from high school” (Hossler, Schmit and Vesper 1999, p. 9). Search is the second phase of the college choice model. During the search phase, students explore various college options and gather information about the characteristics of each college of interest. The last phase, choice, is when a student narrows his college choices and decides to enroll at a particular institution (Hossler, Schmit and Vesper 1999). Because the current study examines how universities can gain the attention of prospective students by leveraging the star power of experts and celebrities, search is the most pertinent phase to investigate. After all, it is during the search phase that college-bound and current students pay the most attention to colleges’ advertising initiatives, which ultimately influence college choice.

**METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study investigates how expert and celebrity star power garners the attention of prospective college students. Undergraduate students were asked to participate in this study because they are recent high school graduates who engaged successfully in the college search process. Prior to attending college, they held preconceived notions about higher education. To answer questions such as “should I attend college,” “which college should I attend,” and “what is college about,” they browsed solicited and unsolicited information (e.g., brochures, catalogs, and flyers) from colleges. They also may have paid attention to billboard, radio, and television advertisements. Some visited colleges that appeared to match their needs, wants,
and interests. They also used digital platforms to research prospective schools. A recent study noted that 68 percent of high school students use social media to research schools (Lytle 2012), take a virtual tour, or chat with currently enrolled students at the college. According to Cara Rousseau, social media manager at Duke University, “using these...platforms gives students a real insight into what colleges are really like. [It’s] a sample of what the experience is all about” (Lytle 2012, p. 2). Mobile apps are also helping inform high school students’ college search. The apps are helpful for researching colleges, comparing favorites, offering advice, gathering application materials, and meeting deadlines (Sheehy 2014).

Undergraduate students (rather than high school juniors and seniors) were invited to participate in this study because they understand which advertising messages work and which messages do not. They are keenly aware that advertising messages must be engaging and entertaining to be effective; relevance to their world is critical. Millennials are exposed to all types of media, suggesting that the advertising market for their age group can be over-saturated. As a result, it is even more important to reach prospective and enrolled college students in ways that will capture their attention. If one institution fails to do so, another certainly will (OnCampus Advertising 2012).

The research participants included a total of 294 undergraduate students (129 male and 165 female) enrolled in 56 degree programs at 86 colleges and universities in the United States. The majority of the participants were between the ages of eighteen and 25 years; only eight participants were non-traditional students. Fifty-three were freshmen; 63 were sophomores; 75 were juniors; and 103 were seniors. More than three-quarters (77%) reported that they had paid attention to advertisements of colleges and universities, yet only 41 percent thought that advertising was effective. Participants’ three most common complaints about college advertising were that it: is too similar; “does not speak to me”; and is prominent only with big-name schools, such as Duke and Notre Dame, especially when it comes to athletics.

The qualitative research method used to investigate the proposed research question is focus-group interviewing, which was selected for several reasons: one, this method encourages subjects to speak freely, completely, and without criticism about their “behaviors, attitudes, and opinions” (Berg 2001, p. 111); two, it creates a “synergistic group effect,” which leads to greater ideas, analysis, and discussion about the given topic (p. 112); three, and most important, this method is based upon interaction. “Meaning and answers arising during focus-group interviews are socially constructed rather than individually created” (p. 115). Focus-group interviewing is the logical research method for the current study because the process of selecting a college—like focus-group interviewing—occurs socially. Following the focus groups, the researcher bracketed the data (Berg 2001). Bracketing allows a researcher to inspect a phenomenon (i.e., the influence of expert and celebrity endorsers on search).

The researcher served as the focus-group moderator, explained the project to the participants, and described how the focus groups would operate. Participants were told that their responses would be recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis by the researcher. The number of research participants per focus group was limited to ten (though four groups had eleven each), so verbal and nonverbal reactions could be recorded and observed. A total of 29 focus groups were conducted using Skype videoconferencing with enabled webcams. Skype videoconferencing facilitated participation by students enrolled at 56 U.S. universities and community colleges. Each videoconference was conducted in a single session, the duration of which ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. To elicit discussion about how expert and celebrity endorsers can garner prospective students’ attention during the college search process, the researcher crafted a series of discussion questions (see below)—a common practice because focus groups provide a means for assessing intentional conversations about research topics (Berg 2001). The discussion questions included:

- Do you pay attention to expert and/or celebrity endorsers? If so, why?
- What media do you use to pay attention to expert and/or celebrity endorsers?
- Do you think an expert and/or celebrity endorser is an effective spokesperson for a university? Why?
- Describe an expert and/or celebrity advertisement that would gain your attention when searching for universities. Describe what the ad would look like and what the message would communicate.
- When searching for universities, what media are the most effective for receiving messages? Why?
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ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The researcher analyzed the videoconferences and identified concepts the undergraduate participants deemed true. Redundancies in the discussions prompted the researcher to identify similarities and make connections. Interviews allow a researcher to study a phenomenon and understand the essence of the research topic without having to collect as many examples as possible. The following insights from the undergraduate participants and direct quotes summarize the impressions of the participants in this study.

Do you pay attention to expert and celebrity endorsers? If so, why?

The majority of the participants (83%) acknowledged that they follow either expert and/or celebrity endorsers. The participants follow experts and celebrities because doing so provides information about lifestyles, trends, fashion, upcoming movies, and sports in an interesting and entertaining manner. In addition, “inspiration” was cited as a reason to follow experts and celebrities. A female participant explained: “Even though celebrities and I are on different career paths...celebrity or not...we are still people who sometimes hit rock bottom, but we fight through it anyway.” Relevance is pivotal; there needs to be some connection between the participant’s personality and what the expert and/or celebrity encodes. “I pay attention to celebrities who share similar interests as mine. For me, that’s music. Celebrity musicians inspire me. I look up to those celebrities, because of their music style, band interests, and what they support,” said a male participant. A female participant said, “I grew up listening to their music and watching their television shows. I want to continue having their presence in my life.”

What media do you use to pay attention to expert and/or celebrity endorsers?

Social media are the preferred ways to follow expert and celebrity endorsers. Social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tumblr, Twitter, Vine, and blogs. Participants referred to social media and the Internet to monitor the activities of their favorite expert and/or celebrity endorsers. “I choose to use social media because it is something that I use almost every single day. It is really convenient to follow them on their social media pages as opposed to regular news. [On] most social media, you can choose to tailor your news feed to reflect your interests,” explained one participant. Another elaborated: “I use social media to follow their interesting lifestyle. I like viewing their pictures and watching their videos on Instagram and reading their picture captions. On Facebook, however, I follow them to see upcoming events and movie trailers.” Other preferred media include television programs such as E!News, TMZ, and late-night shows such as Jimmy Fallon (27%); magazines such as Cosmopolitan, Glamour, People, Sports Illustrated, and Us Weekly (16%); and radio and news reports (6%).

Do you think an expert and/or celebrity endorser is an effective spokesperson for a university? Why?

Eighty-six (86) percent agreed that an expert or celebrity endorser would be an effective spokesperson for a university, with the condition that he attended the institution. One female participant said,

If the celebrity actually went to the university, for sure they would be an ideal spokesperson because his/her face is known. Not only does the celebrity have to be known, he/she has to have personal experience with the school for credibility purposes. If the school is just using a name and a face to get the university’s name out there with no celebrity connection to the school, then credibility would be lost.

A senior majoring in entertainment management expressed a similar thought: “Expert and celebrity alumni are the best, because they have experienced the university and the campus first-hand.” Other participants explained why featuring expert and/or celebrity endorsers is an effective advertising strategy: “A lot of college seekers, especially high schoolers, at a minimum would do at least a quick Google search of the university to see why the celebrity went to that school.” A marketing major said, “I believe experts and celebrities alike are ideal spokespersons. They have the ability to influence people to study and have a better life. They can do this because of their exposure
and fame.” Several students commented on expert and celebrity endorsers and the specific institutions they attended—for example, Emma Watson (Brown University) and her passion for gender equality; George Lucas (University of Southern California) and his success with movies such as “Star Wars” and “Indiana Jones”; John Legend (University of Pennsylvania) and his musical leadership; John Goodman (Missouri State University) for his founding of the university’s drama program; and Michael Sam (University of Missouri), whom one participant described as the “ideal spokesperson for Mizzou. He reaches different segments of people, because of his race, gender, sexual orientation, athletic ability, and background of beating the odds.” A history major said, “Expert and celebrity endorsers are proving the education they were provided was an effective tool for their careers.”

The 14 percent of participants who did not agree that expert and celebrity endorsers are effective ambassadors expressed concerns that the endorser never earned a diploma. “I like Brad Pitt as an actor, so I would pay attention if he did an ad for Mizzou, but he never finished his college degree,” said one female participant. “Lil Wayne is dope as a rapper. He started college and took some online classes but has no degree in hand,” commented a male participant. Another concern is a tarnished image. One participant said, “Celebrities need to get real about life. Justin Bieber, Miley Cyrus, and Kim Kardashian would bring bad publicity to a school.”

When searching for universities, describe an expert and/or celebrity advertisement that would gain your attention. Describe what the ad would look like and what the message would communicate.

A common response was that advertisements should highlight the success of the endorser and how the university was pivotal to that success—that is, how the university, its professors, curriculum, and student life were significant factors in the individual’s success—in short, “I have success because of the skills I learned at this university.” Several participants described the ad and the message. “The ad would show the celebrity or athlete (I like Payton Manning) at the beginning of his freshman year to the day he graduated, with the final scene showing where the celebrity is present day. The ad needs to be inspirational with a bit of humor because humor makes me want to watch the entire ad,” shared a nursing major. An international business major said her attention would be gained by watching the expert and/or celebrity reminiscing about her days on campus; the message would say, “I remember studying in my dorm, hangin’ out with my friends on these steps between classes, eating pizza in the cafeteria, and being a student member of the business club.” A psychology student offered another advertisement: “The celebrity would be sitting in a classroom with a bunch of other students who are intently listening and learning. The announcer would say, ‘I did it, and so can you’ as the camera zooms in on the star.” To encourage participation in Greek life, a female education participant said, “Carrie Underwood would gain my attention, because she’s a Tri Sigma like me. This would get some chats goin’ among high school girls.” A male political science major described how music could be used to garner the attention of high school students engaged in the college search process: “Lady Gaga attended New York University; she could promote the university through song.” An international student majoring in theatre shared how an advertisement could encourage international students to study abroad: “Take a soccer player from Brazil, share his experiences of studying abroad and how the university was instrumental in his success.” One participant even said, “Yoda received formal training to be a Jedi. Yoda can promote higher education and say, ‘The force is strong in school.’”

When searching for universities, what media are the most effective for receiving messages? Why?

Social media prevailed as the most effective medium through which to receive recruitment messages during the college search process. However, more than half (61%) of participants agreed that recruitment messages must be integrated across several media to generate the greatest attention to the message by college seekers. Participants contend that a combination of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tumblr, Twitter, and Vine)—with Facebook as well as direct mail, television, billboards, and email being preferred (in descending order)—is most effective. According to a recent study, 53 percent of high school students use Facebook multiple times per day; 55 percent use it to research a college’s background, engage in a conversation with the institution and its current and former students, and understand the college’s culture (Lytle 2012).
The current research participants explained the benefits of social media: “Facebook is a good medium because sponsored ads often come up in the news feed,” said a participant. Another shared, “I really like Facebook because it offers visuals, easy clicks on a link that can provide more information, and messaging.” “Most people use Facebook daily. The chance for ad exposure would be really high. Plus, if I like an ad, I will most likely share it on Facebook. Then my Facebook friends will see it. It’s almost like free advertising,” exclaimed a freshman participant. A graduating senior contends that social media platforms are effective for high school students involved in a college search: “Everyone always has a phone on them. For this reason, students will see posts on these forms more than any other form and more consistently.” A freshman summed up the benefits of social media: “Social media is the most effective when searching for a university because it makes you feel more connected and almost accepted by the university.”

Direct mail was the second most effective medium cited by participants. Direct mail offers a personalized message, a professional presentation of data, an urgency to open now, and a constant reminder. “Everyone with a mailbox gets mail. Even if the mail is not of interest, you still have to look to make that decision, which garners attention at the subconscious level,” explained one participant. Another said, “Direct mail was a big hit for me. I was always impressed with the school that sent big fancy folders with information. It was so professional looking, so much so it made me feel special to receive one.” International students studying abroad contend that direct mail is their preferred medium. A male student from France said, “Before I came to the United States, the university sent me mail with all the information. This gave me a guide to follow. I felt more appreciated and knew that my university understands what it is like to be an international student.”

Television was another preferred medium because of its ability to communicate the college’s main point visually. (Television includes regular programming as well as Hulu and Netflix.) One participant said, “I think that television is always effective at getting attention, especially if it’s used at an optimal viewing time like during a national sporting event.” Another participant elaborated, “Television is a medium all members of the family can see—meaning, my family influenced my college decision because of an ad they saw on television.”

Billboards must be part of an integrated campaign, because “it’s the only thing I cannot throw away, delete, or turn off,” said one participant. Another understands their benefit: “I like college billboards because the school has to make the point in one statement. Literally, I will know if the school is a right fit for me.”

Email is an effective medium because information can be received immediately and 24/7 on portable devices. Teenagers’ use of web-based e-mail has decreased, but their consumption of messages on digital devices such as smartphones and tablets has increased dramatically (Palis 2012). Mobile email is an ideal way for colleges to stay in contact with prospective students: “Email works best for me because I check my e-mail all the time, and that’s where all my important information goes,” explained a sophomore.

**DISCUSSION**

As a result of the changing landscape of higher education, gaining the attention of prospective students is a greater challenge for admission and recruitment officers than ever before. The current landscape is competitive because of advancements in the application process, transportation, and telecommunications. Increased tuition and the lack of a guarantee of employment upon graduation compound the difficulty. Admission and recruitment officers must challenge the status quo of traditional college advertising (e.g., that focused on expert faculty, lush amenities, winning sports teams, and niche curricula) because this approach fails to elicit a personal connection with prospective college students. College seekers desire and demand relevance to brands they choose to incorporate into their lives. College is one of the most significant brands because of its powerful influence on the shaping of its students’ minds and senses of personal well-being.

The market for millennials is saturated with advertising; millennials are bombarded by an array of media—media that almost never leave the palms of their hands. Yet only so much advertising can be absorbed. For this reason, millennials gravitate toward advertisements that are credible, feature familiar and relevant spokespersons, and convey meaning at cultural and symbolic levels.

Showcasing expert and celebrity alumni in college advertising can garner prospective students’ attention to the extent of spurring their college search. Messages that focus on the endorser and how the institution was pivotal
to her success are effective. “I’d rather hear from an expert or a celebrity about their glory days in school rather than some old fart lecturing me about working hard,” said one participant. A mix of traditional and social media should be deployed by any higher education institution seeking to enroll new students. Expert and celebrity alumni chose their alma mater from among hundreds of higher education options. More than simply marketing a product, they used the product.

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The Financial Aid Office’s Role in Enrollment Management: Part 2

By Kenneth McGhee

Editor’s Note: Part 1 of this two-part financial aid series appeared in Volume 90, Number 3, of C&U.

Student retention is an important part of a strategic enrollment management plan. Many scholars have written about the challenges of helping students not only enroll in college but also complete their degree programs. Among students pursuing a doctoral degree in higher education administration, student retention is a popular topic. Many doctoral advisors try to persuade their students to write about something other than student retention because so much already has been written about it. Student retention remains an issue not because of a lack of information but because it is hard work to create, monitor, maintain, and continually enhance a student retention program. An effective student retention program is based on the culture and priorities of the campus.

What are the most popular academic majors at your college or university? Does your institution admit students as pre-majors who are seeking to enter competitive majors such as nursing, physical therapy, business, engineering, or education? Do students who are not accepted into these programs tend to change their major or transfer to another institution that offers a similar program? If a student has earned numerous credits but not declared a major, does your institution offer a general studies, liberal arts, or interdisciplinary studies degree? If so, how many students know about or take advantage of this opportunity? Is someone on campus tracking the reasons that students are withdrawing from the institution? In light of the answers to these questions, what potential opportunities exist to retain students at your institution?

Students who receive federal student aid are required to maintain satisfactory academic progress (SAP). Part of this federal policy requires monitoring aid recipients’ grade point averages (GPAs) as well as the percentage of courses they complete successfully. If a student is struggling in either or both of these areas, she may have to submit an appeal for ongoing funding. She may have to describe what caused the academic difficulties and provide appropriate documentation—i.e., evidence of the circumstances and an academic plan completed by her with input from an on-campus academic advisor.

Because so many students need continuous funding in order to remain enrolled in college, the federal rule provides an opportunity for academic advising and financial aid offices to work collaboratively to promote student success. Federal regulations do not specify what must be
included in an academic plan. As a result, colleges and universities can develop unique criteria that constitute a good “fit” given their individual characteristics.

Academic advising offices can be very busy during the beginning of a semester. Many students seek advice about what classes they need to take in order to graduate. For a student who is experiencing academic challenges, it is not enough to create a class schedule for the upcoming term; additional information is needed to determine how best to experience academic success.

Class scheduling is not academic advising. Rather, three areas are important to review if a student is to obtain advice that will have a positive impact on his future enrollment: academic major, course schedule, and support services available on campus.

ACADEMIC MAJORS

Selective Degree Programs

Some students enroll as pre-majors for selective academic programs. A common example is pre-nursing. Based upon a student’s current grades and interests, an academic advisor can review with the student whether she should continue in her current pre-major or consider a change in major. Students who are not going to be accepted into the nursing program may complete a degree in a different major; others may be advised to continue as pre-nursing majors but to consider adjusting their work schedules (or other obligations) as part of a strategy for earning better grades.

Specialized Certificate and Degree Programs

Some community college students need to decide whether to enroll in a certificate or degree program. A student may have dropped too many general education classes but enjoy the courses in his major. In a highly specialized career such as automotive or computer aided design (CAD), a student who has earned good grades and who has not dropped any courses could be advised to complete the courses in the major and to complete the community college certificate program. The academic advisor also may emphasize the importance of general education classes and encourage the student to develop a plan to also complete the degree portion of the program.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Full-Time Students

Some students try to complete a full-time load of college courses while also working full time. It is important for academic advisors to understand the various factors that may have had an impact on a student’s academic performance to date before making recommendations about her future course load. It is also important for appeal committee members to know if a student accepted the academic advisor’s advice or enrolled in another full-time course load while continuing to work full time.

Full-Time Enrollment Required

Some academic programs require students to enroll full time. If a clinical or internship is involved, this can amount to 30 to 40 hours of work per week. Students who are considering or who recently were accepted into such a program should be reminded how to plan to meet their class requirements. A full commitment to the program is needed. In some cases this can include summer-term enrollment.

Part-Time Students

Some part-time students become discouraged when they think about how long it will take them to complete a certificate or degree program. In addition to school, they need to balance work and family obligations. Even after a few terms of enrolling part time in general studies classes, they may perceive the goal of transferring from the community college to a local university as distant or even unattainable. Perhaps the need to work could be combined with the student’s ultimate career goal. Consider the student who wants to become an architect. Some of the computer-aided design classes that are offered at the community college transfer to the universities the student is considering. Advise the student to take the first CAD class the following term. According to the campus job placement office, many local employers want to hire students who have completed between one and three CAD classes. This meets the immediate need to keep the student engaged in coursework; provides a potential increase in pay as a part-time architect assistant (greater than the student’s current pay scale); and credit for the CAD class will transfer to the universities that offer a degree in architecture.
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Share your conference experiences on Twitter by tagging them with #aacrao. Follow @AACRAO on Twitter to get meeting updates and receive invitation-only information. We will be tweeting our followers the location of this meeting’s Tweet-up!
**SUPPORT SERVICES ON CAMPUS**

**Student Success Workshops**

Learning how to become a better student can improve a student’s chance of earning higher grades. Many colleges and universities offer online and in-person workshops. Often, students fail to utilize these resources on a regular basis. Having them attend a time management or study skills workshop can help them develop the skills they need. Students should also be reminded to utilize tutoring and writing labs on campus.

**Disability Services**

Many college students do not disclose that they have a disability until after they have accrued a few terms’ worth of academic difficulties. Once students are admitted to a college or university, the institution’s academic advising office can help ensure that they are aware of the disability services that are available on campus. Signs, flyers, and other marketing strategies should be utilized to promote awareness. Tutoring, extra time to complete assignments and exams, note-taking pens, and other accommodations should be considered, as appropriate. It is important to develop individualized plans to support students as necessary; doing so can help ensure that all students experience success in college.

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**Student Success Workshop Taught by Academic Advising and Financial Aid Staff**

Consider creating a student success workshop jointly sponsored and facilitated by an academic advisor and a financial aid staff member. The workshop can decrease the need for one-on-one appointments during the busiest time of the year and can be offered year round based on when grades are posted. Review such topics as “how dropping a course may help protect your GPA but have a negative impact on your financial aid status.” Inform students of the numerous support services that are available on campus, and encourage them to utilize them. Track students’ attendance at the workshop; such documentation may prove useful if they later submit an academic or financial aid appeal. This strategy has proven successful at community colleges as well as universities.

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**About the Author**

KENNETH McGHEE is an enrollment management and financial aid consultant. He began his career as a financial aid administrator in 1995; since 1998, he has trained fellow higher education administrators, high school counselors, and college admission counselors in the financial aid process at the state, regional, and national levels. He has served as assistant director, director, and executive director of financial aid for multi-campus community colleges and universities. As a consultant, he has assisted more than 50 colleges and universities from all sectors. McGhee earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and his graduate degree from Northern Illinois University. He has earned the post-master’s degree certificate in enrollment management from Noel Levitz and Capella University.
Having spent many years in registration and records, we often are struck by the number of higher education professionals with advanced degrees who choose not to contribute to the literature. At times, these individuals seem almost averse to conducting research, as though that chapter of their lives closed when they completed their advanced degrees. Yet registrars and admissions officers know student data better than any others on campus. They create hundreds of reports annually; meet with students to discuss a broad range of academic and policy-related issues; teach classes; write and edit academic policies; and advise, recruit, and admit students. They often are considered the hub of campus knowledge. Conducting research seems a natural extension of their work. Not only do they have a responsibility to contribute to the literature, but they also have the potential to elevate faculty members’ perceptions of their work, highlight the role of their offices in the scholarly literature, and provide a sense of professional and personal accomplishment as a result of conducting and publishing research.

This is not to deny that their roles encompass more duties and responsibilities than ever before, and they are expected to achieve at the highest levels—often with dwindling resources. So how can colleagues be encouraged to pursue a research agenda when so many already feel overwhelmed? The help that is needed is right in their own offices.

When I arrived at Elon University in January 2013 to begin my career as registrar, one of the biggest challenges I faced was how to effectively leverage student workers to manage the office’s numerous responsibilities. Unfortunately, as in many offices, the bar for student worker performance had been set very low. Student workers often were poorly dressed and were of the opinion that they were there to be paid to do their homework or browse the Internet—and perhaps occasionally assist a student or answer a phone call. Their few responsibilities did not come close to filling the time they were scheduled to work. This culture was difficult to change, and the student workers initially loathed my setting of a new standard relative to their time in the office.

As we began to seek creative ways to engage student workers, we realized that they were well-positioned to help conduct higher education research. Particularly because Elon is a “writing-intensive” institution, its students are adept at answering questions by seeking information from a variety of electronic resources.

We began asking the student workers to help develop new research ideas and to write annotated bibliographies on these topics. Some began to take ownership of research
ideas that interested them and were energized by the potential to contribute to the literature. Many began to do more work at the office and to understand that the skills they were developing would help them in the future in a way that the clerical duties they had performed previously would not. Most student workers welcomed their new duties, acknowledging that they had felt bored and limited by their previous, undemanding roles. (Of course, some decided they did not want to work harder and quickly sought jobs elsewhere.)

The students’ new responsibilities began to produce opportunities for teaching and mentoring that further encouraged the students’ engagement in research. Not surprisingly, the students wanted to know that they would be rewarded for their work. We explained the immense value of initiating a publication record to enhance their co-curricular transcript. Such work would distinguish them from other undergraduates, whether they were seeking to impress potential employers or pursue graduate education. Moreover, they were being paid to do work that would enhance their post-graduate opportunities.

At the time we began this initiative, Elon had just completed its Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reaccreditation, which included a new quality enhancement plan (QEP) focused on writing excellence. The QEP supplied the institutional priority supporting realignment of student workers’ official duties and responsibilities. Including research and publication as mandatory components of their job descriptions thereby fulfilled the registrar’s office’s commitment to the QEP.

Not every student has the ability or desire to conduct research and write for publication. Maturity, motivation, skills, and interest are individual factors that affect students’ involvement in research. Undergraduate research is valued increasingly in higher education, regardless of the size of the institution (Cook and McCauley 2003). Undergraduates who conduct research should be encouraged to identify topics within their individual areas of interest; to work on projects that are highly original; and to collaborate with groups of peers to solve problems (Chan and Lee 1991).

Identifying intersections between student interests and areas of importance for the registrar’s office was sometimes challenging. Just mentioning the term “research” made some students’ eyes glaze over. For a research endeavor in the registrar’s office to succeed, participating student workers must be interested in the topic and help formulate the research focus. When this occurs, the research is more engaging, seems less like work, and is more likely to result in a better product (Paul 2004). With clear guidance from the registrar and an assistant registrar, the new research endeavors began to yield publications, and the student workers/research assistants began to perceive their roles differently and to display a new level of passion for their job.

As we considered the career implications of research opportunities for our student workers, we also had to consider their job description. “Student worker” is a generic title that registrar’s and admission offices assign to student employees who assist with routine office functions. Elevating the title of student workers who both assist in the office and help conduct research bestows a higher status in comparison to other student workers on campus and across the country.

Changing the title to “student/research assistant” adds a level of specificity and importance that enables students to record greater detail about their research activities and publications. Both the post-graduate job search and the graduate school application process have become increasingly competitive; undergraduates who gain research and/or professional experience distinguish themselves from their peers who lack such experience. The new job description clarified that conducting research was an expectation for student employment in our office. For the ongoing success of this initiative, it was vital to set the bar high during the new student/research assistant recruitment process.

We developed one lead student/research assistant position to serve as the registrar’s office ambassador. In addition to the regular student/research assistant duties, the ambassador assists in hiring and training new student/research assistants, conducts special projects that require more extensive experience in the registrar’s office, and travels with office staff to conduct site visits at other institutions.

To maximize the value of the students’ research responsibilities, the office seeks to provide a variety of opportunities for student/research assistants’ professional and personal growth. We developed a structured student mentorship/teaching process that requires the registrar and assistant registrar mentors to meet weekly or bi-monthly with students to manage their office responsibilities and research projects. Meetings focus on basic research skills, such as conducting literature searches, writing abbreviated litera-
ture reviews, creating an annotated bibliography, utilizing qualitative and quantitative methodologies, obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, interviewing participants, and structuring findings into a publishable paper.

Key to these endeavors is not overwhelming students in presenting the steps required to publish a paper. At each meeting, the mentor addresses one topic and assigns the student research-related work to accomplish the following week. For example, the initial meeting is devoted to discussing the student’s interests and seeking to identify an overlap between those interests and the higher education literature. Students are then asked to conduct an initial literature search, read the articles they identify, and come prepared to refine their research focus the following week. At this stage, students are asked to complete the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) modules and thereby to prepare to discuss the protection of human research subjects the following week. Table 1 presents a step-by-step overview of the structure and progression of the meetings with the mentor—the ultimate goal being to create educated undergraduate researchers/assistants.

CASE STUDIES

Ashley Edwards, a longtime student worker in the registrar’s office, was introduced to the new job description in 2013. To pilot the new student/research assistant role, she and the registrar met to discuss potential research ideas. Edwards’ interest in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) students’ rights resulted in an agreement to conduct research on transgendered students and the challenges they face in transitioning to a different gender while pursuing a college degree. Edwards eventually published her research in the SACRAO Journal and thereby became the first published student/research assistant in the history of Elon’s registrar’s office. In 2014, Edwards received the Conor Scholarship from AACRAO and presented her research with Parks at the AACRAO annual meeting, where she was also honored as a recipient of the Margaret Ruthven Perry Distinguished Journalism Award. Edwards has since presented multiple conference papers and posters and published an additional article in AACRAO’s College and University Journal. In 2015, she presented at SACRAO and AACRAO, having won scholarships to attend both meetings; she recently won the Thomas Barnett “Breaking Down Barriers” Scholarship, an annual award given to an undergraduate student who completes a high-profile project on a topic related to improving the university experience of students with disabilities. In all, Edwards’ research to date has yielded more than $3,500 in scholarships, grants, and direct payments for publication. Since graduating from Elon, she accepted a position at William & Mary.

Erin Walker, another exceptional student/research assistant, eventually co-authored chapters in AACRAO’s Helping Veterans Succeed: A Handbook for Higher Education Administrators. Even though she had no other research experience, Walker’s publication helped her obtain an interview with a veterans’ service corporation. Her work also appeared in AACRAO’s College and University.

Table 1.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Topics of Weekly Meetings with Student/Research Assistants</th>
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<tr>
<td>Informational Interview</td>
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<td>Literature Search</td>
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<td>CITI Training</td>
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<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
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<td>APA Referencing</td>
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<td>Interview or Survey Question Development</td>
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<td>IRB Preparation and Submission</td>
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<td>Study Population Parameters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing a Selected Review of the Literature</td>
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<td>Writing the Methodology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice Interviewing (Qualitative Only)</td>
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<td>Capturing Data</td>
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<td>Transcribing/Thematic Analysis/Creation of Data Key</td>
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<td>Analyzing Data</td>
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<td>Writing the Findings</td>
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<td>Writing the Discussion/Limitations/Conclusions</td>
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<td>Writing the Introduction</td>
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<td>Finding the Right Journal and Restructuring the Publication</td>
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<td>Editing and Submission</td>
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Table 1 presents a step-by-step overview of the structure and progression of the meetings with the mentor—the ultimate goal being to create educated undergraduate researchers/assistants.
Since graduating from Elon, she is pursuing graduate school at the University of South Carolina and has continued to work with the Elon University Registrar’s Office to write book chapters for a future AACRAO book focused on students’ experiences relative to natural disasters, violence, campus closings, and social displacement.

CONCLUSION

In the past two years, Elon students employed by the registrar’s office have co-authored eleven peer-reviewed publications and multiple newsletter articles. They have also presented their work on campus and at various regional and national conferences. As a result of current student/research assistants’ discussion of the benefits of their experiences with their peers, the registrar’s office now maintains a wait list of students hoping to obtain work in the office.

Registrar’s offices have the opportunity to support student learning and professional development, advance higher education research, and heighten the visibility of their work by mentoring student/research assistants throughout the research and publication process. Moreover, implementing a research role for student workers has the potential to improve perceptions of the registrar’s office. At Elon, the office’s reputation improved as we educated faculty and staff about our role. Our efforts were rewarded as we witnessed not only the successes and growth of our student workers but also the creation of a team of staff and students whose relationships are characterized by deep mutual respect and admiration and a shared passion for our work.

REFERENCES


About the Authors

RODNEY PARKS is Registrar and Assistant Professor at Elon University where he has served since 2013. Parks earned his Ph.D. in Counseling from the University of Georgia and has published numerous studies focused on unique student populations and their challenges navigating higher education. Dr. Parks has co-authored more than fifteen publications with undergraduate students in the past three years.

MELISSA T. HOLMES is an Assistant Registrar for Technology for Elon University. Holmes currently oversees the research and implementation of new technologies as well as training campus constituents on their daily use of the student system. She also supervises the student research assistants and helps to guide their writing initiatives to lead to publication. Holmes graduated from Elon University and served in the Registrar’s Office for the past fourteen years.
Reflections on Finally Becoming a Professor after Forty Years

By J. Foster Watkins

I wrote this reflective piece in 1999 as I was assuming my first full-time position as a professor with limited administrative responsibilities at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). After 30-plus years in administrative roles in higher education that provided the opportunity to teach on a part-time basis only, I quickly became aware of the challenges and opportunities of the professorship. At UAB I was appointed to the graduate faculty on the basis of prior research and publishing efforts that had gained me full graduate faculty status at Auburn and Alabama. My efforts at that time were focused on teaching and advisement. With time available to do so as I struggle with retirement, I am revisiting some of the unfinished “word-on-paper” efforts from the past.

I have been in the education business for more than 40 years. The majority of those (35 plus) were in higher education. During my first five years at Baker High School in Columbus, Georgia, I served as a math teacher, assistant coach (of three sports), and assistant principal for pupil personnel services. During subsequent years, I continued to teach—at times on a very limited basis because of the preponderance of my administrative responsibilities. I always approached my administrative roles as having responsibility to provide for staff development for the people with whom I worked.

Since leaving the K–12 sector, I have served in administrative positions with two federal projects in the southeast, in administrative roles from program chair to associate dean at two research universities, and as president of two regionally oriented, two-year colleges with upper-division and graduate host-role relationships with neighboring universities. Yet my long-term objective was to end my career in a professorial position. All of my administrative positions had carried an academic appointment with the opportunity to teach on an “as time permits” basis.

During my almost seventeen years at Auburn University and The University of Alabama, I taught at least one course per term, served on and directed doctoral committees, and maintained a sufficient research and publishing interest that supported advancement to a tenured professorship with full graduate school status. While serving as president of Gainesville College, I taught college and career planning and was a resource person and lecturer for teacher education students. Shortly after beginning my last administrative position, at UAB Walker College (UABWC), the decision was made to not renew the affiliation between UAB and Walker College. Ultimately the decision not to go forward with the merger proved a win-win situation for me.

My original appointment at UAB included a tenured appointment as a professor of educational leadership. I had
worked closely with members of the Educational Leadership Department to establish an administrative leadership cohort with certification and degree options for aspiring administrators up the corridors from Birmingham. Subsequently, I taught three courses in the certification option and worked with students in a 300-hour internship program. Once the merger was complete, my future at UAB was re-cast as a full-time professor! For the first time in 40 years, I had no administrative responsibilities. I wondered, “What do real professors do?” and “How do they spend their time?” My thoughts have clearly been influenced by my involvement with that first cohort of educational leadership students as tempered by my somewhat fragmented attention to them during the year in which I had transitional responsibilities in reversing the merger between UAB and Walker College. The remainder of this article draws from those experiences and from my developing feelings about my future as a full-time professor of educational leadership.

The cohort experiences—particularly working with the internship component in meeting the competency requirements—have made me realize that the challenge of leading at the local school level is much different and more complex than when I began in 1959. With schools expected to do more and more for the full range of students in a society that increasingly assumes less responsibility for assisting in the demanding process of educating and developing its young people, the challenge of school leadership is awesome.

One purpose of the cohort experience, particularly in the leadership course and the internship process, is career assessment/commitment. Essentially, participants are challenged to develop a research- and practice-based philosophy of leadership. Through a series of assessment and career-directed opportunities, they are expected to consider and answer questions such as “What is leadership?” “Can I lead?” “Do I want to lead?” And “Where do I go from here from a career-planning point of view?” A paper answering these questions is the course’s culminating project. Students are encouraged to utilize it as a point of departure for an administrative portfolio as they move into their futures as educational leaders.

It became apparent early in the leadership course that at least three members of the cohort were beginning to question their decisions to start the certification sequence. Their discomfort had begun to develop in the first course in the sequence, an introductory course in school law and administration. They demonstrated further discomfort and lack of career certainty as they struggled in individual sessions with the leadership/career questions referenced in the previous paragraph. All three eventually discontinued their participation in the cohort. The cohort experiences and the opportunities to discuss their feelings and concerns in a safe, one-on-one environment helped the three students make significant decisions about their career objectives. Clearly, professors should allocate time for such conversations early in students’ preparation programs or during a pre-admission/screening process.

Six other members of the cohort demonstrated the benefit of such conversations. Several seemed initially to be looking for ways to “escape” the classroom and were interested in talking about becoming good assistant managers while demonstrating little or no aspiration toward the principalship with its multiple demands and transformational opportunities. While there will always be a need for transactional oriented administrators in schools, those starting out in a leadership direction need to be aware of and consider its challenges and opportunities.

It is hoped that subsequent cohort experiences helped those six students acknowledge their lukewarm commitment to a future in administration. At least a third of cohort participants—and possibly one-half—lacked the “total-and-without-reservations” commitment that local schools now seem to expect, if not demand. These data, although limited, raise a question relative to the need to strengthen admission and screening procedures in administrator preparation programs. The need seems to be particularly acute in light of the “add-on” option that results in the award of initial certification after successful completion of only four courses and an internship experience. The opportunity to be meaningfully involved in future leaders’ career planning and decision making is somewhat awesome. All of my previous (part-time) participation had been at the advanced graduate and doctoral levels; I had thought very little about the screening effect that should be present in working with aspiring and entry-level administrators.

UAB has an expectation that its graduate students will be prepared to utilize technology, academically and administratively. Several internship competencies call for demonstrated technological skills and abilities. Efforts are made to incorporate opportunities in the cohort experiences that will help students meet that expectation.
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AACRAO 2016 Academic Record and Transcript Guide

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capabilities are deployed to help the students connect for purposes of internal communication. Research and practice articles are generated from web searches and are critiqued and shared within the group. All class assignments are to be generated on workstations, and examinations are responded to via computer labs on campus.

Such expectations produced new demands at the time of my return to the professorship. (Somehow, I had never gotten much beyond e-mail during my years as an administrator, though I had certainly encouraged—expected—others to do much more.) My own goal for the year is to improve my skills in this crucial area.

A modular, self-paced approach was utilized in the third course in the sequence, “Planning for Change.” Eventually, the course material could be converted to a “web-course-in-a-box” format and experimented with from a distance-learning perspective. Several colleagues at UAB were already experiencing success with this method. My own approach was somewhat cautious, particularly as I still believe in and value teacher-student interaction in the classroom, small-group, and/or individual settings. Nevertheless, the quality of individual and group products generated in the class far exceeded my expectations. I experimented with the role of professor as facilitator rather than disseminator of learning. I sensed the power of collaborative learning, peer influence, and enhanced individual expectations as a result of the approaches utilized in that class, even among graduate students. In subsequent terms, I became a convert to the use of Blackboard.edu in developing and delivering my courses. The structure the process requires is making me a more organized and effective teacher, and the multiple means of communication are serving students well, individually and collectively.

For the first time in my career, I have time to read professionally beyond administrative-related materials and dissertation drafts from anxious graduate students. I find myself challenged to make the best use of that time as I move further into the professorship. I am sure, for example, that I will have to be updated on many developments as I attempt to become a full-time professor for the first time in 40 years. In fact, doing so at this time is challenging given higher education’s struggle to embrace emerging technological capabilities in an increasingly competitive environment.

No longer can I do what I once did too often: decide on my way around the corner or during the drive to off-campus locations what to do in class. Now with time to keep up with the literature, to catch up with technology, to plan how best to meet my instructional responsibilities, to be available to my students, to develop and maintain contacts within the field and with colleagues, and to reactivate a research and publishing program: I am beginning to believe that I will not have enough time to do it all. I note as well that establishing contacts with practitioners in schools and maintaining a strong field-service orientation do not seem to be valued as highly as they were during my years at Auburn and The University of Alabama. Given the challenges facing public schools in Alabama, I have to question this shift in priorities.

Over the years I have defended college teaching—really teaching at any level, when done well—as more than a full-time job. Today, I stand by that defense. My part-time teaching experiences have confirmed that teaching is and should be a most rewarding profession. I look forward to a full dose of challenges and rewards over the next several years. Recently, I read several thought-provoking articles about what “we” professors do and the value of teaching to future and in-service administrators. I left the university and administrator preparation (to the limited extent that I was involved at Auburn and Alabama) committed to putting into practice what I had studied and taught in prior years. For almost 20 years, the link between theory and practice was very real and supportive.

I now plan to be an active participant in discussions about the value of administrator preparation programs, particularly as we move into an ever more challenging future. I cannot recall from my years at Auburn University or The University of Alabama a systematic effort to build a case like that now being called for. It will be important to “address the questions before the house in the near future!” Perhaps the inclusion of education administrators in Governor Siegelman’s call for a thorough study of the performance and preparation of education personnel in Alabama, will move us collectively in that direction.

**The three campuses of GSC were merged with North Georgia College in 2014 to form the University of North Georgia.**
All enrollment managers face some level of challenge related to decentralized decision making and operations. Policies and practices can vary considerably by academic area, creating administrative complexity, restricting the scope and speed of institutional initiatives, and limiting potential efficiencies. Central attempts to standardize or streamline these diverse processes may be unwelcome and perceived as counter to local interests. Identifying ways to manage these complexities—and even benefit from them—can be useful.

This article will briefly introduce the structure of the University of Toronto as it relates to student recruitment. It will then look at specific challenges arising from this context, review strategy and initiatives to enhance recruitment, consider outcomes, and, finally, revisit the challenges in light of lessons learned.

**CONTEXT**

With more than 85,000 students enrolled at its three campuses, the University of Toronto is Canada’s largest university. Seven of the university’s academic divisions offer a total of 700 first-entry programs. Five of these are faculties on the St. George campus in downtown Toronto: Arts and Science (the university’s largest academic division); Applied Science and Engineering; Kinesiology and Physical Education; Music; and Architecture and Landscape Design. The other two divisions are campuses rather than faculties: the University of Toronto Mississauga and the University of Toronto Scarborough. These two campuses currently enroll between 12,000 and 13,000 students each, and each offers predominantly arts and science programs. Nearly all of the university’s undergraduate growth is expected to occur on these campuses. These and other faculties and schools at the university offer second-entry professional programs—graduate and undergraduate—and the university provides a wide range of doctoral programs.

There is a considerable amount of both decentralization and asymmetry when it comes to student recruitment and admissions. The central Enrollment Services (ES) department coordinates student recruitment, financial aid, and admission policy and services to the first-entry divisions. However, all first-entry divisions have their own student recruitment staff and may also have admission and financial aid staff; the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering manages its own separate admissions function. Seven colleges are within the Faculty of Arts and Science, each

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1 First entry, also called direct entry, refers to academic programs that do not require prior postsecondary education for admission.

2 At the University of Toronto, a college is a ‘home base’ for Arts and Science students. Most residence students in the faculty live in a residence associated
with staff who have some involvement with admission and recruitment. And all divisional recruitment and admission staff have reporting relationships within their divisions (rather than centrally).

The executive director of enrollment services also serves as university registrar. Unlike most of their U.S. counterparts, Canadian registrars usually have recruitment and admissions responsibilities. The University of Toronto has approximately 26 registrars or equivalents in its various academic divisions; all have some level of responsibility for recruitment and admissions for their division in addition to more traditional registrar-related duties. This is unique in Canada. Other institutions may have separate campus registrars and/or graduate registrars, but rarely are there registrars of other academic divisions.

Enrollment Services employs approximately 70 staff for its recruitment, admissions, and financial aid operations; it processes nearly 70,000 applications per year, two-thirds of which are submitted by Ontario high school students. Enrollment Services also includes the Office of Student Recruitment, with approximately twelve staff plus student tour guides.

The Office of Student Recruitment (OSR) is responsible for managing a visitor center and running tours on the St. George campus; organizing open house events; producing the university viewbook and other recruitment publications; managing the prospective student web presence; conducting or attending school visits and fairs domestically and internationally; liaising with guidance counselors, and organizing the university’s presence at a large prospective student fair held each year in Toronto (i.e., the Ontario Universities’ Fair).

Recruitment staff in the academic divisions are also active in these areas. The University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) and the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) run their own campus tour programs and events and, with OSR, divide the province into territories to manage school visits, at which they represent all three campuses. Many divisions run separate campus events and conduct international recruitment activities. Most first-entry divisions produce their own viewbooks to supplement the university viewbook. The Faculty of Arts and Science had implemented its own CRM in 2008 to manage communications with prospective students.

The university’s budget model is the final important contextual item. Nearly all revenue—including tuition, other fees, and government operating grants—flows to academic divisions. Divisions fund central services based on cost drivers such as enrollment or applications. This means that student recruitment outcomes—i.e., enrollments—are critical to divisional finances and that divisions, like taxpayers, will carefully consider whether their contributions to central services are providing value. Any proposals from central units for new budget items must be approved by a committee that consists of senior academic administrators, including divisional deans.

A key question for Enrollment Services and other central functions is how to add value within this environment by promoting university-wide interests while advancing the agendas of the academic divisions. An obvious way is through responsive operations that serve prospective, admitted, and current students. Most readers will be familiar with these kinds of challenges in an administrative world of growing complexity and shrinking resources. However, unique challenges at the University of Toronto are associated with student recruitment.

THE CHALLENGES

Three specific challenges emerge in consideration of how best to add value:

- What is the appropriate balance of central and local responsibilities?
- How can a set of distributed resources be optimally leveraged?
- How does one lead groups with diverse and competing interests in the absence of direct authority?

This discussion will proceed inductively, by reviewing what actions have succeeded over the past four years or so and then returning to the challenges enumerated above. It will not address student recruitment in graduate studies or in second-entry programs. Enrollment Services does not have primary responsibility for recruitment in these areas, though it does work to serve them where it is pos-
sible to add value, as well as in financial aid and awards, where ES does have direct operational responsibilities.

REVITALIZING RECRUITMENT

In 2008, the university had experienced a few years of declining market share of first-choice applications in Ontario. Prior to 2010, a number of measures had been put in place to begin to arrest this decline and reverse the trend. These included a much-improved tri-campus viewbook, a redesigned website, a new scholarship program, and other initiatives.

As part of this effort, a new position was created to bring together into one organization (Enrollment Services), the Office of Student Recruitment and the Admissions Office, with an eye toward improving communication and continuity between them. (While admissions offices in the United States typically include student recruitment in their responsibilities, these are usually separate units in Canada; sometimes they even report through to different senior administrators.) Later, financial aid and the position of University Registrar were added, which allowed more integration of the recruitment and student service continuum.

BUILDING ALIGNMENT

To begin building a coordinated approach, Enrollment Services produced a document in 2011 entitled “An Aligned Recruitment Strategy.” This was not to be a strategy of increased centralization or control; academic divisions needed to be able to continue to respond to differing strategic imperatives. However, coordination was essential so that the university would be—and would be perceived by stakeholders to be—a single institution with a common brand, leveraging the strengths of its diversity.

The strategy contained a brief environmental scan and recommended a number of priority actions, including:

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*Ontario high school students rank their Ontario university choices via a central application service. Though not always a reflection of preference, first-choice applications have much higher yield rates than lower choices.*

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identifying enrollment goals such as enhancing incoming student quality, increasing internationalization, and increasing out-of-province enrollments;

- promoting an evidence-based approach to recruitment, with a research agenda and performance metrics;
- implementing a prospective university-wide student CRM with much more attention to lead generation;
- stressing the importance of high-quality publications and web services;
- advancing the importance of consistent brand management while respecting local and diverse identities and ensuring a tri-campus approach; and

- developing a data-driven international recruitment strategy.

The "Strategy" also recommended adding a Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Committee to complement the existing Strategic Recruitment Advisory Committee (SRAC), which was a broad informational and consultative group. SEM was to be smaller and more action-oriented, consisting of registrars and recruitment staff of academic divisions. Initially SEM would be recruitment focused but would grow to incorporate a broader range of initiatives.

All of these recommendations were implemented by the end of 2012. In addition, "Principles of Interdivisional Coordination in Student Recruitment" was approved by the Council of First Entry Deans. The principles document included some key ideas:

- The interest of the prospective student comes before the interest of the university or its divisions.
- Intra-university competition for students should not result in the need to grow recruitment resources.
- Divisions should share information with one another on any initiatives that might affect the ability of other divisions to recruit and enroll students.
- School visits and international recruitment must be planned and coordinated.
- University recruiters must undergo regular centrally managed training.

Since the document was established, these principles have been operationalized in a variety of ways. Training has been expanded and made more interactive, and learning outcomes have been identified; divisions share information through OSR, which acts as a clearinghouse; a common tri-campus recruitment presentation was developed in collaboration with academic divisions; and international recruitment schedules are developed collaboratively and submitted to OSR for approval each summer. The principles continue to serve as a touchstone for planning and implementation of recruitment initiatives.

**SPECIFIC INITIATIVES**

**Recruitment Collateral**

In 2008, the university began renewing its investment in recruitment materials. A new booth for the Ontario Universities’ Fair was introduced, with a consistent look for those staffing the booth. A new viewbook was created. The website was redone, and the university is now in the midst of a second renewal project for its future students’ web space. Other materials were enhanced, and many recruitment-related videos were produced. Student service spaces were renewed and branded. In all, the university updated the image it presented to prospective students, making it more professional and brand-relevant.

**Technology**

The university created an applicant portal for sharing customized information with applicants. The portal included livestream broadcasts with chat functionality. New interactive touchscreen technology was introduced in the visitors’ center. Social media monitoring and responding were enhanced. The Hobsons CRM initially implemented by the Faculty of Arts and Science was extended to all first-entry divisions and beyond. A dedicated staff person supports the CRM through the central Office of Student Recruitment, but coordinated communication plans are developed collaboratively with divisional staff. A document management product (Nolij) was implemented to streamline data processing and retention but also to make real-time applicant information available to recruiters.

**Coordination and Communication**

Within Enrollment Services, the directors of recruitment, admissions, financial aid and awards, and technical and administrative services meet bi-weekly to discuss information issues. This helps ensure that the three functions connect regularly and that the organization benefits from the cre-
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activity and collaboration of team leadership. Each director also maintains contact with constituencies in the academic divisions. The Office of Student Recruitment has implemented a software tool that enables recruiters in first-entry divisions to share information online in real time.

Data
Enrollment Services regularly produces reports on a variety of recruitment-related subjects, from competitive analyses to student surveys. These reports are shared with the SEM committee and with the Council of First-Entry Deans. Data help direct recruitment efforts; for example, applicant responses to a survey were used to inform the design of a new entrance scholarship. A new Enrollment Services data analyst position was created to support the continual generation of relevant data. With the initiative and support of the university’s business intelligence unit, admission data cubes were created and made available across divisions.

SEM Committee
The SEM committee helps leverage the strengths of decentralization. Divisions often share information about initiatives they have undertaken—including what others can learn from them. It is an opportunity for divisional representatives to acknowledge and discuss issues, manage conflict (when it arises), and work collaboratively. The SEM group reviews a range of subjects, from current admissions data to recruitment activity, and the potential impact of modified admission requirements on the university’s ability to meet enrollment targets.

International Strategy
International enrollment is a critical element of the university’s plans for all divisions. In 2011, an evidence-based international recruitment strategy was developed (it was renewed in 2015). The strategy identified source countries of interest by reviewing a range of data, including economic conditions, school systems, enrollment history, academic performance of students from that region at the university, and enrollment patterns at other Canadian and U.S. universities. The strategy also identified key brand messages.

Academic and Co-Curricular Focus
Of course, there is no possibility of recruitment success without the right mix of programs and an attractive student experience. The university community continually strives to offer programs that appeal to students and has developed many ways of creating community within its large population: For example, the Arts and Science colleges serve as a home base for students; there are first-year learning communities, small enrollment tutorials, “first-year foundations programs” that create small-group academic and experiential learning opportunities, orientation programs, and a range of other approaches. Student life has made focused efforts to offer and/or support a wide array of student services, clubs, and activities and to enhance other elements of student life, including the introduction of a co-curricular record.

Service and Operations
Enrollment services must deliver a range of operational services, including managing financial aid and scholarships, processing applications and issuing offers, and running a front-line inquiry service. Student satisfaction can affect recruitment and retention, so these operations also play a role in the larger mission of student recruitment at the university. A number of processes have been automated or streamlined to reduce delays during peak times. Other services have been distributed to divisional offices as part of an effort to provide more opportunity for personal attention. Offers of admission are now processed more quickly and delivered more attractively.

Services are also provided to academic divisions. OSR organizes annual recruiter training and manages the CRM so divisions don’t require staff for that purpose. Three years ago, a professional development day for divisional registrars was created to facilitate the sharing of ideas and the provision of information to registrar’s office staff across the university. More than 250 staff attended in 2014. Enrollment Services takes on many data analysis projects and shares the results with academic divisions. This service approach helps balance the “gatekeeper” role ES sometimes has to play and adds value for its clients.

OUTCOMES
Enrollment Services monitors a number of metrics to help gauge the effectiveness of its efforts:

- The University of Toronto market share of first-choice Ontario high school applications is increas-
ing. This measure has improved considerably since 2008 and is now at its highest level in many years.

- Over the past five years, the total number of applications to first-entry divisions has increased fourteen percent despite decreases in the size of the fifteen- to nineteen-year-old Ontario population.
- International enrollments are up considerably. Of all first-entry applications over five years, the proportion of international applications increased from seventeen percent to 27 percent. The number of international students accepting their offers of admission increased 60 percent from 2010 to 2014.
- The number of offers made in February or earlier has increased by over 600 percent since 2011.
- The grade point averages of entering students have increased every year for the past five years.

Many more recruitment data points—e.g., social media and web usage, event attendance, and yield measures—are also monitored.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Given the various initiatives described above, it is possible to draw some conclusions with respect to the challenges articulated earlier in this discussion.

**What is the appropriate balance of central and local responsibilities?**

Enrollment Services at the University of Toronto continues to deliver some operational services centrally, e.g., admissions and financial aid and awards; there are clear cases for the efficiency and consistency that centralization brings, though divisional priorities still need to be met. In student recruitment, however, each academic division operates in a different context and has different goals. As a result, divisions need to present somewhat distinctive messaging, goals and strategies. Nevertheless, the university must still present a coherent image to prospective students. In the sphere of student recruitment, the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

At the University of Toronto, the key role for central recruitment has been to encourage coordination and collaboration among the academic divisions. This has been attempted in various ways:

- defining principles of interdivisional coordination in student recruitment;
- managing initiatives that require a coordinated effort, such as the Ontario Universities Fair and school visits;
- protecting and promoting the university’s student recruitment brand by allocating resources to high-quality recruitment collateral and related initiatives;
- organizing committees, meetings, and other communication vehicles that facilitate the exchange of information among divisions; and
- providing data to inform decision making.

All of these point to a logical division between the center and the divisions in which the former advances common interests and balances the more centrifugal forces while the latter have considerable freedom to pursue their goals with the most appropriate strategies.

**How can a set of distributed resources be optimally leveraged?**

Just as central resources need to promote divisional interests for the university to succeed, so divisional resources benefit from a common brand that is well-known and highly regarded. And because decentralized resources work in somewhat different environments with different challenges, they bring unique perspectives and skills to this task. These reciprocal benefits encourage collaboration.

This collaboration can take several forms. First, decentralized resources allow academic divisions to make many decisions about what is in their best interests, unimpeded by central intervention (provided that basic principles are respected). This avoids some of the tensions institutions experience between the center and the divisions when there is disagreement about how resources should be allocated, and it allows central and divisional resources to focus on mutual gain. Second, decentralization provides more opportunity to test different approaches to problems. Often, one academic division will discuss its experience with a particular recruiting initiative, be it positive or negative, that will assist other divisions in determining whether to adopt similar approaches. Third, the range of markets that draws the interest of various divisions and their leaders almost certainly ensures that the university
is present in—and able to test—markets that otherwise would not have been explored.

An important principle is that student needs should come first. This is critical to an effective decentralized strategy. A recruiter may be engaged primarily in attracting students to her own academic division, but when talking to a student whose best fit is elsewhere, she is able and obliged to provide positive information about that option.

Finally, a number of measures help decentralized resources contribute to a common effort. These include training and professional development in which divisional participants make essential contributions; entrusting responsibility for promoting the entire university in particular markets to different divisions (e.g., on school visits or international recruitment efforts); and open and frank conversations about policies and initiatives.

**How does one lead groups with diverse and competing interests in the absence of direct authority?**

Many basic attributes of leadership apply. Decentralization often means that talent and diverse skill sets are deployed across the organization. Practices such as ensuring that colleagues are heard and respected, adopting good ideas regardless of their source, and sharing responsibility and credit go a long way toward creating good will. Central areas should be resources and enablers rather than gatekeepers (even if a certain amount of the latter proves necessary).

Central recruitment areas need to add real value to divisional efforts. Whether through coordination, recruitment collateral, provision of resources such as communication channels, organization of events, scholarships, management of a CRM, or other initiatives, divisions need to see evidence that the central recruitment area understands and contributes to the attainment of their goals. Communicating is key, as is providing data that demonstrate (or in some cases disprove) the effectiveness of the initiatives.

Of course, if there were truly no common interests, this challenge would be much more difficult. But, as indicated earlier, the success of each division is tied to some extent to the behavior of the others. Division leaders recognize that some ground rules are necessary in order to avoid counterproductive competition; this is an inherent incentive for collaboration.

While decentralized environments can require more patience and a different skill set than more top-down organizations, they can also bring considerable benefits. Change management is a challenge for all organizations, regardless of the degree of decentralization, and leading with relational authority can result in more durable change than leading with positional authority. The University of Toronto is proof that decentralized organization brings strengths that can offset the challenges. Leaders should consider and leverage the benefits as they navigate these complex environments.

**About the Author**

RICHARD LEVIN is the Executive Director, Enrolment Services and University Registrar at the University of Toronto. His position includes responsibility for Student Recruitment, Admissions, Financial Aid and registrarial policy and coordination. Richard has a keen interest in evidence-based decision making and has published and presented on issues ranging from accountability to Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM). He is the author of “Student Recruitment,” a chapter in the book entitled SEM in Canada, published by the American Association of Collegiate Recruitment and Admission Officers. He has served on the executive committees of the Ontario University Registrars’ Association (OURA) and the Association of Registrars of Universities & Colleges in Canada (ARUCC) and is a recipient of the University of Toronto Influential Leader award. Prior to joining the University of Toronto, Richard held registrarial and SEM positions at three other Canadian universities as well as policy and operations appointments with the governments of Manitoba and Ontario.
COLLEGE DISRUPTED: THE GREAT UNBUNDLING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

CRAIG, R. 2015. NEW YORK: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN. 213 PP.
Reviewed by Marguerite J. Dennis

*College Disrupted: The Great Unbundling of Higher Education*, by Ryan Craig, traces recent changes in U.S. higher education and illustrates why the current system will not disappear but rather will transition to a different system—one that will be judged, according to the author, on outcomes, the unbundling of expenses, and closer collaboration with employers. The effective and efficient use of technology and data will drive these changes.

Craig is the founding managing director of University Ventures, a private equity fund focused on establishing next-generation higher education companies through partnerships with traditional colleges and universities. His focus is on higher education entrepreneurship and return on investment.

The book’s early chapters outline the author’s basic premise that the three greatest crises facing U.S. higher education are affordability, governance, and data.

**Affordability, Governance, Data**

In the chapter on the crisis of affordability, the author makes the case (often with a dizzying number of statistics) that college costs as currently structured are unsustainable, and students are graduating with too much debt. For 30 years tuition has increased at double the rate of inflation while state funding for higher education has decreased by fifteen to 70 percent.

The average discount rate at private colleges and universities is 42 percent—clearly unsustainable for many small schools with comparatively small endowments.

The chapter on the crisis of governance makes the case that higher education governance is failing for two reasons: unclear objectives and the shared governance model. Mission statements are vague, complex, and dysfunctional. The author also faults the U.S. Department of Education for imposing rules and regulations that are both confusing and of questionable value. Such rules have complicated the governance of many colleges and universities.

Administrative bloat is another facet of college administration that has made colleges ungovernable. From 1975 to 2005, colleges and universities increased the number of administrators by 85 percent and the number of non-instructional staff by 240 percent. The author sarcastically refers to this as the proliferation of “deanlets” or staff assigned to administrators who are assigned to other administrators. Few would argue that administrative bloat is one of the many significant contributors to increased higher education costs.
The author takes aim at college rankings and the focus on incoming students’ statistics as well as on the need to acquire more and more real estate. Poignant examples of extravagant athletic facilities and Olympic-sized swimming pools should make all higher education administrators question the wisdom of allocating so much money to such a small part of the educational enterprise.

Perhaps the most revealing statistic is the amount of money that Division 1 football schools spend on athletes: $90,000—seven times the average amount spent on non-athletes.

Finally, the author makes a scathing indictment of how research has surpassed teaching in importance.

In the chapter on the crisis of data, Craig makes the case that university presidents don’t have the data they need to manage effectively; there are no clear, agreed-upon metrics by which to determine whether there is a problem or how students are progressing or what they are actually learning. The author suggests that the $1 billion spent in the United States each year on education research is insufficient, particularly when compared with the amount spent on medical research ($140 billion).

MOOCs, Competency-Based Learning, Online Learning, Adaptive Learning

Given the author’s background, it is no surprise that he is an advocate of the potential of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), competency-based learning, and adaptive learning to change the field of higher education and to help lower its cost. He maintains that in the coming years, technology will provide a better educational experience. Currently, more than three million students are enrolled in one or more online courses; hundreds of colleges and universities offer online degree programs.

Craig believes that competency-based learning will challenge, but not replace, the seat-time model. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the difficulties of implementing a system that awards credits in accordance with both models.

Adaptive learning (defined by technology making the single stream obsolete) will combine with competency-based learning and what the author terms the “killer app” of online education.

Unbundling

Craig suggests several ways in which to “unbundle” higher education. Anant Agarwal (2013) president of edX, writes, “Universities are responsible for admissions, research, facilities management, housing, health care, credentialing, food service, athletic facilities, career guidance, and placement” (p. 1). If higher education were unbundled, the author contends, consumers would purchase only what they want rather than all of the available services.

This is not a new idea. In the 1980s, John Stickney, a writer for Money magazine, collaborated on a book about college indebtedness. Unbundling costs was one of the suggestions. Unbundling would radically decrease revenue per student; as a result, the cost structure of colleges and universities would shift dramatically. The current business model, in place for decades, would become obsolete.

The author is a fan of so-called “double-click degrees,” which he defines as a competency-based system within the current degree framework. Double-click degrees would provide employers with much more information about a graduate’s course of study and competencies mastered than the college transcript does. Double-click degrees would also provide an opportunity for schools to correlate competencies with courses, units, and learning objectives and would supply a more robust evaluation of a candidate’s competency.

A number of statistics are presented throughout the book. Trustees, presidents, provosts, and deans may find some of them new and informative:

- There are 6,000 Title IV-eligible colleges and universities in the United States employing more than three million people. They generate nearly $500 billion in revenue from more than 20 million students. This represents an increase of 30 percent over the past fifteen years.
- Seventy percent of high school graduates pursue higher education. This is the highest level of higher education matriculation in the world, but the U.S. also has the lowest higher education completion rate.
- According to the National Clearinghouse Research Center, more than 31 million students left higher education without earning any credential. Approximately one-third dropped out during their first semester.
- Nearly half (43%) of all college students are older than 25 years of age.
One-third of students transfer at least once before graduating, and 25 percent transfer more than once.

The lifetime earning potential of a person whose highest earned degree is a bachelor’s degree is $3.4 million. Individuals whose highest earned degree is a high school diploma can expect to earn $1.8 million, and high school dropouts can expect to earn $1.2 million.

By 2018, 65 percent of all U.S. jobs will require some education beyond high school. U.S. employers will need 22 million workers with college degrees.

One-third of all college presidents believe that higher education is headed in the wrong direction. More than half (57%) of Americans believe that higher education is not providing students with good value.

A fall 2013 survey of small private and regional state institutions found that nearly half did not meet budget enrollment or net tuition revenue.

From 2010 to 2012, freshman enrollment at more than a quarter of U.S. private four-year colleges decreased by ten percent or more.

Since 1999, outstanding student loan debt has increased by 511 percent.

On average, graduates of associate degree programs earn 79 credits rather than the required 60. On average, graduates of bachelor’s degree programs complete 136 credits rather than the required 120.

Anywhere from 45 percent (sciences) to 98 percent (arts and humanities) of published research is never cited in any other publication.

A study of 2,300 graduates of two dozen universities found that one-third demonstrated no improvement in their critical thinking, analytical reasoning, or written communication.

Nearly half (.43%) of all grades now given in higher education are As, up from 33 percent 25 years ago.

The families of 75 percent of students enrolled at the 200 most selective schools are in the top quartile for family income.

He suggests that college presidents should refocus academic programs on the competencies that employers care about. He stresses the need to “avoid the pause” (leaving school after one or two semesters) and believes that faculty should increase the rigor of their class assignments and term paper requirements.

The author further recommends “flipping the classroom” (based on the Khan Academy model) and developing online courses for large lecture classes. Schools should shift scholarships from merit-based to need-based and should also expand their outsourcing of such functions as marketing, enrollment, and student support.

Conclusion
Craig’s book is controversial and has already been challenged. In her March 12, 2013, Washington Post review, Janet Napolitano wrote that despite making several pertinent observations about U.S. higher education, the author fails to confront the tremendous practical and political challenges associated with unbundling. Rather than recount the childish pranks and unnecessary stories of his life at Yale, the author should have provided examples of schools that have tried his suggestions and met with success in doing so. Few examples in the book support the author’s predictions and recommendations.

Given the political and economic climate in the United States, it might have been useful to present statistics to illustrate how U.S. higher education today reflects the country’s income inequality. One of the strongest indictments is the author’s suggestion that the U.S. is heading toward a two-tier higher education system: the bundled (for the elite) and the unbundled (for everyone else).

Whatever the book’s shortcomings, the issues raised by the author and the often-startling statistics make it a “must read” for college administrators as well as federal and state policy makers.

References


EDUCATING A DIVERSE NATION: LESSONS FROM MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS

CONRAD, C., AND M. GASMAN. 2015. CAMBRIDGE, MA: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS. 289 PP.
Reviewed by Matthew Fifolt, PhD

In Educating a Diverse Nation, Conrad and Gasman explore the best practices of Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) in helping students learn and persist at the post-secondary level. The authors describe MSIs as a relatively small number of colleges and universities that educate a large percentage of students of color and low-income students. They contend that while these institutions play a critical role in serving historically underrepresented students, they have “long been invisible across much of the landscape in higher education as well as in the literature on our colleges and universities” (p. 12).

According to demographic trend data as reported by the U.S. Census, the United States continues to become an increasingly diverse nation. In fact, by 2050, racial and ethnic minorities are expected to account for more than half (52%) of the U.S. resident college-age population (U.S. Census 2009). Conrad and Gasman suggest that mainstream U.S. higher education institutions, or Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), are not culturally prepared to address the unique needs of this new major-ity-minority. Specifically, they state:

Because many faculty members and staff in mainstream higher education know little about the history, challenges, strengths, and perspectives that traditionally underrepresented students bring to college, they expect all college students to assimilate into traditional higher education and adapt to the norms of the dominant culture. (p. 9)

According to Conrad and Gasman, MSIs increasingly have become a gateway to higher education for many underrepresented minority students. This is significant given the authors’ observation of the relative indifference of PWIs in meeting the needs of a diverse society.

Study Design

The goal of this three-year national study was to identify practices that enhance the learning and persistence of traditionally underserved and underrepresented students (10). Using a purposive approach, Conrad and Gasman identified twelve MSIs that offer programs either to support diverse students or to contribute to their learning and persistence. The authors selected these twelve programs from 185 submissions by more than 160 MSIs representing a wide variety of institutional types (e.g., private, public, two year, four year) and geographic regions. Conrad and Gasman articulated four categories of MSIs and conducted three in-depth case studies for each:

- Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)
- Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)
- Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander–Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs)

The authors describe the distinct cultural, historical, and contextual factors that influenced the establishment of these four types of institutions. Despite their differences, MSIs reach out to diverse students and “meet students where they are” (p. 258) in similar ways. Conrad and Gasman acknowledge, however, that even successful MSI programs and practices are often hampered by insufficient funds—a problem that seems endemic.

Tribal Colleges and Universities

The authors state that there are currently 34 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in twelve states. In addition to offering accredited degree programs, TCUs frequently host cultural events and serve as centers for social services; many also function as business incubators for their local community. Conrad and Gasman describe TCUs as culturally responsive institutions that provide relevant degree programs to individuals who are often unprepared or underprepared for the rigors of college-level coursework.
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—Rob Garrett, Managing Director of Enrollment Services, Brigham Young University–Idaho

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One faculty member noted that students who attend TCU are frequently “bruised by a system’ that never ‘cared about what they think’ and has often been indifferent to their prior knowledge and experience” (p. 52). Thus, to address students’ academic and social needs, faculty and staff have invested heavily in building personal relationships with students and are committed to the belief that every student can succeed if given the appropriate tools and guidance.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions
Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) have an undergraduate FTE enrollment that is at least 25 percent Hispanic. Conrad and Gasman identify 254 HSIs (approximately 6 percent of all degree-granting institutions in the United States). The authors characterize HSIs as predominantly public, two-year institutions in largely urban areas. They enroll approximately four million undergraduates, including “one-quarter of all minority undergraduates in higher education in the United States, and nearly one-half of Hispanic undergraduates” (p. 29).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities
Conrad and Gasman describe Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as “champions for access to higher education for under-resourced and underprepared students” (p. 20). There are currently 105 HBCUs in the United States, and the vast majority (90%) are four-year, degree-granting institutions; half are public and half are private institutions.

Conrad and Gasman note that students who choose HBCUs typically do so because they offer “a supportive environment in which [students] feel they belong and at which they believe they will find cultural support, a sense of belonging, and a feeling of pride, as well as an opportunity to develop a racial identity” (p. 32). Students in this study indicated that HBCUs validate their interest in learning and scholarship and showcase black individuals who are achieving high levels of success.

Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions
Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) is a federal designation for institutions that serve large populations of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). As of 2009, there were 116 institutions that qualified for AANAPISI status. These institutions are located primarily in urban centers with large AAPI communities, and they serve many first-generation college students who come from low-income families; often the students have limited English proficiency (p. 202).

Conrad and Gasman note that many AAPIs are stereotyped as “model minorities” despite significant disparities in their educational backgrounds when cultural and ethnic differences are taken into account. While AAPIs overall have the highest rate of degree attainment, a number of subgroups (e.g., Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, Hmong, and Pacific Islanders) have significantly lower rates of attainment (p. 32). Individuals frequently “come to college from the margins of the global economy from communities with little experience with higher education” (p. 201).

Collective Themes
In addition to highlighting the individual practices of colleges and universities within each institutional type, Conrad and Gasman provide a cross-case analysis from which they derive common themes, such as:

- Addressing unprepared or underprepared students
- Offering challenging but relevant curriculum
- Creating a college-going culture
- Facilitating transitions
- Maintaining high expectations

Addressing Unprepared or Underprepared Students
At Chief Dull Knife College (TCU), faculty and administrators reconceptualized math offerings as hybrid courses designed to remediate students’ math skills and alleviate students’ fear of failure in math. Conrad and Gasman note that faculty members combined self-paced computer-based work with teacher-led instruction and inquiry-based learning as a way to create a “safe” space within which students could learn math skills. In addition, instructors re-tooled math curricula to challenge students to solve real-world problems relevant to their everyday lives.

Similarly, faculty and administrators at El Paso Community College (HPS) developed the College Readiness Initiative (CRI) to help students understand the expectations and responsibilities associated with matriculating
and the resources available to support them even prior to enrolling in college. The authors describe CRI as a set of systematic, comprehensive, and computer-assisted supports (high tech) combined with personal connections and guidance (high touch).

For students at the College of the Marshall Islands (AANAPISI), faculty and staff members implemented the First-Year Residential Learning Experience (FYRE) to help students acquire requisite skills in English, mathematics, and computers to support their broader success in college. FYRE builds upon the strong sense of community that is common in Marshallese culture and inspires students to become self-directed learners. Administrators report that participation in FYRE has resulted in higher grades in foundational courses, higher first-semester completion rates, fewer withdrawals, and improved retention through the first and second years of college.

**Offering Challenging But Relevant Curriculum**

At Salish Kootenai College (TCU) and the College of Menominee Nation (TCU), college officials developed STEM programs that engage students in “purpose-driven and challenging educational experiences” (p. 83). Conrad and Gasman observe that, unlike many STEM programs at traditional PWIs that focus on individual achievement, STEM programs at these two colleges utilize a cohort model to emphasize the traditional tribal value of community. The programs incorporate practical, hands-on learning experiences such as internships and apprenticeships and thus help students expand their professional networks and hone leadership skills they can use to serve their communities.

Since its inception, Morehouse College (HBCU) has had significant success preparing black men to be scientists and scholars in the STEM disciplines. Morehouse students benefit from faculty and peer mentors and hold one another accountable in these challenging curricula. A number of Morehouse students participate in the Minority Biological Research Support—Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement program (MBRS—RISE), an NIH-funded program. Through RISE, and under the guidance of a mentor/professor, undergraduate students have opportunities to develop research questions, design and conduct experiments, and analyze and present data.

**Creating a College-Going Culture**

To promote a college-going culture among Latinos, the leaders of El Paso Community College, along with academic leaders of secondary schools, reconfigured public education by developing small, experimental high schools that allow motivated students to access college classes as early as their first year in high school. More than Advanced Placement (AP) courses, Early College High Schools (ECHS) allow high school students to take courses with college students on college campuses. One instructor noted that ECHS helps high school students (many of whom lack academic and financial resources) develop the “skills and habits of mind that will take them where they want to go next” (p. 120).

Faculty and administrators at California State University at Sacramento (Sacramento State) (AANAPISI) initiated the Full Circle Project (FCP), an ethnic studies–driven program that provides AAPIs with opportunities to explore racial and ethnic identities and to share stories of activism and leadership of racialized individuals and groups (p. 217). One component of an “activist education” is outreach. For students at Sacramento State, outreach occurs through the 65th Street Corridor Project, a partnership with schools that enroll students in seventh through twelfth grade in a low-income and diverse Sacramento community. College students work with youths to promote a college-going culture while also recognizing their own leadership potential and ability to serve as role models within disenfranchised communities.

**Facilitating Transitions**

At Salish Kootenai College (TCU), faculty and administrators created the Department of Academic Success (DAS) to connect students to the people and resources they need to succeed. DAS helps students transition from developmental coursework to departments by scaffolding “collaboration between disciplinary experts and student development professionals” (p. 55).

Likewise, faculty and administrators at LaSierra University (HSI) launched a campus-wide first-year experience (FYE) program to help students transition successfully into the college environment. As a result of personal and academic coaching, students learn what it means to be a college student and how to become self-directed learners. According to university officials, academic coaching out-
side of class has become an integral part of student learning and persistence.

Maintaining High Expectations

Students at Paul Quinn College (PQC) (HBCU) commented that faculty and staff hold students to the very highest standards both inside and outside of the classroom. In the words of the provost, PQC faculty and staff “fundamentally reject the notion that under-resourced communities can’t perform at a high level” (p. 185).

At Norfolk State University (HBCU), faculty and staff members conduct a four-week summer bridge program for students who are admitted but barely meet institutional admission criteria. The purpose of the bridge program (for which students earn college credit) is to boost academic skills, build community, and establish expectations for success. According to students, the greatest benefit of the program is that it “instills the self-discipline that is essential to performing well in college” (p. 169).

Summary

Educating a Diverse Nation is a timely and important contribution to the field of higher education. In fact, Conrad and Gasman suggest that PWIs have much to learn from MSIs in order to advance equal educational opportunities for all students. The authors note in particular that, contrary to the trend to standardize higher education curricula, MSIs seek to customize curricula to meet their students’ unique needs.

The examples that Conrad and Gasman provide throughout the book reflect high-impact educational practices that involve significant commitments of time and substantive interactions with faculty members and peers and help students make meaningful connections between personal and academic experiences (Johansson and Felton 2014; Kuh 2008). The difference, however, is that these high-impact practices are embedded in MSIs’ institutional cultures.

Conrad and Gasman suggest that the problem with higher education in the United States is no longer one of access; rather, it is providing students with access to institutions that understand and value their experiences and recognize their unique challenges. The authors conclude that if PWIs are to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, they will have to reach beyond traditional practices and transform in ways that help students develop a formal plan for their learning, blur the hierarchical roles on college campuses, and validate all students as learners. Educating a Diverse Nation is an engaging and thought-provoking book; it should be of great interest to the higher education community in the United States.

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THE POLITICS OF PERFORMANCE FUNDING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION: ORIGINS, DISCONTINUATIONS, AND TRANSFORMATIONS

DOUGHERTY, K. J., AND R. S. NATOW. 2015. BALTIMORE, MD: JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS. 260 PP.

Reviewed by Matthew Fifolt, Ph.D.

In The Politics of Performance Funding for Higher Education, Dougherty and Natow address the emergent trend of performance funding of public higher education institutions in the United States. The authors define the practice as “tying state funding directly to performance on specific indicators of institutional outcomes,” (p. 1) such as rates of student persistence, course completion, degree completion, and job placement. The authors note that, as of September 2014, 38 states have established performance funding programs; 30 states are actively using performance funding mechanisms as part of their financial allocation process (p. 3).

Using an exploratory case study design, Dougherty and Natow investigate eight states that either currently use performance funding or have used it in the past and discontinued it. These states include Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington. The authors also explore programs within this cohort that have experienced long-term operational changes.
Dougherty and Natow base their investigation on the following five questions:

- What are the sociopolitical origins of performance funding for higher education?
- Why have so many states that have established performance funding—if only for a while—later discontinued it?
- How has performance funding evolved in states where it has been retained over a long period of time?
- Why have states replaced longstanding performance funding programs (PF 1.0) with programs (PF 2.0) that are quite different in design and funding levels?
- What is the likely future of performance funding given the political forces resulting in frequent adoption but also frequent discontinuation? (pp. 4–5)

In addition to conducting an extensive review of relevant reports, articles, and studies, the authors interviewed more than 200 political actors, including state- and local-level higher education officials, state legislative representatives, governors, and more to gather firsthand accounts of performance funding in these targeted states (p. 7).

**Overview of Performance Funding**

According to the authors, state allocations for higher education typically are calculated using a funding formula based on workload factors (e.g., enrollment or size of physical plant) or a base plus/minus system based on the previous year’s funding and such factors as inflation, salary increases, program improvements, and productivity gains (p. 15). In addition to these input and process measures, many states have added student outcome indicators (i.e., performance measures) to inform decisions regarding state budgets.

The authors describe two “waves” of performance funding adoption in higher education. In the first wave, performance funding (PF 1.0) was envisioned as a bonus (on top of regular state appropriations for public higher education expenditures) based on progress toward meeting student outcome indicators; however, since 2006, performance funding in a number of states (PF 2.0) increasingly has become an integral part of base funding calculations. In fact, Dougherty and Natow note that 80 to 90 percent of state funding for public higher education in Tennessee and Ohio is based solely on performance funding measures (p. 16). In addition, states increasingly have shifted performance indicators from ultimate achievement measures (e.g., graduation and job placement rates) to intermediate achievement outcomes (e.g., completion of developmental education and mathematics courses).

**Stages of Performance Funding**

Dougherty and Natow identify four stages of performance funding: program adoption, persistence, discontinuation, and re-adoption. The authors use this continuum to describe the various trajectories of performance funding and to demonstrate the ways in which the eight selected states either exhibit a high degree of institutionalization (e.g., IN, OH, TN) or follow patterns of discontinuation and re-adoption (e.g., SC, MO, IL, FL, WA).

The authors also note that “institutionalization does not mean stasis” (p. 36). For example, while TN implemented PF 1.0 in 1979, it added a substantial PF 2.0 program in 2010. Similarly, Ohio replaced its PF 1.0 program in 2009 with an expanded PF 2.0 program that included both two- and four-year public institutions.

Because there are no national models for performance funding, states have implemented it in different ways and with varying levels of success. Notably, the performance model in SC (which included 37 performance indicators) was so complex that some states explicitly designed their own programs “so as not to resemble South Carolina’s” (p. 46).

**Theoretical Framework**

While previous studies have focused on elements of performance funding—namely, origins and discontinuation of state programs—researchers have failed to consider higher education performance funding programs through the lens of policy formation theories. For that reason, Dougherty and Natow apply various theories as part of their effort to describe facets of policy formation and to address limitations of other theories. For example, the authors combine an advocacy coalition framework with policy entrepreneurship and policy diffusion perspectives not only to demonstrate the evolution of performance funding but also to examine questions of how advocacy coalitions arise, where policy solutions originate, and why.

Specifically, the authors note that policy changes occur when they are championed by an individual or organiza-
tion (policy entrepreneur) during periods in which a “policy window” or opportunity presents itself. Further, based on institutional theory, organizations (i.e., states) tend to copy one another’s structures and policies when they are viewed as models that (a) confer legitimacy, (b) address uncertainty, or (c) conform to precepts of best practice (p. 58).

First Wave of Performance Funding

According to Dougherty and Natow, the first wave of performance funding (PF 1.0) occurred between 1979 and 2000 and was influenced by a number of forces, including:

- concern about the quality and effectiveness of higher education in meeting current economic needs;
- perceptions of inefficiency in higher education;
- concerns regarding competing priorities for state dollars, such as Medicaid, K–12 education, and prisons; and
- growing interest in introducing business-like methods and practices into public administration (pp. 62–63).

The authors note further that two key political coalitions promoted adoption of PF 1.0: political and business leaders who wanted to see more accountability for public funds and greater alignment of curriculum with workforce needs identified by the state and state higher education boards as well as some public higher education institutions that saw potential to generate new funds on the basis of output indicators.

This first wave of performance funding also had its critics. Dougherty and Natow note that a number of college and university presidents criticized performance funding as too intrusive and lacking in its ability to “sufficiently recognize different institutional missions” (p. 74). Within the timeframe of PF 1.0, the authors applied the aforementioned policy theories to the adoption of performance funding in seven of the eight selected states.

Change Over Time

Consistent with the literature on policy change and implementation, the authors note that “policies continue to evolve after enactment through bureaucratic decision making, the evaluation of existing policies, and political pressures” (p. 92). When performance funding policies exist for a relatively long period of time, they become highly institutionalized and resistant to change. Conversely, performance funding policies that are weakly supported become highly volatile and subject to frequent changes, including discontinuation of programs.

Dougherty and Natow cite specific theories and research perspectives to describe both the institutionalization and the discontinuation of performance funding policies and to compare and contrast state experiences with performance funding on the basis of these theoretical constructs. Essentially, support for or discontinuation of performance funding can be viewed as two sides of the same coin: states that support performance funding policies tend to protect financial resources, have policy champions, and collaborate through tightly coupled coalitions; states that discontinue performance funding policies point to financial shortfalls and policy opposition and are noteworthy for their lack of collaboration among potential partners.

Most institutional resistance to performance funding was among schools that perceived or experienced such policies as external to the organization, punitive in nature, or non-reflective of institutional culture or mission. The authors conclude that there are a number of considerations for program continuation, including institutional input into program design, adaptability against changing circumstances, and transparency.

Second Wave of Performance Funding

The second wave occurred between 2007 and 2014 and included 35 states that either established or re-established some form of performance funding for higher education. In this second wave, the models frequently took the form of PF 2.0, in which performance indicators were embedded in base state funding for higher education rather than being added to state allocations. Dougherty and Natow identify the primary social force behind PF 2.0 as the great recession of 2007–09 and its impact on state economies and revenues (p. 144). They suggest that the great recession rekindled longstanding concern about the effectiveness and efficiency of public higher education, especially in the face of multiple, competing priorities for state funds—a claim that is consistent with recent studies (Best 2014, Mettler 2014).

In addition to expectations of greater efficiency and effectiveness, performance funding proponents viewed PF 2.0 as a means of increasing the number of graduates who
would meet the needs of the modern economy and of holding institutions accountable for specific performance indicators. Despite muted opposition, institutions were willing to accept the indicators because they actually measured productivity (p. 154). In addition, state coordinating boards spent considerable time and effort soliciting institutional buy-in within their states for adjusting policies in such a way as to lessen any potential negative effects. According to one state official in Ohio, “We argued that it was in all of the schools’ best interests to get out ahead of any criticism and design [their] own performance system before legislators proposed their own efficiency measures” (p. 159).

Looking Ahead

Based on the differences in implementation of waves 1 and 2, the authors depict a shift in educational policy-making decisions away from state higher education boards, higher education institutions, and education interest groups and toward state governors and legislators who increasingly must account for higher education’s contributions to economic growth through research and workforce development. Dougherty and Natow anticipate the continual escalation of performance funding because “economic concerns...are unlikely to abate, and the political pressure in favor of performance funding is likely to intensify” (p. 187). They note further that performance funding models have been widely supported by private entities (e.g., the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Lumina Foundation) and represent a key component of the Obama administration’s Race to the Top.

Summary

In the last chapter of The Politics of Performance Funding for Higher Education, Dougherty and Natow provide a concise yet informative summary of their findings, including “the sociopolitical circumstances, actors, motives, and political forces in state adoption, discontinuation, and long-term incremental transformation of performance funding” (p. 179). In addition, the authors skillfully apply policy theories to the eight selected states to describe
the evolution of their performance funding programs over time and to fully address their initial five questions.

The authors briefly describe the potential for performance funding models to include learning outcomes assessment, which would constitute a way to “incentivize institutions to not weaken academic standards in the service of improving retention and graduation” (p.190). This was best expressed by the president of Indiana University, who argued that “the performance funding program was ‘incentivizing quantity at the expense of quality’” (quoted in Fyall 2011, p.154). The notion of rewarding or penalizing public higher education institutions on the basis of the number of graduates rather than the quality of education they offer seems anathema to the education enterprise and more consistent with the practices of for-profit institutions, which have been vilified for similar actions (Bok 2013, Mettler 2014). Notwithstanding the fervent support of higher education advocates, the inclusion of learning outcomes assessment in performance funding programs remains an open question.

The Politics of Performance Funding for Higher Education is well written and extensively researched. Despite the complexity of performance funding, the authors do an admirable job avoiding jargon and other technical language that might alienate potential readers, and they steer clear of value judgments of performance funding. Instead, through extensive interviews and document analysis, they communicate that the decision to implement some form of performance funding is far more complicated than it might appear; they expertly use policy formation theories to demonstrate some of this complexity.

This book seems to be written by academics for academics, despite the authors’ attempts to provide rich, descriptive accounts of performance funding in eight states and their use of accessible language. Because the topic is so highly specialized, the book may appeal most to those individuals who have direct knowledge of or experience with performance funding models. The widespread use of performance funding models across states and its financial implications for public higher education continues to increase, but the topics researched and discussed in this volume likely would be most attractive to an audience with highly specialized interest in higher education finance and related policy making.

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