The Impact of Online Applications on Higher Education Outcomes

Factors Influencing Student-Athletes’ Decision to Attend a Military Service Academy

Social Integration and Transition Experiences of Homeschooled Students

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The Impact of

Online Applications

ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Outcomes

Technology has become an essential aspect of the college admissions process. The current research study examined trends in the availability of online applications at four-year colleges and universities from 2001 through 2009 and investigated whether an institution’s transition to an online application was associated with changes in the quantity, quality, and diversity of student applicants and enrolled freshman students.
Technology has become an essential aspect of the college admissions process. Given that the Internet is now the primary source of information for most prospective college students, more and more institutions are using the Internet and social media to impart as well as to collect information. According to the National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC), in the past decade the transformation of the application process from a paper-based to an online format became nearly complete. In 2011, 97 percent of colleges reported integrating social media into their online recruitment offerings. The proportion of applications received online increased steadily, from 57 percent in 2002 to 85 percent in 2011 (NACAC 2012).

Although the transition to the online application is associated with many benefits—including increased efficiency and paperless processing, leading to faster service and lower costs—it also may have some drawbacks. Because the Internet makes it easier for prospective students to apply to multiple colleges, they may spend less time evaluating which institutions are the best “fit” and instead apply indiscriminately to a large number of colleges. The increased volume of applications to certain colleges may create a greater burden on the part of admissions professionals to review applications and may make it more difficult for institutions to predict yield (NACAC 2010). An increased volume of applications also may result in heightened selectivity as colleges necessarily admit smaller percentages of students.

Furthermore, if offering an online application engenders a greater number of applications from students whose qualifications may not necessarily meet the requirements of a particular college, then the overall qualifications of applicants—particularly of those applying to selective colleges—may decrease. This might manifest in a decrease in the percentage of highly qualified applicants, e.g., those with high school GPAs greater than or equal to 3.0 and those in the top 10 percent of their high school graduating class.

Unequal access to technology by minority and low-income students—the “digital divide” (Compaine 2001; Warschauer 2004)—is also a persistent concern. There is a dearth of research examining the impact of an exclusively online application on minority and low-income students. Poock and Berryhill (2000) found that minority students who applied in 1999 to graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were not excluded due to the University’s use of an online application; however, they noted that this finding might not apply at the undergraduate level.

In a 2007 study conducted by the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, focus groups revealed a gap
between low- and middle-income families’ knowledge of college admission processes; the gap was attributed in part to such families’ differential access to the Internet. A recent U.S. Department of Commerce study (2011) reported that individuals from lower-income families, with less education, with disabilities, and who were black, Hispanic, or lived in rural areas still lagged behind national averages in both broadband access and computer use. Consequently, colleges that require students to submit their applications online may experience a decrease in the number of applications submitted by minority and low-income students.

The purpose of the current study was to examine trends in the availability of online applications at four-year colleges and universities from 2001 through 2009 and to investigate whether institutions’ transitions to an online application were associated with changes in the quantity, quality, and diversity of student applicants and enrolled freshman students. In particular, this study addressed the following research questions:

- Did the transition to an online application correspond with an increase in the number of applicants?
- Did the transition to an online application affect the percentage of minority students in the first-year entering class?
- Did the transition to an online application correlate with any changes in applicants’ qualifications (i.e., the percentage of enrolled freshmen with a high school GPA greater than or equal to 3.0 and/or in the top 10 percent of their high school graduating class)?
- Did the transition to an online application have a negative impact on the institutions’ yields?

Several external factors also may have had an impact on these outcomes. According to NACAC (2012), students are submitting more college applications than ever before; also, some regions of the United States are experiencing an increase in the number of high school graduates. In response to the increased volume of applications, insti-

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<th>Seats Always Available.</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Our ever-expanding Web site is filled with timely information and news for the growing community of registrars and admissions officers in the United States and around the world. Association members enjoy special benefits and exclusive access to AACRAO’s higher level resources and news. Here’s a small sampling of what content areas the site includes:</td>
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<tr>
<td>✮ AACRAO Transcript (An Online News Source)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✮ Jobs Online</td>
</tr>
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<td>✮ Webinars</td>
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<tr>
<td>✮ Transfer Credit Practices (TCP) Online</td>
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<tr>
<td>✮ Bookstore</td>
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<tr>
<td>✮ Self-Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>✮ Online Courses and much more...</td>
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<tr>
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tutions—particularly the most competitive—have become somewhat more selective. Yield rates have decreased steadily. Further, during and immediately following a recession, there is a significant increase in the average annual change in total college enrollment (Kantrowitz 2010). (That said, the effect is typically greater for institutions that enroll large numbers of adult as opposed to traditional college-aged students.) Increases in application fees either concurrent with or independent of the transition to an online application also may affect enrollment outcomes. For example, an increase in an application fee may deter students from applying to an institution and may be associated with a decrease in the number of applications submitted by minority students, in particular. The analyses in this study distinguished the effects of the online application from those of the unemployment rate, the number of high school graduates, and the application fee on trends in the outcome variables.

**METHOD**

Data for this study were obtained from the College Board’s Annual Survey of Colleges (ASC) (2009), an Internet-based survey of nearly 4,000 accredited U.S. undergraduate institutions that includes questions about such characteristics as programs, costs, application requirements, and deadlines. Nine years of data (2001 through 2009) from 737 four-year institutions were analyzed. All institutions provided at least three years of data for all variables of interest; 24 percent of the institutions (n=177) provided data for all nine years, and 78 percent provided data for at least eight years. To supplement ASC data, Common Application data were used to determine which colleges offered an online application. Established in 1975, the Common Application is a membership organization that provides a standardized first-year application form. Membership in the Common Application increased from 276 colleges and universities in 2005–06 to 414 colleges and universities in 2010–11. (See <www.commonapp.org>.)

Table 1 lists the variables included in the study. The outcome variable on the number of applicants was taken from an ASC (2011) question about the number of total first-time, first-year (freshman) students that applied to the institution. The outcome variables related to student qualifications were the responses to the following questions:

- What percent of all degree-seeking, first-time, first-year (freshman) enrolled students had a high school GPA greater than or equal to 3.0; and
- What percent had a high school class rank in the top tenth of their graduating class?

The outcome variable on the percentage of minority students was the number of degree-seeking, first-time, first-year students who identified as the following: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, black or African American, or Hispanic/Latino as reported by the institution and divided by the total number

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Variables Included in the Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome Variables</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range or Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of applicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of enrolled freshmen with high school GPA ≥ 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of enrolled freshmen in top 10% of their class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of minority students in freshman class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total yield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predictor Variables</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State unemployment rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of U.S. high school graduates by state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College-Level Variables</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private or public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent admitted (selectivity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The values in this column are across the nine years of data examined in this study.


3 Source: WICHE 2008.
of degree-seeking first-time, first-year students. An additional variable for the percentage of minority students was created that excluded Asian students because such students often are considered as a group to be high-achieving as well as familiar and comfortable with technology. The outcome variable on yield was computed by dividing the total number of first-time, first-year (degree-seeking) students who enrolled by the total number of first-time, first-year (degree-seeking) students who were admitted.

The main predictor variable on the adoption of an online application was taken from responses to the ASC (2011) statement “If your institution’s application can be accessed online, indicate the policy for submission of the application;” responses included “online submission required” and “online submission accepted.” Missing values were imputed if the response from the previous and subsequent survey year matched. For example, if an institution indicated that applicants in 2003 and 2005 were required to apply online yet failed to provide a response in 2004, the institution was coded as requiring an online application in 2004. If an institution was a member of the Common Application as of the 2006–07 academic year, then it was coded as offering an online application because at that time, all members accepted the Common Application electronically. In addition, once an institution was coded as having an online application, all subsequent years were coded similarly. This was in accordance with the assumption that once an institution developed the technology with which to accept online applications, it would be unlikely to revert to accepting paper applications.

The three control variables were unemployment rate, number of high school graduates, and application fee. The unemployment rate variable was coded by year in the state in which the institution was located (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011). Similarly, the number of high school graduates was the total number of public and non–public high school graduates by year in the state in which the institution was located (WICHE 2008). The application fee variable was taken from a question on the ASC.

Two variables—control of the institution (public = 0 and private = 1) and the percentage of freshman applicants admitted to the institution (often considered a measure of an institution’s selectivity)—were used to explain differences in the initial levels and rates of change in the outcome variables across different institutions.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND ANALYSES
A series of piecewise growth models (also known as interrupted time-series models) was used to answer the research questions. Such models are appropriate for determining the impact of a specific event on trends in one or more outcome variables. The transition to an online application was hypothesized to correspond to a discontinuity in the trends that existed prior to the transition. Singer and Willett (2003) provide a detailed description of this analytic method. We postulated that there would be a shift in the levels and/or rates of change in the outcome variables after institutions made their applications available online. The null hypothesis was no change in the trends that existed prior to institutions’ making their applications available online. There were three possible alternative hypotheses regarding the total number of applications (Singer and Willett 2003):

- There was an immediate increase (or decrease) in the number of applications, but the rate of change remained the same as before the application was made available online;
- There was no immediate increase (or decrease) in the number of applications, but the rate of change increased significantly; and
- There was an immediate change in both the number of applications and the rate of change.

Similar hypotheses applied to each of the other outcome variables examined in this study. To capture the potential immediate shift in the outcome variables once an institution made its application available online, a binary variable was created to indicate whether the institution had an online application available for each of the nine years. An additional predictor variable was created to model a discontinuity in the rate of change (or slope) once an institution’s application was made available online. (See the appendix for a full description of the piecewise growth modeling approach used in this study.)

RESULTS
Table 2, on page 7, displays the trends (means and standard deviations) from 2001 to 2009 for each variable examined in this study. From 2001 through 2009, there was a sharp increase—from 53 percent to 97 percent—in the percentage of institutions utilizing online applications. This period also witnessed increases in the mean number of ap-
applicants, the percentage of minority students (including and excluding Asian students), and the percentage of students with high school GPAs greater than or equal to 3.0; however, yield and percent admitted both decreased. The percentage of students in the top 10 percent of their high school class remained stable from 2001 through 2009. The average application fee, state unemployment rate, and number of high school graduates all increased during the same time period.

Impact of the Online Application on the Number of Applicants

Tables 3 and 4, on pages 8 and 9, display the piecewise growth model results for the best-fitting final models. The intercept is interpreted as the mean of the outcome variable holding constant all other variables in the model. The effects for the year variable indicate the rate of change (increase or decrease) in the outcome variable over the nine years for which data were studied. The final model for the total number of applications shows that the mean number of applications in 2001 was 6,737 for public institutions (controlling for percent admitted, unemployment rate, and number of high school graduates). Private institutions received approximately 4,636 fewer applications than did public institutions, reflecting the fact that private institutions typically enroll fewer students than do public institutions. Holding all other variables constant, public institutions experienced an overall increase in the number of applications received of approximately 4 percent (or 300 applications) per year. Private institutions received approximately 191 fewer applications per year than did public institutions, for an annual increase of 5 percent.
The initial effect of the online application was not statistically significant, indicating that the number of applications received did not increase immediately. However, the rate of change (slope) was significant, indicating that once an institution made its application available online, it received approximately 53 more applications per year—that is, 18 percent of the overall increase in the total number of applications received by public institutions and 49 percent of the increase at private institutions. Moreover, for every one-point increase in the percentage of students admitted, the growth rate decreased by approximately six applications, suggesting slower growth in the number of applications submitted to less selective institutions.

Impact of the Online Application on the Type and Qualifications of Applicants

We hypothesized that making an application available online would correspond with a decrease in the qualifications of entering students due to a dilution effect and would potentially decrease the percentage of minority applicants due to their comparative lack of Internet access. The growth model results indicate that there was a significant increase in all four outcome variables over the nine years for which data were analyzed, but the trend was not affected by institutions’ having an online application. The addition of a squared term to the model for high school GPA greater than or equal to 3.0 was statistically significant, indicating

Table 3. Results for Final Piecewise Growth Models (Fixed Effects)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Applications</th>
<th>HSGPA &gt;= 3.0</th>
<th>Top 10%</th>
<th>% Minority Students</th>
<th>% Minority (excluding Asian)</th>
<th>Total Yield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>6,736.71**</td>
<td>70.03**</td>
<td>21.47**</td>
<td>21.94**</td>
<td>13.97**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Admittedb</td>
<td>-98.84**</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>-0.54**</td>
<td>-0.20**</td>
<td>-0.10**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>-4,636.19**</td>
<td>3.03*</td>
<td>5.22**</td>
<td>-5.48**</td>
<td>-3.91**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yearc</td>
<td>299.74**</td>
<td>1.15**</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.49**</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Admittedb</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>-191.39**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.16*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Squared</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.08**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Cubed</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rateb</td>
<td>48.22**</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduatesb</td>
<td>0.01**</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01*</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01**</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application Feeb</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.05**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Online Application Effects

| Initial effect (Intercept) | - | - | 0.06 | - | - | -1.15* |
| Percent Admittedb          | - | - | -    | - | - | -0.08 |
| Rate of Change (Slope)     | 52.78* | 0.04 | -0.12 | - | - | -0.45* |
| Percent Admittedb          | -6.18** | 0.01** | - | - | - |

* For this outcome variable, a reduced data file was used with non-missing values on the application fee variable.

b These variables were grand mean centered.

c Year was centered at 2001.

d Variables that were not statistically significant at p < 0.05 in previous models were excluded from the final model.

** p < 0.01
*p < 0.05
a steeper increase in the trend in earlier years and a leveling off (i.e., ceiling effect) around 2005. Using the two different variables for the percentage of minority students did not result in any meaningful differences in the growth model results; that is, excluding Asian students from the percentage of minority students did not have an impact on the results.

The results did not support our hypotheses. The initial effects (intercept) and rate of change (slope) were not statistically significant in the final models, suggesting that the transition to an online application did not have a significant effect on any of the variables related to the type and qualifications of students. Nevertheless, as the percentage of admitted students increased, there was a small but significant increase once applications were made available online in the percentage of students with a high school GPA greater than or equal to 3.0.

**Impact of the Online Application on Institutions’ Yields**

Amid the trend of decreasing yields displayed in Table 2, we hypothesized a significant additional decrease when institutions made their applications available online; we anticipated that this would be the result of students’ submitting applications to greater numbers of institutions that they were not seriously considering attending. The growth model results indicate that the average yield for public institutions in 2001, holding constant the other variables in the model, was approximately 50 percent and decreased by approximately 1.11 percentage points per year thereafter. The higher the percentage of students admitted, the lower the initial yield; private institutions experienced an even lower initial yield (approximately 41%). The squared and cubic effects were statistically significant, suggesting that the trend across all institutions was not strictly linear—that is, it did not decrease at the same rate each year.

The initial effect of the online application (intercept) indicated a significant initial decrease in institutional yield. The higher the percentage of applicants admitted, the smaller the initial decrease. There was also a significant change in the rate of decrease. Holding constant the other variables in the model, once applications were made available online, the rate in which yield declined increased by .45 percentage points. Overall, our hypothesis regarding the effect of online applications on institutions’ yields was supported: Yield decreased significantly once an institution made its application available online, with more significant decreases the year after it began accepting online applications and each year thereafter.

Table 4 shows significant variability across institutions in the initial rates (intercepts), growth rates (slopes), and effects of the online application that were not accounted for by the variables included in the growth models.
DISCUSSION

Although online applications are ubiquitous in higher education, this study provides a retrospective examination of how they had an impact on certain trends in college admissions. Findings suggest that once an institution made its application available online, there was no immediate change in the number of applications received—approximately 33 applications per year—which accounted for approximately 18 percent of the increase in applications submitted to public universities and nearly half of the increase at private institutions. This finding may encourage institutions that have not yet done so to make their applications available online so as to attract additional students. Findings indicate as well that the transition to an online application did not affect the qualifications of students who ultimately enrolled at the institutions. A caveat is that the outcome variables of students’ high school qualifications and minority status were based on institutions’ enrolled freshman classes rather than applicants. Many factors shape an institution’s enrolled freshman class and may render it different from the overall pool of applicants. Analysis of ASC data proved unable to directly answer the question about the effect of the online application on the numbers of applications submitted by minority students. Thus, this question was answered indirectly by considering the percentage of minority students in each institution’s freshman class and may render it different from the overall control variables.

The results of this study provide support for the hypothesis that institutions’ yields would decrease after they made their applications available online. In fact, the data demonstrate that the greater the percentage of students admitted, the smaller the initial decrease in yield once the application was made available online. This is in concert with the finding that institutions that admitted a larger percentage of applicants experienced smaller increases in the total number of applications submitted after their applications were made available online. Taken together, these results suggest that the online application was more likely to increase the number of applications at selective colleges—those that many students might consider “reach” schools. The ease of applying online may have increased the number of “reach” schools to which students applied.

The results of this study also indicate that there was significant variability in the means (intercepts) and rates of change (slopes) for all outcome variables, meaning that institutional trends varied greatly. The two college-level variables—public/private and percentage of applicants admitted—accounted for some of this variability, but significant variability remains to be explained. Future research should consider whether the trends are more pronounced at specific types of institutions and whether additional institutional characteristics (e.g., institutional size, geographic region, etc.) are associated with this variability.

Two of the control variables—state unemployment rate and number of high school graduates—were dependent on the state in which each institution in the study was located. However, students from any number of other states may have applied to any given institution. Nevertheless, these variables proved significant predictors of many of the outcome variables in this study, validating their selection as control variables.

Given that technology now pervades nearly every aspect of higher education, from student recruitment to online classes, it is necessary to evaluate its effects—intended as well as unintended. This is particularly true if the use of technology has a differential impact on certain groups of students—as well as on critical institutional outcomes such as yield and selectivity.

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About the Author

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APPENDIX
Description of Piecewise Growth Modeling Approach

A model-building approach was used to determine the set of variables that best modeled the trend in each outcome variable. Full maximum likelihood estimation was used in all models. The year variable was centered at 2001 so that the intercept represented the mean of the outcome variable in 2001, holding constant the other variables in the model. The first model was an unconditional linear growth model with no predictor variables that examined whether the trend in each outcome variable was significant and whether there was significant variability across institutions. If the nonlinear terms were not statistically significant (p ≥ 0.05), they were removed from the model. The next model added three control variables: application fee, state unemployment rate, and the number of high school graduates in the state. These variables were grand mean centered, and their slope was fixed across institutions. All three control variables were entered into the piecewise growth models, but only those found to be statistically significant at p < 0.05 were retained in the final models.

The next set of models included the variables to model a change in the intercept and/or slope once an institution’s application was made available online and/or when a third model added both terms to determine the joint changes in the intercept and slope. Aikake’s Information Criterion (AIC) and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) were both used to identify the model that best fit the data, and the model with the smallest AIC and/or BIC was selected. Finally, the college-level variables (institutional type and percent of admitted students) were added to the best-fitting models to attempt to explain the variability in the intercepts and slopes across institutions. The percent of admitted students was grand mean centered. The final models included the college-level variables that were statistically significant at p < 0.05.
The purpose of this study was to identify those factors that were most important in student-athletes’ decision to attend the United States Military Academy (USMA). This study utilized two surveys to collect data from 1,158 freshmen (pledge cadets) at USMA in the class of 2004. The population included 310 student-athletes and 848 non-athletes. Twenty-three college selection factors were identified and utilized in the study. Data were analyzed using a repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and follow-up post-hoc pairwise comparisons in order to determine the relative importance of these selection factors for various groups of USMA students. The three main groups used for analysis were student-athletes, revenue sport student-athletes, and non-revenue sport student-athletes. Gender was also considered for each of the groups.

The results indicated certain factors that were important to the different groups of student-athletes in their college selection process. For all groups, excellent teachers were the most important factor in selecting USMA. Coaches at service academies should emphasize the quality of teachers, the opportunity to play at the Division I level, the high-quality academics and excellent academic reputation, the athletic tradition and reputation, the opportunity to win championships, and the campus environment (to include the campus visit) when recruiting prospective student-athletes. Coaches also should build positive relationships with parents as well as student-athletes during the recruitment process. USMA graduates, too, can have a positive impact. The study also revealed that other factors not listed in the two surveys were important for prospective student-athletes; these factors varied somewhat according to the student-athletes’ gender and sport classification. Coaches can use this information to become more effective and efficient in their recruitment of student-athletes for the United States Military Academy. Service academies and Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs also may use this information in recruiting future officers.
Selecting a college is one of the most important decisions high school students make. The process of evaluating various colleges and arriving at a final decision involves the complex interaction of many variables, including parental encouragement and support, academics, and alumni, among others. Some students and parents systematically investigate numerous colleges by visiting campuses and college websites, meeting with alumni and faculty, and carefully considering the financial costs as well as the pros and cons of each potential college choice. This approach is labor and time intensive but results in an informed decision. Others conduct very little research about the various options and make an emotional decision at the last minute. This approach typically culminates in a less than optimal decision, which can result in dissatisfaction with the college and the student transferring to another institution.

Colleges use open houses, campus visits, and promotional literature, phone calls, e-mails and Web sites to provide prospective students and their parents with as much information as possible. Many studies have investigated the factors that impact students’ choice of college (Canale et al. 1996, Letawsky 2003). College admissions departments have attempted to utilize information from these studies to enhance their recruitment efforts.

Athletes must take into account additional considerations, such as the coach, team, travel, competition, and the impact of playing a sport on academics. Like all students, student-athletes and their parents attempt to make the best decision based on the information available to them.

Particularly in today’s competitive environment, every coach seeks to recruit outstanding student-athletes who can excel in the classroom as well as on the playing field. Although many coaches dislike recruiting, most agree that it is the lifeblood of any successful college program. Indeed, the success of an athletic program may be determined to a large extent by the coach’s ability to attract and retain top student-athletes. Athletic departments allocate significant time, money, and personnel to recruitment. “Coaches spend as much or more time recruiting players as they do coaching their teams” (Bunn 1961 cited by Reynaud 1998). It takes a great deal of time and money to identify prospective student-athletes; to visit players, their families, and their coaches at their homes; to host prospective players during campus visits; and, in most instances, to award athletic scholarships (Fielitz 2000). In order to maximize the investment in resources and minimize the amount of time spent to attract quality recruits, coaches need to concentrate their efforts on those prospects that are most likely to attend their institution. Coaches could optimize their recruitment budgets and schedules if they knew which factors attract student-athletes to particular universities.

Many research studies have focused on the “major” sports of football and men’s basketball; fewer have focused on either the “minor” sports or women’s sports. Neverthe-

The purpose of this study was to identify those factors of greatest influence in student-athletes’ decisions to attend the United States Military Academy (USMA). Recruiting students and athletes at a service academy—and, specifically, at USMA—is a unique process that involves the admissions department, members of Congress, alumni, and college coaches, to name just a few. Therefore, knowledge of the factors that influence student-athletes’ choice of USMA and other service academies is important. The recruiting process could be more effective and efficient if factors that influence prospective student-athletes’ decision-making process were identified. Until now, these factors have never been investigated at USMA.

The research questions guiding this study were:

- What factors are most important in male and female student-athletes’ decisions to attend the United States Military Academy?
- What factors are most important in male and female “revenue sport” student-athletes’ decisions to attend the United States Military Academy?
- What factors are most important in male and female “non–revenue sport” student-athletes’ decisions to attend the United States Military Academy?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The college selection process has been examined from many different perspectives. Bell, Raiffa and Tversky (1988) and Resnik (1987), utilizing the work of von Neumann and Morgenstern (1947), developed the method of measuring the strength of a person’s preference for an outcome by assessing risks that he is willing to take to receive it. Using this method, they were able to numerically represent a non-numeric structure and provide a method of comparison from person to person.

Jackson (1982) proposed two models—one sociological and one economic—for prospective students’ selection of the appropriate college. The sociological model focused on the real or perceived importance of a college education. The economic model focused on the geographic, economic, and academic factors that influence students’ college choice.

Numerous studies have identified college selection factors ranging from academic reputation to excellent teachers to alumni (Canale et al. 1998, Delaney 1998, Erdmann 1983, Rhoundy and Rho 1973, Dambrot 1984, Heilman 1988, Letawsky et al. (2003), Goss et al. (2007), Pauline et al. (2008), and Smith (2008) have investigated college selection factors ranging from academics, academic major, and college reputation, to the high school or college coaching staff, to the opportunity to win championships.

METHODOLOGY

The population for this study included all 1,158 freshman (plebe) cadets in the USMA class of 2004. The population included 996 males (83.4%) and 192 females (16.6%). The total number of athletes in the class was 310 (26.8%), of which 228 were male (19.7 percent of the total population and 73.5 percent of the student-athletes of the class of 2004) and 82 were female (7.1 percent of the total population and 26.5 percent of the student-athletes). The mean age of the population was 18.7 years.

The athletes were identified by each coach on the admission support form in the Office of the Director of Intercollegiate Athletics (ODIA). Students not classified as athletes by ODIA were placed in the non-athlete category and were not included in this study.

Instrumentation

The American Council on Education (ACE) questionnaire and Class Characteristics Inventory (CCIN) were used to collect data. The ACE questionnaire has been administered annually for the past 45 years to freshmen at approximately 700 colleges and universities throughout the United States (American Council on Education 2009). The CCIN is also a widely used survey instrument designed to examine college students’ opinions (Astin 1993, Boruch and Creager 1972). USMA has utilized both surveys for more than 35 years (Office of Institutional Re-
Both include Likert scales and have content validity (Boruch and Creager).

A review of the literature resulted in the identification of several college decision factors that the two questionnaires do not consider—to include parental goals and encouragement, college coach/coaching staff, high school coach, current team members, athletic reputation/tradition, opportunity to play at the Division I level, campus, opportunity to win championships, and excellent teachers. The category “other” thus was included to determine whether any additional factors would emerge. The Office of Institutional Research granted permission for the researchers to formulate eleven questions that were included in the CCIN.

A pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability of the additional questions and to ensure that student-athletes were able to understand them. Using the same format as the original inventory, the survey was administered to 74 male and female student-athletes. A Cronbach alpha test revealed the reliability of the questions to be .73, which falls within the range of the ACE survey’s reliability. No problems related to the understandability of the questions were encountered or reported. The questions therefore were appended to the CCIN when it was administered.

**Procedures**

The Office of Institutional Research received approval from USMA to administer the two questionnaires (ACE and CCIN) that provided the data for this study. In addition, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the study was sought and granted. Students’ completion of the questionnaires was voluntary. The response rate was 98.1 percent, even with the resignation of 22 students between the administrations of the two questionnaires.

Both questionnaires were computer-scored by the Office of Institutional Research; raw data were provided in SPSS format to the researchers, who then added the fields of athlete, revenue sport, and individual sport. (These coded fields were used to identify group membership for the data analysis.) All other identifying characteristics were removed from the data.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics and repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used to analyze ACE and CCIN responses to determine the importance of the selection factors by student-athletes, revenue sport student-athletes, and non–revenue sport student-athletes. Gender data for each group were also analyzed.

A MANOVA is a statistical procedure used to test the effect of one or more independent variables on two or more dependent variables (Creech 2013). The means, standard deviations, and appropriate frequencies were reported for the entire population as well as for the subgroups addressed by each research question. (Demographic information is described below.) Prior to using the repeated measures MANOVA, the SPSS EXPLORE function was utilized; no outliers were identified. In addition, the associated assumptions of homogeneity, linearity, multivariate normality, and dependence were met (Tabachnick and Fidell 1996).

**RESULTS**

Of the 1,158 questionnaires, 1,050 were complete and in useable form for the MANOVA, for a response rate of 90.7 percent. The repeated measures MANOVA was conducted on six different sub-groups: male and female student-athletes, male and female revenue-sport student-athletes, and male and female non–revenue sport student-athletes.

**Demographics**

Of the total student population, 310 (26.8%) participated in USMA athletic programs. The population’s mean age was 18.7 years. The percentage of female student-athletes (26.5%) was higher than the percentage of females in the student population as a whole (13.0%), and the percentage of male student-athletes (73.5%) was lower than the percentage of males in the student population as a whole (87.0%). (See Table 1, on page 16.) Caucasians constituted the largest proportion (82.3%) of the student-athlete population while African Americans accounted for 77 percent and Hispanics for 4.5 percent. African Americans comprised 16.4 percent of the revenue sport population—more than double the percentage of African Americans in the overall student-athlete population.

In addition, the mean values of students’ standardized test scores (SAT/ACT) were calculated for each group. (See Table 2, on page 16.)

Some studies indicate that income levels and location are factors in the college decision process (Conley 1981,
More than 75% of parents of USMA student-athletes had annual incomes greater than $60,000 while more than 62 percent of parents of USMA non-athletes had comparable income levels. Parents of USMA non–revenue sport student-athletes (80.9%) and of female USMA student-athletes (79.3%) had annual household incomes in excess of $60,000.

Greater than half of student-athletes lived more than 500 miles from USMA. For the vast majority of student-athletes (88.3%), the Academy was their top college choice. Approximately one-third of the student-athletes had either a father or mother with previous military experience, and approximately 86 percent of student-athletes’ parents had graduated from college.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 1**: What factors are most important in male and female student-athletes’ decisions to attend the United States Military Academy?

Two separate SPSS repeated measures MANOVAs were used to analyze the data. The fixed categorical variables were male student-athletes and female student-athletes; 23 continuous random variables were identified in the literature as important factors in students’ choice of college.
Responses utilized a five-point Likert scale, with five being most important and one being of no importance. Because the sample included only one group, assumptions of normality, homogeneity, linearity, and dependence were met. (See Table 3 for the top five selection factors as well as the means and standard deviations for each.) A total of 198 out of a possible 228 male student-athletes completed the pertinent questions, for a response rate of 86.8 percent.

The Wilkes Lambda statistic ($F = 129.44; \text{df.} = 22, 176; p < 0.05$) indicated that 94.2 percent of the variance could be accounted for by the 23 decision factors. The post-hoc pairwise comparisons demonstrated a significant difference among 11 groups of variables. The most important factor in male student-athletes’ decision to attend USMA was excellent teachers. This factor was significantly different from all other factors ($M = 4.60, p < 0.05$). The next most important factor was the opportunity to play sports at the Division I level. Parental influence, the campus environment/campus visit, the college coach/coaching staff, the academics/academic reputation of the Academy, the opportunity to win championships, and the Academy’s athletic reputation/tradition comprised the third group of factors. The fourth group of factors included USMA alumni and other factors not included in the questionnaire.

Female student-athletes’ responses were analyzed in the same way. (See Table 4, on page 18.) A total of 72 out of a possible 82 female student-athletes answered the pertinent questions, for a response rate of 87.8 percent.

The Wilkes Lambda statistic ($F = 33.34; \text{df.} = 22, 50; p < 0.05$) indicated that 93.6 percent of the variance could be accounted for by the 23 decision factors. The post-hoc pairwise comparisons demonstrated a significant difference among seven groups of variables. As for male student-athletes, the most important factor in female student-athletes’ decisions to attend USMA was excellent teachers ($p < 0.05$). The next group of factors included parental influence, the opportunity to play sports at the Division I level, the academics/academic reputation of the Academy, the college coach/coaching staff, the athletic reputation/tradition, and the campus/campus visit.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What factors are most important in male and female “revenue-sport” student-athletes’ decisions to attend the United States Military Academy?**

A total of 97 out of a possible 112 male USMA revenue sport (i.e., football, basketball, ice hockey, and lacrosse) student-athletes answered the pertinent questions, for a response rate of 86.6 percent. (See Table 5, on page 18, for the means and standard deviations for each variable.) The Wilkes Lambda statistic ($F = 57.59; \text{df.} = 22, 75; p < 0.05$) indicated that 94.4 percent of the variance could

### Table 3.

**Means and standard deviations of male USMA student-athletes’ selection factors (N=198)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Question (Factor, Question #)</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Degree of influence in your decision to attend USMA: Excellent teachers (Excellent teachers, CCIN question #91)</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Degree of influence in your decision to attend USMA: Chance to play sports at the Division I level (Play at Division I level, CCIN Question #88)</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What type of influence did your parents have on your decision to consider USMA as a college option? (Parental influence, CCIN Question #65)</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Degree of influence in your decision to attend USMA: Campus (Campus/Campus visit, CCIN Question #89)</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Degree of influence in your decision to attend USMA: College coach/coaching staff (College coach/Coaching staff, CCIN #84)</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
be accounted for by the 23 decision factors. The post-hoc pairwise comparisons indicated a significant difference among eight groups of variables. The most important factors in male revenue-sport student-athletes’ decision to attend USMA were the chance to play at the Division I level, excellent teachers, and the head coach and coaching staff; these factors were significantly different from all others (p < 0.05). The next group of factors that differed significantly from the remaining factors included the opportunity to win championships, campus/campus visit, parental influence, athletic reputation/tradition, academics/academic reputation, and alumni.

Data for female USMA revenue sport student-athletes (i.e., basketball) were analyzed according to the same 23 variables. (See Table 6 for the means and standard deviations for each variable.) A total of eight out of a possible ten female revenue-sport student-athletes completed the pertinent questions, for a response rate of 80.0 percent.

The Wilkes Lambda statistic could not be calculated because of the small sample size and insufficient degrees of freedom. The post-hoc pairwise comparisons demonstrated a significant difference among four groups of variables. The most important factors in female revenue-sport student-athletes’ decisions to attend USMA were excellent teachers, the opportunity to compete at the Division I level, and the college coach/coaching staff. These factors differed significantly from all other factors (p < 0.05).

**RESEARCH QUESTION 3:** What factors are most important in male and female “non–revenue sport” student-athletes’ decisions to attend the United States Military Academy?

A total of 101 out of a possible 116 male non–revenue sport student-athletes completed the pertinent questions, for a response rate of 87.1 percent. (See Table 7, on page 19, for the means and standard deviations for the top five variables.)

The Wilkes Lambda statistic (F = 90.15; d.f. = 22, 79; p < 0.05) indicated that 96.2 percent of the variance could be accounted for by the 23 decision factors. The post-hoc pairwise comparisons demonstrated significant differ-
ence among nine groups of variables. As for other subgroups, the most important factor in male non–revenue sport student-athletes’ decisions to attend USMA was excellent teachers ($p < 0.05$). The next group of factors included the opportunity to compete at the Division I level, academics/academic reputation, and parental influence. The third group of factors included the campus/campus visit, other factors not listed in the questionnaires, alumni, the opportunity to win championships, and the Academy’s athletic tradition/reputation.

Data for female non–revenue sport student-athletes were analyzed according to the same 23 variables. (See Table 8 for the means and standard deviations for the top six variables.) A total of 64 out of a possible 72 female USMA non–revenue sport student-athletes completed the pertinent questions, for a response rate of 88.9 percent.

The Wilkes Lambda statistic ($F = 28.44$; d.f. = 22, 42; $p < 0.05$) indicated that 93.7 percent of the variance could be accounted for by the 23 decision factors. The post-hoc pairwise comparisons demonstrated a significant difference among eight groups of variables. The most important factor in female non–revenue sport student-athletes’ decisions to attend USMA was excellent teachers ($p < 0.05$). The next group of factors included parental influence, academics/academic reputation of the Academy, the opportunity to compete at the Division I level, athletic reputation/tradition, college coach/coaching staff, and the campus/campus visit.

**DISCUSSION**

Several significant factors—including academic, athletic, and ecological (i.e., items that affect change in a population in a given environment [Palaeos.org 2008]) factors—influenced student-athletes’ decision to attend USMA. “Excellent teachers” was the most important factor for all groups except male revenue student-athletes, for whom excellent teachers and the opportunity to play sports at the Division I level were the most important factors. Canale *et al.* (1996) and Delaney (1998) also found that excellent teachers and teacher availability were the most

**Table 7.**  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Male Non–Revenue Sport Student-Athletes’ Selection Factors (N=101)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Excellent Teachers</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Play at the Division I Level</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Academics/Academic Reputation</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parental Influence</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Campus/Campus Visit</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8.**  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Female Non-Revenue Sport Student-Athletes’ Selection Factors (N=64)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Excellent Teachers</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parental Influence</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Academics/Academic Reputation</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Play at the Division I Level</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Athletic Reputation/Tradition</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>College Coach/Coaching Staff</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
had similar findings in her study of female college basketball players in Pennsylvania. High levels of internal motivation are important for success not only on the court or on the playing field but also on the battlefield.

Three of the eleven most important college choice factors pertained to academics while four pertained to athletics. Many of the student-athletes gave equal consideration to the quality of the Academy's academics and academic reputation and their desire to earn an engineering degree (area of study). The quality of education at the Academy and the opportunities available after graduation also were important. Numerous studies—including those of Holland (1959) and Delaney (1998)—have identified the important role of academics and academic reputation in prospective students’ college choice process. In fact, academics are important not only for prospective students but also for prospective student-athletes (Dambrot 1984; Heilman 1988). Many of the same studies also found that a particular area of study—in this case, engineering—was a significant selection factor (Canale et al. 1996, Delaney 1998, Erdmann 1983, Gorman 1976, Martin and Dixon 1991, Sanders 1986).

Clearly, the perceived quality of the collegiate coaching staff was an important factor in student-athletes’ decision to attend USMA. Previous studies also identified the importance of the coaching staff in student-athletes’ decisions to attend a particular college (Copeland 1982, Dambrot 1984, Foreman 1981, Heilman 1988, Mathes and Gurney 1985, Reynaud 1998, Rhoundy and Rho 1975). The ability to excel within a high-quality athletic program appeared to play an important role in the college selection process of USMA student-athletes: The opportunities to play at the Division I level and to compete for a championship were both important factors. Many of the same studies that have identified the importance of the college coach also identified the college’s athletic reputation/tradition as important. Reynaud (1998) identified the importance of winning championships in student-athletes’ college choice process. The earlier successes of a college’s athletic teams also has an impact on student-athletes’ college choice process (Goudge 1984).

The third group of factors affecting student-athletes’ decisions to attend USMA included parents, campus visit, and alumni. Combs (1986), in a study conducted at the United States Naval Academy (USNA), and ACE (1996) questionnaire results also found a high degree of parental influence in student-athletes college choice. Combs (1986) found that the high degree of parental influence on students who chose to enroll at USNA related as well to high tuition costs at other colleges and universities. The ACE (1996) questionnaire results indicated that parents were the most influential people in students’ choice of which college to attend. Findings were similar for student-athlete and non-athlete populations who enrolled at civilian colleges (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 1986, Chapman 1981, Erdmann 1983, Gilmour 1981, Gorman 1976, Heilman 1988, Holland 1959, Martin and Dixon 1991, Murphy 1981, Rehberg and Schafer 1968, Reynaud 1998, Rhoundy and Rho 1973, Sevier 1986, Wannar and Bowles 1989). Murphy (1981) reported that the person who controls the flow of information to the student is very important in a student’s college decision. This suggests that parents may have controlled the information that student-athletes received and therefore were instrumental in the college choice process. Although parental influence might decrease over time (McDill and Coleman 1965), it nevertheless was an important factor in their students’ college choice. Although Dambrot (1984) did not find parental influence to be as important a factor in student-athletes’ college choice, the evidence nevertheless attests to the significant influence of parents.

The campus and campus visit were also important factors in the college choice of USMA student-athletes. Mathes and Gurney (1985) found that both the campus environment and campus visit were important selection factors for revenue sports athletes as well as non-revenue sports athletes. The living conditions, surroundings, scenery, and facilities to which prospective student-athletes are exposed are determined somewhat by the timing and activities of the visit scheduled by the coach (Reynaud 1998).

USMA graduates are very active in student recruitment. Gorman (1976), Gilmour (1981), and Erdmann (1983) found that college alumni played an important role in prospective students’ college choice process. West Point alumni have been identified as the second most influential people (the most influential being parents) in student-athletes’ college choice process (ACE 1996).

“Other” factors—that is, factors not listed on the questionnaires—exerted some degree of influence beyond that accounted for by those in the ACE questionnaire. Some
may have been unique to a particular student-athlete and thus may vary among groups of student-athletes. This category should be investigated in future studies—particularly because almost 64 percent of student-athletes indicated that “other” factors influenced their decision to attend West Point.

Interestingly, such factors as the Academy’s location and size as well as social considerations and athletic scholarships consistently ranked lowest in terms of their influence on student-athletes’ college choice. That almost 84 percent of student-athletes live more than 100 miles from campus confirms that the location of the campus was not an important factor. This contradicts findings by Heilman (1988) and Reynaud (1998) but is a logical consequence of the congressional appointments required to gain admission to the Academy. Students who wish to attend civilian colleges typically have numerous local choices available to them. In contrast, students who wish to attend a service academy have almost no choice with regard to campus location. Dambrot (1984) found that for student-athletes who lived more than 500 miles from campus, location was unimportant. His finding is corroborated by the fact that more than 52 percent of the student-athletes in the present study lived more than 500 miles from campus. The availability of athletic scholarships likely was not an important factor because there is no tuition charge for any student to attend USMA, regardless of whether he is a student-athlete.

Another interesting finding was that the desire to be an Army officer was ranked relatively low on the list of important factors in choosing to enroll at USMA. Because all graduates of a service academy have a five-year commitment, it was expected that the desire to be an Army officer would rank higher on the list of factors influencing college choice. The ACE questionnaire (1996) found that 60 percent of respondents indicated that the desire to be an Army officer was the reason they chose to enroll at USMA. Only 52.5 percent of the student-athletes who were surveyed selected this factor while more than 75 percent of the non-athletes selected it as their number-one or major consideration. Greater than 69 percent of the stu-
dent population selected the desire to be an Army officer as their number-one priority or major consideration—an increase over the 60 percent who so reported in 1996. The desire to be an Army officer was less important for student-athletes than for non-athletes. Among revenue sport student-athletes, competing at the Division I level was the most important factor for males and the second most important factor for females. College coaches appeared to be more influential with this group of student-athletes. Female student-athletes were more influenced by alumni and academics than were male student-athletes, who were more affected by the opportunity to win championships and the campus visit.

Non–revenue student-athletes were similar to revenue student-athletes in terms of their interest in competing at the Division I level, but female student-athletes were more likely than their male counterparts to rank their parents as influencing their choice of college.

CONCLUSION

The college decision process is a complex interaction of many different factors. Understanding the factors that influence student-athletes’ college choice is vitally important for effective recruiting. Coaches can enhance their recruitment by highlighting the factors that most influence student-athletes’ college choice and by identifying those student-athletes who are most likely to attend their institution and succeed in the classroom as well as on the playing field.

This study found that excellent teachers were the most important factor in student-athletes’ decisions to attend USMA. In addition to emphasizing the quality of their institutions’ faculty, coaches should highlight the opportunity to compete at the NCAA Division I level. Many prospective student-athletes may not have the talent that top-tier programs seek but wish nevertheless to compete at the highest level of collegiate athletics and have sufficient ability to excel at a mid-major Division I program.

Coaches also need to interact with recruits’ parents as they are extremely influential in their children’s college decision process. Coaches who devote time and energy to their communication with parents will have greater success in signing the student-athletes they seek.

The campus and campus visit are also critical factors in student-athletes’ decision process. Coaches must make the 48 hours that prospects and their parents spend on campus the best possible. Academic and athletic events, meetings with faculty, and time with coaches and prospective teammates will increase the likelihood that recruits will choose to enroll.

Interestingly, the results of this study suggest that USMA coaches do not necessarily need to emphasize preparation for being an officer in their recruitment of student-athletes: only approximately half of student-athletes consider this an important factor in their choice of college.

In order to attract the best student-athletes, coaches should use a balanced approach to recruiting, emphasizing excellence of the Academy’s faculty as well as the student-athletes’ ability to compete at the highest level of collegiate athletics. Coaches also should spend time with prospects’ parents and provide the best possible experience during the campus visit. Coaches who concentrate on these factors will have greater success in the recruiting process and, ultimately, on the athletic field.

REFERENCES

Class Characteristics Inventory (CCIN). 1996. United States Military Academy results.


**About the Authors**

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More homeschooled students than ever before are attending institutions of higher education. If college and university faculty, administrators, and staff are to attract, support and retain these students, it is important for them to understand more about the college experiences of these students. This qualitative study examines the social integration and transition experiences of students attending two different institutions. The role of faculty members, peers, and parents in the social integration and transition process is considered. Implications for those working with homeschooled students are discussed. Social integration has an impact on students’ transition to college as well as on their college experience beyond the first year (Braxton and McClendon 2002; Schaller 2010; Tinto 2006; Townsend and Wilson 2006). While the importance of social integration is well-established, the literature offers little focus on the social integration process of students with homeschooling backgrounds (Saunders 2009). In order to increase awareness and understanding of the impact of homeschooling on incoming college students’ social integration and transition, this qualitative study utilizes Weidman’s (1989) model of undergraduate socialization as a lens through which to research this process.

This article provides an overview of the growing population of homeschoolers, discusses the theoretical perspective and model supporting this research, examines significant literature relevant to understanding the population, and reports on the study and its findings. It concludes by articulating some preliminary recommendations and implications for practice. Increased awareness of the
transition and integration process for homeschooled college entrants will provide valuable information to those striving to create environments conducive to college students' success.

A GROWING POPULATION

Significant documentation confirms the recent increase in homeschooling (Ray 2011; U.S. Department of Education 2008). In 2003, just over one million students were homeschooled (U.S. Department of Education 2006) by 2007, that number had increased to 1.5 million students (U.S. Department of Education 2008). The latest study estimating the number of homeschoolers (Ray 2011) suggests that as many as 2.04 million students in the United States were homeschooled in 2010; this is consistent with growth estimates of approximately eight percent per year (U.S. Department of Education 2008).

As the number of students being homeschooled has increased, so has the number of colleges with documented policies pertaining to homeschooling admissions (Jones and Gloeckner 2004; Klicka 2006). In 1996, approximately 44 percent had such policies, but by 2004, nearly 75 percent of campuses had admissions policies specific to homeschooled applicants (Jones and Gloeckner 2004). While not every campus has such a policy, a report of the 105th Congress (House of Representatives, Report 105–481, Higher Education Amendments of 1998) states

...it is the sense of the Committee that in determining requirements for admission, an institution of higher education that receives federal funds shall make every effort to evaluate and treat applicants from non-public, private, and non-traditional educational programs fairly and in a non-discriminatory manner (p.147).

A small number of books seek to help homeschoolers through the college preparation and selection process (Binz 2013; Byers and Byers 2012). Homeschooled students and their families may be even more likely to seek information on the Internet (at websites such as www.homeschoolfriendlycolleges.com, homeschoolfacts.com,
Many of these sites include links to the admissions Web pages of public and private higher education institutions of varying selectivity.

While Congress encourages equal consideration of traditionally educated and home-educated applicants (without additional requirements for homeschooled applicants), not all campuses are there yet. One example is the University of Washington, whose admission policies treat homeschoolers and other high school graduates differently in regard to college academic distribution requirements (CADR). Specifically, “CADR subjects completed through homeschool coursework require validating test scores” (www.admit.washington.edu/Admission/Freshmen/Homeschool).

While the literature on the topic of homeschoolers’ college experiences is not substantial, a small number of studies in the last decade provide insight into this population and their college experiences (Bolle, Wessel and Mulvihill 2007; Jones 2010; Lattibeaudiere 2000; Saunders 2009; Smiley 2010). Some of this research is quantitative and provides evidence that homeschooled students seem to do at least as well academically as those entering college from more traditional secondary-education backgrounds (Cogan 2010; Drenovsky and Cohen 2012; Duggan 2010; Jones 2010; Jones and Gloeckner 2004). Others studies examine issues related to student transition and experience (Bolle, Wessel and Mulvihill 2007; Smiley 2010).

While awareness of the number of students being homeschooled and of campus admissions policies is increasing, not enough literature on this population exists to inform practice. The homeschooled population may experience social integration in the same way as the traditionally educated student population, but research suggests that homeschoolers may have a somewhat unique college adjustment and integration process (Jones 2010; Smiley 2010). Furthermore, Weidman (1989) suggests that socialization to the undergraduate college experience is affected by the degree of continual influence of parents and/or non-college peer groups, so it is possible that homeschooled students have different transition experiences. Saunders (2009) suggests investigating the “social integration process on their particular college campuses and how their previous educational experiences are perceived by them as being helpful or not helpful” (p. 97). Without such investigations, many questions remain unanswered.

If college and university faculty, administrators, and staff are to understand, reach out to, encourage, and help previously homeschooled students, then it will be necessary to understand more about them, their social integration process, and their experiences of the college community and environment.

**STUDENT TRANSITION**

Many models of college student adjustment, transition, and persistence (continuation with classes and progress toward degree) highlight the impact of students’ prior experiences and background characteristics on the college experience (Astin 1993; Falcone 2011; Lowery-Hart and Pacheco 2011; McLendon, Tintro 1993; Tuchmayer and Park 2010; Weidman 1989). Weidman’s (1989) model of undergraduate socialization includes many of the same elements (e.g., parents’ education level, socioeconomic status, high school preparation) as others’; however, Weidman’s (1989) is unique in that the socialization influences of parents (including their socioeconomic status and background) as well as of outside groups (e.g., clubs or organizations) are emphasized as continual influences on the student experience (Padgett et al. 2010).

**PARENTAL INFLUENCE AND SUPPORT**

The literature on student/parent relationships is substantial and suggests the importance of parental support to a smooth transition to college and adulthood (Chickering and Reisser 1993; Cullaty 2011; Heister, Nordstrom and Swenson 2009; Kolkhorst, Yazdjian and Toews 2010; Levinson 1978). Parental influence is a broad topic, but relevant and important areas related to this study include emotional support, financial status and support, and anticipatory socialization.

**Emotional Support**

Studies demonstrate that the student/parent relationship characterized by emotional support and (the student’s sense of) security is significant in a student’s successful transition to college (Kline and Pierce 2009–2010; Kolkhorst, Yazdjian and Toews 2010; Mattanah, Lopez and Govern 2011). A recent study on parent involvement during the first year of college indicates that parents expect their primary role to be in the area of emotional support
As a general trend, colleges are witnessing increased parental engagement and support of this generation of students (Carney-Hall 2008; Cullaty 2011; Howe and Strauss 2003; Vianden and Ruder 2012). Scholarly suggestions that a positive, secure attachment to parents is beneficial to students navigating the transition to college (Heister, Nordstrom and Swenson 2009; Kenyon and Koerner 2009; Klein and Pierce 2010). Positive attachment is characterized as a close emotional connection which is supportive yet permits the student to act in an independent manner (Kenyon and Koerner 2009; Klein and Pierce 2010). Cullaty (2011) suggests that certain types of parental involvement—namely, parents supporting students without trying to control or dominate—are more effective in moving students toward autonomy—a key element in the developmental process to adulthood (Chickering and Reisser 1993; Levinson 1978).

In the case of homeschooled students, one might expect significant attachment (beyond the traditional parent/child attachment) due to the sheer amount of time spent together. However, an examination of the type and degree of parental support and attachment desired by previously homeschooled college students does not exist (Cogan 2010; Drenovsky and Cohen 2012; Saunders 2009). Nevertheless, there is evidence that the family continues to play an active and essential role for homeschoolers once they enter college (Smiley 2010). Many homeschooled students attend college close to home (Smiley 2010); it seems reasonable to expect that family relationships might exert significant influence.

Economic Influence and Support

Students from families with higher socioeconomic status (SES) have advantages that their peers from families with lower SES backgrounds do not have (Walpole 2003). While the availability of financial resources is a key component in any discussion of SES, the importance of cultural capital should also be noted (Wells 2009). Cultural capital is symbolic wealth passed on to children in the form of knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, expectations, and privilege (Bourdieu 1986; Wells 2009).

A report (Radford, Berkner, Wheeless and Shepherd 2010) that followed students who enrolled in 2003-04 indicates that six years after beginning postsecondary education, those from higher SES backgrounds had higher bachelor’s degree completion rates. In fact, as income levels increased, so did bachelor’s degree completion rates. Studies of the SES of homeschooled students vary in their findings, but it is generally acknowledged that homeschoolers tend to come from at least somewhat higher socioeconomic backgrounds than their non-homeschooled counterparts (Bilick and Chandler 2001; Rudner 1999). In addition, the percentage of parents of homeschoolers who are college graduates is higher than that of parents of non-homeschooled students (Bilick and Chandler 2001).

The financial and cultural capital affecting students’ attitudes, expectations, and behavior is significant in the process of social integration. Helland, Stallings, and Braxton (2002) studied the relationship of students leaving college to student expectations and conclude that “the fulfillment of social expectations exerts a direct and positive influence on two key facets of the student departure process: social integration and subsequent institutional commitment” (p.395). Evidence suggests that homeschoolers are likely to have the cultural capital that is required to foster social integration and college transition and persistence.

Kolkhorst, Yazedian, and Toews (2010) investigated student perceptions of parental support and found that students often reached out to their parents for financial and (less often) emotional support. Students reported that their parents helped defray the cost of tuition, books, and school-related expenses (Carney-Hall 2008). A recent study by Wightman, Schoen, and Robinson (2012) examined parents’ financial assistance of young adults and indicates that approximately 35 percent of parents help with college tuition (with those in higher income brackets assisting more often); others help with rent, transportation, and other expenses young adults typically incur. Students whose parents provide even modest sums of money may work fewer hours and thus be able to focus more on their academics. Indeed, students often require monetary support in order to have a successful transition to college. Previously homeschooled students thus may be at an advantage due to their parents’ typically higher income levels.

PEER INFLUENCE

Just as parental influence plays a significant role in students’ adjustment to college, so do their peer interactions. Newcomb (Feldman and Newcomb 1969; Newcomb and Wilson 1966) examined peer group effects for several years.
beginning in 1943. Interest in peer group influence was renewed in the 1980s (Milem 1998). Astin’s (1993) work is perhaps the most widely recognized and referenced and suggests that peers play a vital and possibly pervasive part in the adjustment process. Regular interaction with peers is related not only to students’ academic and social adjustment but also to their positive well-being and persistence (Dennis, Phinney and Chuatecho 2005; Grant-Vallone et al. 2004; Oseguera and Rhee 2008). In fact, Dennis, Phinney, and Chuatecho (2005) found that first-generation minority students’ informal peer relationships and support are a stronger factor than parental support in terms of the students’ college grades and adjustment.

While peer interaction is important to students’ adjustment to and success in college, clinging too tightly to pre-college friendships may be detrimental. Paul and Brier (2001) and Christie and Dinham (1991) evaluated the impact of holding on to friendships established prior to college and found that students who focused on past relationships had difficulty being away from those friendships and were not as well-integrated into their new environments as were students who were more focused on new friendships; this is consistent with Weidman’s (1989) findings. A key challenge for new college students is learning to balance established social relationships with the development of new ones (Vianden and Ruder 2012). When this research is viewed alongside that on the roles of family support and peer influence, it becomes evident that there is a delicate balance between severing ties and forming new relationships. Social enmeshment in the past as well as social isolation in the college environment can hinder students’ adjustment to college.

Many homeschoolers have been educated primarily in the presence of other homeschoolers and/or their siblings. Although many have been involved in homeschool, community groups, and church groups as well as dance, arts, and language programs (Holder 2001; Jones 2010), their limited social encounters with a more diverse (and likely
larger) group of public- or privately educated peers may have an impact on their college experience. Jones (2010) found that homeschooled students participated in fewer scouting events, sports activities, and group project experiences than their traditionally educated counterparts and that they reported adjusting to college at a slightly lower rate than their non-homeschooled peers. Lattibeaudiere (2000) also found evidence of previously homeschooled students’ somewhat slower transition to college, even when the transition was generally positive.

Differences in the types of events in which students participate could have an impact on their social integration into the institution. Homeschooled students who are accustomed to seeking support from family and other homeschoolers may devote more time to existing relationships than to developing new relationships—and thereby limit their social integration on campus.

**FACULTY INFLUENCE**

Interaction with parents and peers is only part of the social and personal adjustment process: First-year students also report the importance of faculty relationships to feeling connected to the college community (Donahue 2004). For decades, the literature has reported that college success and adjustment are fostered by positive experiences with professors (Feldman and Newcomb 1969; Graunke and Wooley 2005; Light 2001; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991; Strage 2000). “Next to the peer group, the faculty represents the most significant aspect of the student’s undergraduate development” (Astin 1993, p. 410).

Contact with professors both inside and outside the classroom is important. “Indeed, the literature is compelling that faculty educational potency is significantly enhanced in those campus settings where their contacts with undergraduate students extend beyond the classroom to informal, non-classroom settings” (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991, p. 31). Chambers’ (2010) study based on open-ended comments from the National Survey of Student Engagement reported students’ desire for stronger faculty relationships when they were lacking.

Homeschooled students’ backgrounds are varied: some have been taught by only one or two adults throughout their education while others have been involved in groups or co-ops in which various subjects are taught to groups of homeschoolers (Jones 2010; Smiley 2010). Depending on their prior experience, homeschooled students may need additional support to become accustomed to multiple teachers, to include their expectations, personalities, and teaching methods (Kranzow 2012). All of these factors might affect a student’s relationships with faculty members—and, thus, his social integration at college.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

This qualitative study was implemented at two private Christian institutions in the midwest. Participant selection was purposeful (Creswell 2007) and was facilitated by two key administrators at the two sites where data were collected. Students were of traditional college age (i.e., between eighteen and 22 years of age), in their first or second year of college, and had been homeschooled at least during their high school years. A total of eighteen students participated in semi-structured, open-ended interviews.

Students were interviewed for approximately one hour each. Following the interview, two students e-mailed further personal reflections on particular topics. All eighteen students were invited to participate in a follow-up focus group, the purpose of which was to gain insight into emerging themes and to ensure the trustworthiness of the data (Merriam 2009). Seven students attended one of two focus groups that lasted approximately 45 minutes each. Those students who were unable to attend a focus group were invited to review some of the findings and to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with or wished to comment both on the researcher’s perceptions of what had been communicated and on emergent findings.

All interview and focus group data were transcribed. Coding of these data facilitated the identification of emergent themes as well as categorization of the data (Creswell 2007). Data pertinent to understanding the social integration and transition process provided the basis for the research findings reported below. (See the Table 1, on page 30.)

Before reporting and considering the findings of this study, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by social integration. In the higher education literature, the term typically is synonymous with social engagement (Tinto 2006), although some scholars have adopted the phrase “sense of belonging” (Hurtado and Carter 1997), thus emphasizing the psychological component of the social context and not relying merely on the frequency of a student’s social interactions (Falcone 2011). In the international and intercultural
literature, social integration “refers to the quantity and quality of social connections and interactions that people have with others” (Rubin, Watt and Ramelli 2012, p. 1). In this study, social integration is considered to involve both “sense of belonging” and engagement and thus considers connections of value as well as frequency.

Table 1. Summary of Participant Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student1</th>
<th>Number of Years Homeschooled</th>
<th>Current Class Standing</th>
<th>Mother’s Education</th>
<th>Father’s Education</th>
<th>Homeschool Group</th>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>University2</th>
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<td>Associate</td>
<td>Some College</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>Ellie</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxanne</td>
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<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Two Master’s</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misty</td>
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<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brock</td>
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<td>First Year</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Associate (Student Uncertain)</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star</td>
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<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>First Year</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Two Master’s</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Some College</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>African American/White</td>
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<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Bachelor’s</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
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<td>Some College</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carly</td>
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<td>First Year</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
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<td>Master’s</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Names are pseudonyms.
2 A and B represent the two private Christian postsecondary institutions at which study participants were enrolled.
FINDINGS

The interviews and focus groups provided insights that add to the literature on homeschoolers’ transition to college and, specifically, to understanding of the factors which have an impact on their social integration. First we consider the faculty influence on the social integration and transition process for previously homeschooled students; then we consider peer influence and, finally, parental influence. Direct quotes of the research participants’ statements increase the trustworthiness of the data (Merriam 2009).

Faculty Influence on Social Integration and Transition

Fourteen students spoke of their comfort level with the faculty from the time of their arrival on campus. Abby (a pseudonym) mentioned having no apprehension when approaching a faculty member and explained that her boyfriend (who had not been homeschooled) had observed this quality in her and found it unusual. She said,

Actually my boyfriend calls me weird all the time because it’ll be a professor and I’ll know him so I’ll just talk to him on the way back from chapel to classes or I’ll go up afterwards and ask him how he’s doing, ask him how his break was… There’s not many people that do that.

Abby’s interaction with faculty outside of class is a positive indicator of her social integration. Kuh and Hu (2001) found in their survey of more than 5,000 students that “students reported relatively little personal or social contact with faculty out of class” (p. 317). Abby and other students noted their comfort level with faculty and discussed how their adjustment and social connections extended naturally to faculty and other adults on campus. Students communicated respect for their professors but also viewed them as friends. One student mentioned that having had a parent as a teacher for so long, it would be strange not to have a relationship with a faculty member.

This study found that homeschoolers are similar to other students in that meaningful faculty interactions are important (Chambers 2010; Kuh and Hu 2001); however, it is possible that faculty interactions are even more critical to their social integration and adjustment than to their non-homeschooled peers. Previously homeschooled students believed that their college experience was influenced strongly by their experiences with faculty, and students’ connectedness to the university seemed to relate directly to those relationships.

Previously homeschooled students may rely more than students from other educational backgrounds on their relationships with faculty simply because they are accustomed to having close relationships with their teachers and to low student-teacher ratios that made regular interaction with the instructor commonplace. Further research about the degree of faculty influence on homeschoolers’ transition to college is needed.

Social Adjustment to Peers

Social Activities

Participants were asked about their social involvement on campus. Consistent with existing research (Jones 2010), students mentioned being involved with various activities with their peers on campus. Activities tended to be informal and often spontaneous and involved students socializing with others on or off campus and trying to connect socially with their community. Specific activities included watching movies, going to the store, having coffee with friends, and “hanging out” in the residence hall. These findings are similar to those of Jones (2010): students were more involved in intramural activities, missions, and “other” activities than in clubs with regular meetings and intercollegiate sports. Only three students in the present study were involved in structured activities that involved at least weekly meetings; the other fifteen connected with other students in the residence halls and periodically attended a scheduled student activity or event. Students who did not participate in formal social activities still connected with their college peers (see Jones 2010), but they decided—often spontaneously—with whom and where they would spend time. Not a single student indicated feeling socially isolated.

Curious as to why structured activities and membership in clubs and organizations were not particularly popular, the researcher asked students in the focus groups why they tended to socialize mostly in informal groups. A few students suggested that some were still involved in activities with homeschoolers or church friends at home; that students tended to do things informally before arriving on campus and were simply continuing that habit; and that they were trying to determine how many activities they could take on and still perform well academically (some-
thing that many traditionally educated students may have determined in high school) (Light 2001). Brock said that the most difficult aspect of college was determining what types of involvement would be “right.” He was interested in engaging socially with his peers, but he struggled to determine how much, when, and what types of activities would be best.

Many participants found comfort in the idea of being able to reach out to other homeschoolers during the early weeks of college. Because some students were attending college near their homes, a few mentioned knowing other homeschoolers (for example, from homeschooling groups in a large, neighboring city) when they arrived on campus. They appreciated having someone with a common background on their campus. When asked whether college intervention in that area (e.g., facilitating homeschoolers’ meeting with other homeschoolers soon after their arrival on campus) would be welcome, not all students thought that would be necessary or helpful; a number of students stated that knowing other homeschoolers on their campus “would be nice” because they would be able to identify with them more readily than with many traditionally educated students.

To Conform or Not to Conform

Homeschoolers mentioned the differences they noticed between their values and those of more traditionally educated students and said that interacting with traditionally educated students was sometimes eye-opening. Students attributed this to the fact that many homeschoolers are sheltered. One student said, “They’ve been exposed so much more to the world, and I was in such a bubble that a lot of things came as a shock to me.” Other homeschooled students commented similarly and attested to the gulf between their morals and those of their peers, particularly in terms of jokes told and television programs and movies watched. Many of the previously homeschooled students reported feeling uncomfortable, uneasy, or disgusted; many also said that having been homeschooled, they were accustomed to being in the minority and felt little pressure to conform. This theme emerged from the semi-structured interviews. With the exception of one study (Smiley 2010), the literature on homeschooling and adjustment to college does not note or examine the concept of conformity. Yet enough students initiated this topic (particularly in the conversations related to making new friends at college) that the researcher asked probing questions in an effort to explore it further.

Adam reflected the differences between his sense of humor and that of most of the students around him. He said:

*I know my sense of humor isn’t quite the same, and to be completely honest, I’m kind of glad for that. There’s one guy who lives across the hall from me...he tells crude jokes all the time. And I guess that’s where I come off saying that I feel like I have somewhat stronger morals than some of the other guys.*

Abby spoke of her realization that not all students behaved or thought like she did. For example, she mentioned being appalled to discover that students would be so disrespectful to a faculty member that they would intentionally sleep in class.

Smiley (2010) notes this concept of value contrast in his study of whether homeschoolers maintain their values and beliefs as they transition to college. Although only five students were interviewed, their responses indicate that their values not only remain intact but also become stronger; yet students’ thinking about their values expands to consider more contextual complexity. None of the students fully assimilated to the values and beliefs of other students at college.

Transitional Support from Parents

Previously homeschooled students spoke of the support they received from their parents during their initial transition to college and beyond. As opposed to relying on peers for approval and social support, participants voiced a reliance on family (as well as on previous friends and networks). Each of the eighteen students attested that their relationship since beginning college was at least as close as it had been previously. Just fewer than half of the students spoke of renegotiating the relationship from parent/child to more of a peer relationship. The literature indicates that this type of transition is beneficial to traditionally educated students (Kenyon and Koerner 2009), and this seems to be the case with homeschoolers as well. Students spoke frequently of missing their parents and/or siblings. They communicated regularly with family and tended to visit home monthly (a few students visited more frequently). Four students said they called home every day,
but most said they contacted home at least once or twice a week and e-mailed or messaged their family in between calls and visits. Two students commuted and therefore saw their parents each day.

While phone calls and computer contact with their families remained fairly consistent from students’ first to second year of college, the frequency of visits home decreased after the first year. It is not uncommon for first-year college students to miss their families, contact them frequently, and feel homesick. Indeed, it is very likely that first-year students who feel close to their families will experience homesickness as they transition to campus life (Kazantzib and Flett 1998). Indeed, homesickness is not unexpected given the amount of time previously homeschooled students spent with their family members.

Some students discussed their schoolwork with their parents when they called home. It is unclear from this study whether parents continue to play a significant role in the academic life of some previously homeschooled students, though there may be cases in which students also undergo a transition from parent as trusted teacher to faculty as trusted teacher. This is another area for further research.

**DISCUSSION**

It is important to note that previously homeschooled students do get to know others in their college communities (quantity of experience) and seem to adjust to and integrate into the social life of the campus. While students in this study typically did not participate in formally structured co-curricular activities, they did take time to socialize and worked to build meaningful relationships with faculty and other students (quality of experience); in fact, they seemed particularly adept at building relationships with faculty members. Faculty relationships played a key role in the students’ social integration and adjustment to college.

During their transition to college, previously homeschooled students were in frequent contact with their families, other homeschooled friends, and friends from their home churches and communities; parents in particular were ongoing sources of support. This might be particularly crucial for previously homeschooled students as they seek to resist the values of the dominant peer culture. Students in this study acclimated to the new community as much as their values would allow, but they struggled with differences (in values) between themselves and more traditionally educated students. This is contrary to Astin’s (1993) finding that students do change their values and behavior in accordance with the dominant peer group. Smiley (2010) found that homeschoolers’ values seem to remain intact as they transition to college, and the present study supports this finding. Weidman’s (1989) model of socialization also is supported: As parents and peers from home continue to influence the student, socialization to the undergraduate process is affected.

Conformity to peer-group values should be considered in future studies as it appears to affect the degree of social integration. Although all of the students in this study were attending Christian postsecondary institutions recognized as conservative in many ways (Reisberg 1999), they still encountered behaviors they considered improper; this seems to make the students aware that they are somewhat different from their peers. Because social integration pertains to the quantity as well as to the quality of social connections, it is possible that previously homeschooled students are not integrating to the same degree as their non-homeschooled peers simply because they choose to spend less time with peers who do not share their values. Rather than expressing a need to conform and assimilate, many students in this study stated that they are glad they were sheltered and glad to be different. They perceived the sheltering as a positive thing that aided their development and maturity.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The results of this study have a number of implications for institutions seeking to identify whether they are doing all they can to serve previously homeschooled students on their campuses. One implication is that opportunities to connect socially with faculty members are critical to such students’ social integration on campus. Faculty must be available if these connections are to be made. This is likely to be easier for full-time than for adjunct faculty who teach courses in which all or most first-year students typically enroll. Having full-time faculty advisors serve as first-year seminar instructors is one way to facilitate connections with previously homeschooled students (indeed, this is good practice regardless of the student’s academic background) (Upcraft et al. 2005). Such practices provide students with structured opportunities to meet with faculty both in and out of the classroom.
Institutions also might consider establishing faculty-in-residence programs or living-learning communities which “facilitate a set of relationships between students and faculty and between students and their peers that differed [sic] significantly from those promoted in conventional residence arrangements” (Pascarella and Terenzini 1980, p. 351). This type of arrangement is noted in both current and somewhat older literature as having a positive impact on students (Brower and Inkelas 2010; Pascarella and Terenzini 1980). While any student could benefit from faculty-in-residence programs or living-learning communities on campus, students from homeschooling backgrounds might find them particularly valuable because they are accustomed to living with people who provide academic guidance and instruction. It is logical that having a faculty member available in a residence hall might feel natural and familiar to them.

Because some previously homeschooled students like the idea of being able to meet with other such students either prior to arriving on campus or soon thereafter, colleges might consider ways to facilitate such meetings. Peer mentoring is one suggested way of doing this (Kranzow 2012); other possibilities include social media, student activities, and orientation events.

Finally, homeschoolers might be encouraged to participate more fully in co-curricular offerings. Informal activities (to include chatting over coffee or playing video games with a friend) are not likely to maximize student learning and the impact of college. The Student Learning Imperative (American College Personnel Association 1996, p. 121) states that “certain conditions promote learning more than others. For example, learning and personal development are enhanced when students participate in groups organized around common intellectual, curricular, or career interests.” Previously homeschooled students may not realize that participating in structured co-curricular activities may be helpful to their learning and development; student affairs professionals and faculty members should be encouraged to communicate the benefits of other forms of campus engagement.

LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

As with any study, this has some limitations. First, although every effort was made to ensure that students felt comfortable discussing their experiences, some may have felt some burden to describe their experiences as optimistically as possible (even if they were not as positive in reality) so as not to promote any negative stereotyping of homeschoolers. Second, the study population was not diverse. Although all sophomore-level previously homeschooled students at both institutions were invited to participate, more females than males volunteered to do so. Except for one student who is bi-racial (half African American and half Caucasian), all who volunteered are white. Future studies should seek a more diverse participant population. Future research might examine the social integration and adjustment experiences of previously homeschooled students at community colleges as well as at public, secular institutions. Longitudinal studies also would be useful in understanding whether the experiences of previously homeschooled students at college change over time. For example, do students feel any differently about their homeschool experiences when they are college seniors or graduates? The present study does not answer these important questions. Finally, despite the difficulty of gathering data from previously homeschooled students who do not finish college, future studies might seek to determine which factors influence their lack of persistence. These students likely would provide some additional insight that their peers who are successful in their transition to college cannot provide.

CONCLUSION

This study provides insight into the social transition and integration process of homeschooled students studying at Christian colleges. It sought specifically to investigate the degree of continual influence of parents and non-college peer groups on this group of college students. While much remains to be learned about how this population experiences college, the interviews conducted as part of this study uncovered some informative perspectives on social integration and adjustment to college.

Parents continue to offer critical support as previously homeschooled students transition and integrate into the campus community. Relationships and emotional ties between students and their parents remain close during students’ early years of college; maintaining those relationships while also developing new relationships appears to be an important aspect of previously homeschooled students’ assimilation to university life. As Weidman
(1989) suggests, peer groups, community groups, and parents (to include parental resources and socioeconomic status) continue to influence the college student socialization experience.

As colleges seek to attract, support, and retain previously homeschooled students, it will be essential to expand related literature so as to increase insight into their college transition and related experiences. Increased understanding of this population will help campus leaders develop information and services designed to maximize its success. While much remains to be learned about homeschoolers and the college experience, the current research provides information that should be considered as campuses plan orientation and parent programming and develop practices aimed at promoting academic support, student development, and success.

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About the Author

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The meritocratic tradition in collegiate admissions is “founded on academic merit or exceptional scholastic ability, not arbitrary privilege” (Lucas 1996). Recently, prominent admissions leaders and legal experts convened at a conference on “Attributes That Matter: Beyond the Usual in College Admission and Success.” Conference attendees engaged in critical dialogue about how colleges and universities use merit and non-cognitive attributes to decide which applicants shall be offered admission. By and large, collegiate admissions officers must make difficult choices as they seek both to enhance and diversify applicant pools, while also attending to applicant attributes that suggest the highest probability of student success. To that end, it is becoming a common practice for institutions to take into consideration both cognitive variables (e.g., standardized test scores, high school rank, and grades) and non-cognitive variables (e.g., positive self-concept, strong support, long-range goals, and community), when making holistic admission decisions.

Sedlacek (2011) proposes consideration of a non-cognitive variable that reflects how a prospective student “understands and knows how to handle racism; navigate the system.” This particular “attribute” can be used to assess “the student’s ability to understand the role of the ‘system’ in life and to develop a method of assessing the cultural/racial demands of the system and respond accordingly/assertively” (Sedlacek 2011). Further, Sedlacek (2011) points out that positive evidence of a student’s ability in this regard includes:

- Exhibits a realistic view of the system based upon personal experience of racism.
- Committed to improving the existing system.
- Takes an assertive approach to dealing with existing wrongs but is not hostile to society nor is a “cop-out.”
- Able to handle racist system and make system work for him/her.

Positive evidence aside, I am often taken aback by facile treatments of the cultural and racial demands experienced by students of color vis-à-vis firm expectations that those students understand the “system” and the role it plays in their lives, as they are systematically judged on the appropriateness of their responses (as defined by “others”). Many students standing at the door, and within the milieu of higher education systems, experience structural inequalities that limit their ability to attain the requisite resources and knowledge to effectively navigate—let alone improve—systemic issues. Moreover, a critical analysis of the aforementioned non-cognitive variable might suggest that its misappropriation can reify social stratification and
disproportionality that perpetuate inequitable and unjust conditions in higher education.

The breadth and depth of my knowledge of and experiences in the system, respectively, stimulate and yield reflective, rather than reflexive, sensibilities on the matter of collegiate admissions. At the onset of my unexpected career in higher education, I became starkly aware of the racial implications of “the system,” in the domain of collegiate admissions. In 1996, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals’ decision in Hopwood v. University of Texas and subsequent formal opinion issued by the Texas attorney general prohibited public colleges and universities in Texas from using applicants’ racial or ethnic background as a decision factor in recruitment, admissions, financial aid, and retention. Consequently, for almost a decade thereafter, I was engaged in numerous campus initiatives to restructure Texas A&M University’s admissions policies and recruitment practices, in order to mitigate the probable negative effects of Hopwood on student diversity. In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court abrogated Hopwood in Grutter v. Bollinger. However, in an unanticipated move, university leadership—supported by the System Board of Regents—decided to maintain race-neutral admissions at Texas A&M University.

Approximately a decade ago, I became well versed on achieving a complimentary balance of strong diversity enrollment goals and minimized institutional legal risks, by way of “strict scrutiny” standards, institutional policies of “compelling interest,” and the necessary precision of “narrow tailoring.” Most recently, the high court ruled that in the case of Fisher v. University of Texas the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals failed to apply strict(er) scrutiny in its summary judgment against the plaintiff, and in the university’s favor. In short, the lower court “erred in presuming that the university had made a good-faith effort to consider race-neutral alternatives to its policy” (Schmidt, 2013). Lauded by some as a victory for both sides, arguably, the high court’s strong majority decision sets the stage for race-conscious collegiate admissions policies and practices to be determined as unconstitutional (perhaps in the next decade).

As higher education institutions and their applicants grapple with the outcomes of selective admissions policies and practices vis-à-vis judicial filings and rulings, I am reminded that the meritocratic view of higher education emerged in the antiquity, when Greek and Roman philosophers estimated that only a small minority of the citizenry—i.e., those with the freedom and leisure to pursue education (Lucas 1994, Lucas 1996)—was suitable for higher learning. Conversely, I am a benefactor of “the founding of the land-grant colleges dedicated to imparting applied knowledge to the masses” (Lucas 1996)—a repudiation of classical education for the leisureed and gentlemanly elite. During the early nineteenth century enrollment increases at land-grant institutions essentially went unchecked for decades. Booming enrollments stimulated the resurgence of selective criteria in collegiate admissions. Moreover, the debate between meritocratic and egalitarian admissions intensified.

The evolution of admissions applications and associated processes has a prominent role in higher education history. Historically, the collegiate admissions application process was a more personalized rite of passage into higher education, generally, and specifically into a particular college or university. These days, however, standardized applications facilitate larger numbers of applicants, resulting in more applicants being denied admissions to the institution(s) of their choice. Moreover, while institutional uniqueness may have been formerly reflected in admissions processes—which possibly made clearer the likelihood of being denied admittance—standardized applications and admissions processes conceivably confound applicants who are denied admittance, thereby resulting in perceptions that selection processes are little more than number games in the proverbial admissions arms race.

Admissions officers are defenders and purveyors of a commonly accepted paradox: Although admissions offices primarily exist for the purpose of assisting students with the application process at a particular college or university, those same organizations may employ selective criteria that prevent many qualified students from gaining admittance into their college or university of choice. So, although an individual applicant may meet an institution’s minimum admissions qualifications, enrollment limits can result in the admission of students who primarily exceed standard admissions criteria. Ironically, selective admissions processes, shaped and driven by meritocratic traditions, socially and pragmatically construct Offices of Denials, as opposed to Offices of Admissions.

Lucas (1996) stresses that “the question about who ought to be allowed or denied admission to higher educa-
tion needs to take into consideration the sort of institution one has in mind.” Furthermore, although an applicant may fail to gain admittance into the institution of her choice, “there is always a school willing to accept a determined applicant” (Lucas 1996). Thus, one of the access dilemmas faced by collegiate admissions officers is not necessarily who should go to college, but rather who should be offered and who should be denied admittance into a particular college or university. Case in point, Abigail Fisher, a determined applicant, illuminated an access dilemma by calling into question the constitutionality of the decision that denied her entry into the University of Texas.

The U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Fisher v. University of Texas* calls for closer analysis of race- and ethnicity-conscious admissions policies that might evidence how the “great sorting” process actually works in practice, not merely what any institution might assert to a denied applicant as to how the process worked for her or him. Thresher (1966) describes the omnipresent “great sorting” admissions process, by which individual demand meets institutional capacity, as “under the influence in part of calculations and estimates…and in part of beliefs, opinions, whim, ancient loyalties, and areas of ignorance scarcely amendable to rational estimate.” Astute awareness of the supply and demand of higher education—and the gateway to collegiate enrollment—reveals that rather than merely rules and customs, admissions processes mediate the social complexities of individual choice vis-à-vis market dynamics. The admissions application, including supplementary materials, is a gate linchpin that explicates and complicates admissions decisions.

Since the establishment of the Common Application®, in 1975, “by 15 private colleges that wished to provide a common, standardized first-year application form for use at any member institution,” many private and public institutions have adopted it. The University of Chicago is a notable private institution that moved judiciously to the Common Application®. In 2005, Theodore (Ted) O’Neil, then dean of admissions at the University of Chicago, opined that “a good college admissions process is not like computer dating—it’s like love letters.” Moreover, he stressed that “current trends in online applications take away students’ individuality and result in ‘generic’ and ‘utterly boring’ essays” (O’Neil 2005). Nonetheless, a few years later, the university decommissioned its “Un-Common Application” and adopted the Common Application®, which it supplemented with “UnCommon” questions. O’Neil (2005) noted on his blog that “even though we loved and patted ourselves on the back for being different and clever, we always feared that the students who might turn away from the UnCommon might be disproportionately the least comfortable with competitive college admissions.”

Opening space for “common” collegiate admissions pathways may be motivated by an institution’s objective to increase the number of applications it receives; the by-product, however, is typically a more diverse applicant pool. Institutional motivation notwithstanding, I believe there is a social justice ethos that should impel colleges and universities to be thoughtful about the consequences that their unique stances have on underrepresented and disenfranchised populations in their applicant pools and student bodies. It took some time, but the University of Chicago leadership finally heeded to what I suspect they already knew: As uncommon as an institution may be perceived—internally or externally—its leadership should aim for the altruistic goal of promoting and facilitating access that enables “commoners” to attain the best post-secondary education our global society has to offer.

The normative experience of the common and uncommon who enter, persist through, exit, and cycle back into higher education is that they have moved through enrollment pipelines, swilled down enrollment funnels, ascended to peaks of enrollment pyramids, and swirled about in student life cycles. The journey for most, however, is not fluid. Pipelines clog. Funnels leak. Pyramids crack. Cycles break. I have spent the greater portion of my higher education career addressing issues of access to and persistence through “the system”—issues that play out in pipelines, funnels, pyramids, and cycles. My personal academic experience of enrollment schemata is one of engagement, disorientation, conflict, perseverance, enlightenment, and serendipity.

Despite my professional and academic accomplishments, I consider myself a common student who has been fortunate to come into the presence of uncommon mentors and colleagues. Long before entering high school, my decision to aim for an education higher than that attained by anyone in my immediate family placed me on an unrecognizable—and therefore unfamiliar—path compared to
that of my kindred contemporaries. Aiming to secure an affordable and high-quality college education, I applied for admission to Texas A&M University and the University of Texas at Austin. However, upon receiving notification of my admittance into both institutions, I declined both offers. Alternatively, I attended Wharton County Junior College—an open enrollment community college.

After earning my associate degree, I transferred to Texas A&M University and earned a bachelor’s degree. Subsequently, I accepted a job in Austin, Texas. Then five years later, I returned to my alma mater as an employee and re-entered the student life cycle as a graduate student—first for a master’s degree and then a doctorate degree. Serendipitously, approximately 20 years after declining the offer of first-time-freshman admittance into my alma mater, I was appointed the university’s interim director of admissions. In my new (and fortuitous) role, my interactions with prospective, current, and former students invoked memories of my own journey into and through higher education. Moreover, it is through the lens of my holistic experience of my university that I first contemplated the “Attributes That Matter: Beyond the Usual in College Admission and Success.”

My decision to attend a community college en route to ‘Texas’ land-grant flagship university heightened my awareness and deepened my understanding of numerous meritocratic and egalitarian issues in higher education—awareness and understanding that continues to inform my daily practice. I often reflect on my own and others’ life- and career-defining collegiate moments. Much of my professional work in higher education can be described as unclogging pipes, plugging leaks, sealing cracks, and fusing breaks that hinder diverse (and sometimes uncommon) students from achieving common collegiate dreams and life goals. In the face of challenges experienced by institutions and students entrenched in the admissions arms race and associated legal entanglements, I am encouraged by the noble efforts of those who see meaningful utility and promise in claiming middle ground spaces between the egalitarian and meritocratic traditions that have shaped American higher education to this point, and will conceivably circumscribe the attributes that matter in the great sorting process known as Collegiate Admissions.

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Building a Project Management Office

By Karl E. Burgher and Michael B. Snyder

The utilization of project management (PM) tools in higher education and the nonprofit sector is spotty. The efficient application of PM is rare. Nevertheless, some organizations have established and perpetuated a project management office (PMO): Visit Princeton University’s website and you will find an extensive PM site including project portfolio information, methodology, templates, training, and best practices. As with most organizations where PMOs exist, Princeton’s PMO resides within the information technology department. Some other universities have undertaken similar efforts, though usually not quite so extensive.

Many institutions do not strategically allocate resources to PM efforts—especially in the current economy, in which resources are scarce. We argue this is exactly where resources need to be allocated: No longer do we have the luxury of being anything but efficient. Building an office that is responsible for managing large, strategic efforts can make a huge impact on a project’s success. A PMO itself does not necessarily need to be large, and its mission need not be complex, but it can be valuable to have an office whose sole mission is to ensure that complex projects are competently selected, prioritized, managed, and implemented so as to fulfill the institution’s needs in an efficient, timely, and cost-effective manner. The PMO can be a home to your project methodology, documentation, and tools. Its staff can be the “go-to” people for, and the drivers of, all project-related matters, thereby ensuring progress along the intended path toward an on-time and on-budget deliverable.

This article describes exactly how a PMO was implemented in a higher education environment. Although we feature an office of information technology and the implementation of a strategic plan, the steps described in the pages that follow can be used in any office. Recall our introduction of PM into the registrar’s office: PM is not just for construction and IT anymore; rather, it can benefit just about all areas.

We begin by helping you examine your own environment. Our hope is that such examination will generate sufficient ideas and courage to send others off on similar ventures, which, in turn, will increase the likelihood of campus-wide project success. Certainly, we are biased as to the benefits of PM tools and techniques. But we are not simply project managers looking for something to do. Rather, we are—and for most of our careers have been—people managers who have adapted to a faster-paced and more competitive economy.
THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Organizational Structures

While discussing the potential of PM at your organization, it is helpful to consider your organization’s structure in relation to functional management versus project management. Structure can have a significant impact on how resources are assigned, who controls the budget, and who is designated the project manager (either explicitly or implicitly.) We will look at organizational structure through a lens similar to that of the Project Management Institute (PMI), in which structure is considered as one of three types: functional, “projectized” (i.e., where projects own the day), or matrix.

Functional organizations locate employees within logical specialties or functions. Such organizations are hierarchical: each employee typically receives all instruction and feedback from one designated superior. Projects are managed at the manager/director level, with project details worked out at that level. A project may be assigned to the manager with the largest stake in the project—or, perhaps, with the least on his plate at the time. The manager coordinates with other managers at his level to engage resources outside of his immediate area. Resources in each functional area work independently of one another. Lower-level employees often have little or no knowledge of the bigger picture or of the goals of the organization as a whole—particularly as they pertain to an enterprise-wide project—because they often communicate only with their superior.

At the other extreme is the projectized organization, where teams are formed around projects rather than functions. Team members report directly to a project manager and “co-locate” with project team members. Functional groups may exist, but they report to a project manager and support the needs of a particular project, not a larger functional area. In this organization, project managers have access to the hierarchy and the resources, and all major efforts are project oriented. Departments are mini PMOs built around larger enterprise-wide strategic efforts.

The last organizational type is the matrix organization, which in our experience is by far the most common. Sadly,
it is the most poorly managed because it is the most difficult to manage. There is far more selling and leading required than in a hierarchical management environment. In fact, it has been likened to “managing volunteers.” In an all-volunteer organization, purpose must be foremost, and leadership must be compassionate, for if the volunteers do not feel respected and useful, the leader soon will find himself fresh out of labor.

In matrix organizations, functional and projectized characteristics exist concurrently. Labor and monetary resources are, for the most part, divided into functional groups, but they often are pulled into various projects in support of a particular piece of work. Certain projects will require certain expertise, and they must borrow or steal resources to attain their objectives. This inevitably leads to questions concerning who truly has authority over resources. Consequently, tensions can arise among employees, project managers, and functional managers. Often, an employee simply stays loyal to her direct report and the projects seem to come last. And why not? Functionally, the line manager is the one who signs her check and performs her annual evaluation (read: authorizes a promotion and a raise.) In other cases, an employee may not like her boss or her job, or may feel she is stuck and has no upward mobility. In such cases, the “day job” suffers, and the excitement of the project wins the day. This leads to other vital duties’ being ignored and functional managers possibly becoming angry (not good if you need their support.)

Matrix organizations come in three sub-types: weak, balanced, and strong. In weak matrix organizations most power lies with the functional manager. Resources are pulled from teams, but authority rests almost entirely with functional leadership. A resource usually is assigned project management work, but such work often constitutes only one of many responsibilities. This resource may be designated a project scheduler or project coordinator though typically has very limited power and defers to others on the project for nearly all decisions.

Balanced matrix organizations are characterized by better balance between functional and project managers. Project managers have more (but not all) power, and often they still have less power than the functional managers. Functional managers may control many important aspects of the project (such as budget) and may need to be consulted regarding resources or schedule. However, when the project is generally larger in stature and/or scope, a project manager will be responsible for moving the work forward. Balanced organizations may have professional project managers on staff, or they may assign the role to existing staff who can devote a good amount of time to the effort.

In strong matrix organizations the balance of power shifts toward the project manager. A project office of some type likely exists, and several project-dedicated resources are on staff. Resources assigned to the project do not technically report to the project manager, but often have few to no other job responsibilities beyond those dictated by the project manager. Responsibilities related to budget, scope, schedule, resources, and change and issue management rest with the project manager.

In any of these cases, the project manager must be strong and confident and not fear difficult conversations. In addition, she must possess the political skills requisite to influence multiple functional areas in order to ensure that projects are completed on time and on budget. Finally, she needs to be able to “manage up,” as well as laterally and down, to ensure successful completion of deliverables. All managers—whether project managers or not—need to know and understand these issues. All organizations have projects that are best managed by cross-functional teams. PM in the matrix organization is not for the faint of heart: There are great days, good days, and no shortage of bad days—particularly as resources get tighter and the economy moves faster; slow, boring days are few and far between.

So why doesn’t every organization have some level of PMO if, at least enterprise-wide, it can serve so well?

First, many organizations feel they already put enough thought and time into managing projects. Anyone who has finished any sort of work effort can believe he is a project manager; thus, all functional managers perceive themselves and their people as project managers at least some of the time. But are they efficient project managers? The data and success rates of actual projects should be allowed to speak for themselves—particularly when the projects are large and/or enterprise wide.

Second, maintaining some level of PMO is just plain difficult. It is challenging to dance among projects, among functional areas, and among teams. Often, teams comprise many different personalities from multiple areas, making leadership difficult. Managing “volunteers” is challenging! It can be a lot of fun, but you must really like people, you
must want to see others succeed, and you must be able to change and adjust every day.

Finally, PM in under-served project environments often has little or no career track. People do not understand that an enterprise project or program manager sees the big picture and often can manage many functional units (and even the organization as a whole). As long as project managers are not perceived to be important as functional managers or valued as a key part of organizations, then project management likely will not attract the most competent individuals. At many organizations, the primary limitation may relate to recruitment.

The remainder of this article describes how to build a small PMO in your under-projectized organization. Higher education needs to bite the bullet and establish some sort of PMO to manage and increase the success rates of enterprise-wide projects. At present, most organizations plan well, and often they initiate projects fairly well, but too often they close terribly. A project manager’s job is to close, period. Once you understand your environment and how it will shape your project management, you can wade into the task of shifting the culture, laying the groundwork for PM, and building your office.

THE START: ALLOCATE RESOURCES GENTLY

A PM by any Other Name

For organizations new to project management, or that have survived any previous attempts to strong-arm PM into existence (as, for example, through the barking of the order, “Everyone will use Microsoft Project for every single task they do!”), a measured approach can be successful if a sound plan is created and then executed patiently one project or one area at a time. This slow and steady approach can prove the overall usefulness of PM to the organization.

The first step for us was to find individuals within the organization who already were doing and/or who were capable of doing project work. Perhaps someone in your organization was a project manager in a previous life. Many employees doing business systems analysis work have crossed over at times into PM. And often, team leaders—especially if they are good leaders—possess an array of PM skills. Directors/managers often have project skills but seldom have time to implement them. They often are tasked to be the project lead but either end up being a bottleneck because of capacity issues or do a great job but then neglect their management responsibilities.

If the employees you task with PM are capable, then you can start with a larger, high-profile project that requires care. If, however, they are somewhat more junior or comparatively inexperienced, then assign some smaller, less risky projects at the outset to prove that your new project manager can assess, start, manage, and complete them. Either way, emphasize and document how PM tools and behavior help keep a project on task, and on budget, and how a dedicated project resource frees those within the functional area(s) to do work, rather than get bogged down in messy processes and meetings.

The goal is to prove the real value of PM. Often, this is not as difficult as one might imagine. Usually there is no shortage of people complaining about the lack of a go-to person (“who’s in charge of this thing?”), management’s failure to bring the right people to the table, and last-minute, emergency requests and change orders that are the result of poor or no planning. Support your unofficial project managers well, as their failure could mean the defeat of all you are trying to accomplish. Good staff paired with good top-down support will get you the results you are after.

At Indiana State University (ISU), we began with a staff member who, despite reporting to the Office of Information Technology (OIT), somewhat serendipitously had been given the role of lead on one particular project. He and the project were handed over to the University’s Chief Strategy Officer (CSO) so the project could be more closely integrated with the new strategic plan. Within a short time, the CSO (who also had considerable PM experience) realized that he had an employee who both understood PM and could thrive within its structure. The CSO had many other strategic projects to get off the ground; thus, the use of PM began in an office that already was enterprise wide and that had access to larger, high-visibility work efforts.

At ISU, most of our initial projects began as part of our strategic plan. With 45 teams undertaking some 250 tasks/projects, it was not difficult to pick some low-hanging fruit. It also was not difficult to identify large, difficult, highly visible yet appropriately funded projects with which to begin. Perhaps you have some strategic initiatives of your own to use as the foundation for a PMO test case? Every college and university seems to have a strategic plan of some sort; perhaps you should argue that you can imple-
ment yours—and that you can do so more efficiently and effectively—with a project manager or two. Projects related to our strategic plan are the primary work we now do.

Get Some Wins

Consider the following example: One project, the creation of a co-curricular record for reporting student participation in activities outside the classroom, had labored along without closure for more than a year. Numerous processes, politics, and technical roadblocks had impeded the project’s progress. Eventually, the president intervened. Aware of a recent string of project wins coming out of the CSO’s office, he made it responsible for the project and set a deadline four weeks hence. Immediately, a new project manager was assigned, appropriate management processes were put in place, and the project truly got started. It was a hectic four weeks, but the project was successful in terms of schedule, budget, and quality of the deliverable. This proved a huge win and provided great evidence of the potential of PM.

Around this time a new CIO was hired. Like many of the new breed, she sought to implement a more rigid set of project standards. After a continuing trend of wins (in the form of completed projects) out of the CSO’s office and with a CIO and CSO both desiring tighter management of work efforts, there was a conviction that a PMO could succeed and be accepted within ISU’s environment. A good case was being made with enterprise projects, but it would be valuable to have a business partner to bolster the argument for a new position.

The Functional Area PM: Grow Where You Can

Throughout a period of budget cuts, several functional areas had lost their IT and other support staff even as IT had been forced to lay off some of its own staff. This left many areas without sufficient resources to support new initiatives—particularly those involving technology. For more than a year, the division of student affairs had been requesting help and had tried repeatedly to secure funding for a project manager–type position of its own. Seizing on the opportunity, the CIO offered to pilot a dedicated project manager resource of up to 20 hours per week. The pilot would be carefully documented: Intermediate checkpoints were assigned, and a written evaluation was required. Upon completion of the pilot, the CIO and the vice president for student affairs would present the results at the president’s cabinet meeting. Student affairs got its resource help, and PM now had a business champion. The pilot was overwhelmingly successful, and a formal position quickly followed. A seed had been planted, and the momentum had shifted.

SOCIALIZE AND SELL THE PM MESSAGE

Project Charters and Project Plans

The CIO began to ask her employees who led good-sized projects for project charters (white papers) and project plans. Project charters were to lay out the detail and justification for a project while project plans would provide a clear, step by step methodology.

In the case of the CSO, and the strategic plan and initiatives, this had been the routine for a couple of years and had proven an effective way of initiating a couple hundred or more projects campus-wide. And, in fact, it was not too difficult to implement given that folks already had agreed to the work effort, had ownership, and did not obtain funding until they had written a work plan, prepared a budget, and developed a schedule and management plan. Recall from our second article in this series that work plans make for better work; schedules and responsibility diagrams hold people accountable. Often, when competent employees develop these documents, the work happens without requiring much additional management.

At first, the CIO would press for documentation only when complications or confusion arose within a project. Staff often perceives documentation as adding to the burden of the work. But the benefit is that it requires teams to get organized and defines who is supposed to do what when. When projects got messy, it was easy to question why there was no blueprint to follow. When there are problems, it is more difficult to argue that time need not have been “wasted” on documentation. Requests for documentation became more frequent, with the result that staff began to prepare it from the outset, as they knew they would have to defend their position sooner or later. Despite not having standard PM documentation in place, the OIT was more consistently producing information for most of the projects it undertook. It was time to take the next step.

Time for Standards

Building on the momentum, the CIO now charged one of the project managers with creating standards and docu-
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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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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.
A project management checklist; a list and descriptions of project roles; and PM templates with explanations of their required content for the entire office. This had been part of the CSO’s process for two years during development of the strategic plan, but it had been called an RFP (request for proposals) process (which just so happen to require work plans, budgets, schedules, benchmarks, and a management plan.) The seed had been planted for documentation, work planning, and accountability across campus. The goal was to create both a detailed PM plan and supporting documentation for not only IT, but also enterprise wide initiatives. Because similar efforts had failed in the past as a result of “documentation overkill” and the forced use of tools, simplicity was a primary objective. Complete but manageable processes were needed. PM had to make sense: The work required to manage a project should not rival that required to execute the project.

In an effort to obtain good input and increase the likelihood of widespread buy-in, a project team was formed to create the standards. This team included a member of each of the four departments as well as any members currently acting as project managers. The team met every other week. First, it mapped current processes in the organization as a whole as well as within each department. Two realizations emerged: One was the need to push the IT leadership to further refine the project-intake process. It was clear that the best-laid PM plans would fall short absent a methodology for receiving and classifying projects and then assigning them to a project manager who could initiate whatever processes the standards team developed. The second realization pertained to the path forward. Now that the group was informing the development of a standard PM process, a list of deliverables could be derived. After three months’ work, the group delivered the following:

- A project management checklist;
- A process for beginning-to-end management, including the names of templates to be used in the process;
- Guidelines for classifying project size;
- A list and descriptions of project roles; and
- PM templates with explanations of their required content.¹

The CIO and IT directors provided feedback. After a couple of months and several revisions, final processes and documentation were agreed upon.

¹ See www.indstate.edu/strategicplan/PM for a list of all templates and documentation.

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Project Requests and Prioritization

Although it often occurs before a project manager is assigned, efficient project intake is vital to a PMO’s success. Organizations should maintain some type of log or list of what projects are being undertaken, their progress, their priority, and their number. Doing so will help them understand the breadth of their responsibilities at any given time. An office also needs a method for capturing project requests and evaluating them against those already on the log, both scheduled and in progress. This can become extremely political as directors, managers, and VPs seek to have their projects given priority. Someone must be responsible for assigning priority to the various projects. At ISU, the president, the CSO (as the strategic plan “owner”), the vice presidents, and the cabinet all play a role. At institutions that continually battle over the queue (where there is a “deal of the day,” or where chaos management reigns), too often either nothing is given priority or everything is given top priority, with the result that resources—both labor and capital—are squandered.

Because there was no existing “master view” of large IT projects at ISU, the CIO quickly put in place a project log and asked each director to update it monthly. The new existence of a project focus prompted others to “PM up” their own areas. Within the department, each director was asked to ensure that there was a standard method for requesting projects, scoping them, and then sharing them at a weekly meeting for purposes of prioritization and scheduling (smaller projects could be handled by the departments themselves). Part of this process was to ensure that there was a project lead; this paved the way for more stringent PM standards down the road.

Presentation to the Office

As part of the next all-hands forum, two members of the standards team presented the PM material, processes, and documentation to the staff. They described the steps that had been taken to create the standard, the reason for doing so, the process and documentation itself, and a timeframe for implementation (approximately six weeks after the presentation). Each manager was asked to describe his or her own group’s internal processes for capturing requests and assigning project managers so there would be no confusion as to when staff would be required to utilize the processes and when they would not be (for example, when
a project was too small or was outside the scope of the processes.) Project managers now would have an exact process for starting, managing, and completing a project.

Questions were few, but staff members were eager to review the materials so they could better understand what they were being asked to do and provide feedback. All documentation was posted on a newly created team site that the PMO was charged with managing. Immediately after the meeting, all staff members were sent an intranet link to the team site. Six months were allotted for a pilot, followed by review and recommendations for adjustments to the initial plan. The directors would be required to ensure adoption of the processes within their respective areas.

Supply to Meet Demand

As the efforts of the standards team were winding down, other developments opened a window of opportunity. A greater focus on academic support was desired, and the user services department was divided in two: one unit, academic services, would support faculty; the other unit, enterprise service, would provide general frontline services to the campus. The help desk and consultant group fit here well as one was the single point of contact for IT help and the other provided desktop support and general IT consulting. But a gap soon became apparent: Divisions lacked a mechanism to request project support, which would include a knowledgeable resource that could guide their implementation of technology applications. As the result of a foundation at the strategic level and a successful example in the student affairs division, the IT project manager role was created and staffed with two resources (one for student affairs and a second for academic affairs). The PMO was born. This office would be responsible for project management and business systems analysis for all projects assigned.

For now, this is where we are. As support takes shape and demand continues to grow, this group could grow; but for now, it is a three-person shop, including the director who is still very much a player-coach. The resources divide their time between division support and large, cross-organization projects that have an IT component to them.

SUMMARY

To be successful, there needs to be a project plan for developing the project management office. Everything can become a project if you set your mind to it (that may not mean that it should, but the tools apply in a variety of ways). In this case, it simply means make a plan, follow your plan, and adjust your plan as needed. Any new build requires time and patience in a limited resource environment. Often, the key is to start small and prove that you can deliver. One thing to know in today’s economy is that money typically follows work effort success; rarely does the money come first. Someone has to take the lead, be the champion, take a risk, and inspire a group to believe. The group then digs in—it does the work—and the money and resources then often follows. Remember: funding often has to come out of someone else’s budget, so tread lightly, and be sensitive to those who likely will see a decrease in their budget. Be sure that area gets some service. Soon the mantra may be that “we can do more great work with even more resources.”

In the event that you fail even after rigorous due diligence, remember that the attempt in itself was a project. Some projects meet with success, and some die from a lack of support or just bad timing. Perhaps you’ll need to wait for another day and for another group of champions to help you make the project office successful. In the meantime, utilize PM in the areas over which you have management authority, and call it a local win. All experiences are good if we learn from them. As a mentor of ours often repeated, there are no mistakes only learning opportunities.

Until next time,
Karl and Mike

About the Authors

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Two phenomena have combined in recent years to make the student recruitment process at selective private liberal arts colleges more competitive than ever: The first is the demographic change of which we have been aware for several years. Overall, the U.S. public high school population is decreasing. While some regions, such as the southwest and Florida, are experiencing a population boom, others—particularly the northeastern states—are experiencing dramatic decreases. This has presented a particular challenge to mid-Atlantic colleges that historically have been considered “regional”; over the past five years, many of them have responded by adopting national student recruitment strategies. The second phenomenon is the more recent economic recession and slow-growth recovery, which together have further diminished the supply of prospective students and have made parents more aware of their negotiating power in the admissions process. In this environment, college officials carefully examine their recruitment efforts, business costs, and fee structures. They are committed to enrolling freshman classes of comparable quality to previous years’ but without “buying” them at an unsustainable discount.

The small liberal arts college where I serve as associate dean of the faculty has made significant changes to its efforts to attract and serve transfer students as part of its overall strategy to respond to these challenges. Washington and Jefferson College (W&J) always welcomed transfer students, having enrolled an average of ten per year during the period from 2000 through 2010. But a concerted effort, begun in 2010, to increase to 40 the number of transfer students per year (roughly 15 percent of all new students annually by 2013–14) has resulted in a significant review of and re dedication to the principles of a liberal arts education within the context of a difficult business imperative. This effort has required a “change management” philosophy based upon cooperation and collaboration of divisions of the college that traditionally have not worked together to accomplish shared goals. Most of all, it has required a deep understanding of the transfer experience from the point of view of transfer students themselves, whose interests we serve and whose lives and futures we hope to help shape.

All corners of the campus expressed concern about the concerted effort to quadruple the number of transfer students matriculating at this traditional, residential liberal arts college. The admissions office was concerned about obstacles inherent in existing processes and policies that might result in transfer students’ enrolling elsewhere. Academic affairs—to include the faculty we represent—was concerned about academic standards, about students suc-
ceeding in higher-level courses when they had taken foundational courses elsewhere, and about the increase in faculty workload due to evaluating transcripts and advising incoming students. And student life was concerned about additional resources and programming that would be required to effect a successful transition for these new students.

EVALUATING STUDENT TRANSCRIPTS

The first and most significant change was in the evaluation of student transcripts. In the past, a transfer student applied to the College; submitted transcripts and clearance forms; and was accepted or rejected by admissions. Only if the student paid a $200 non-refundable deposit did admissions refer his transcripts to the registrar’s office for evaluation and the student to student life for orientation (“Nuts and Bolts”). This system had the advantage of ensuring that the registrar and department chairs spent time reviewing courses only of students who were committed to attending the College. But it had the disadvantage of deferring for far too long an answer to students’ most important questions: Which courses will transfer, and how will they be counted toward general education and major requirements? After reviewing College procedures, we decided to refer to the registrar—and then to department chairs—the transcript of every student who submitted an application. Academic affairs committed to conducting these evaluations in ten or fewer business days. Admissions still conducts an initial review and excludes applicants whom the College is certain not to accept, but otherwise, all applicants’ transcripts are reviewed. This has significantly increased the amount of time the registrar and department chairs devote to this activity.

Reviewing transfer courses is time consuming and touches the core of our mission as a liberal arts college. In general, our policy is to accept all courses that are similar in kind to those we teach (or would teach) in our own curriculum. Thus, if a student takes HIS 105: History of U.S. II at another college, we want to credit it as HIS 206: 20th Century America, as the course is named in our curriculum. One goal (among others) is that we want to ensure that the student does not take what is essentially the same course twice. Alternatively, if a student takes a course elsewhere that does not have a direct equivalent on our campus—for example, HIS 213: 20th Century World History—we can evaluate it as similar to something we would teach (provided we had the resources to do so) and award “generic” credit for HIS 200. This process requires input from department chairs to ensure that equivalencies are correct and that we accurately identify courses we cannot accept—e.g., those that are not similar in kind to courses we do—or would—teach.

The change in process from reviewing only the transcripts of matriculated students to reviewing the transcripts of all transfer applicants represents a significant workload increase for departments. It also appears to make us less efficient: Prior to the change, 100 percent of the students whose courses were reviewed by department chairs were already matriculated at the College. By fall 2011 (after the change was implemented), only 32 percent of the students whose courses were reviewed ultimately matriculated. Yet the yield was much greater: 21 transfer students compared to 9 the previous year. For 2012–13, 29 students out of an applicant pool of 125 matriculated, representing a 23 percent yield. No one questions the value of the additional work, but it has been a significant increase for the registrar and department chairs nonetheless.

As we implemented this change, we also reviewed and revised our internal communication process regarding transfer students. Admissions now initiates a message chain by sending to the registrar an e-mail to which PDFs of student transcripts are attached. Academic affairs is copied on this e-mail to signal the beginning of the process and to allow us to intervene as we deem necessary—for example, when a non-academic course should not transfer at all. Academic affairs also determines whether courses that are not equivalent to any in our own curriculum yet qualify for transfer can be designated as meeting our general education (humanities, social sciences, etc.) or skills (quantitative reasoning, oral communication, etc.) requirements. The registrar then e-mails department chairs to request course equivalency designations; the e-mails specify whether any of the courses were taken online and indicate the student’s intended major. This information can influence whether courses are counted toward the student’s major. Department chairs have always had the discretion not to count online courses toward major requirements. Also, some departments require that certain courses be taken on our campus—not elsewhere—so information about the student’s intended major aids the chairs of these departments in their decision making. For
example, our Department of Economics and Business requires that ECN 101, ECN 102, and several other courses be taken on our campus; alternatively, the student must pass a recent final exam for the course in question in order for the other college’s course to be considered equivalent. For non-business, economics, and accounting majors who will not be applying the course toward the respective W&J major, the course can count as equivalent (to ECN 101, for example). But for students intending to major in one of these disciplines, the department chair will work more closely with them to plan their subsequent coursework.

After receiving department chairs’ responses, the registrar sends a summary of the course designations back to admissions; copies are sent to academic affairs and student life. Admissions then can inform the prospective transfer student as to which courses will transfer and which requirements they will count toward. Although the process is laborious, it has become more efficient as the registrar has built a large database of previously evaluated courses. Now, even before sending e-mails to department chairs, the registrar can determine whether a course has been evaluated previously. Ultimately, we expect this to reduce by more than half the number of courses sent to department chairs for review. Despite the extra effort that is required, the process is necessary to ensure that all stakeholders have the opportunity to apply their respective standards to courses being considered for transfer equivalency.

**NUTS AND BOLTS**

The summary e-mail from the registrar that lists all course equivalencies per prospective transfer student is sent as a reply to the initial transcript e-mail sent by the admissions office. This is important for the next step in the transfer student’s journey: Nuts and Bolts, an on-campus event that is customized for each transfer student. The organizer of Nuts and Bolts schedules math placement tests...
for the student (unless the student has passed a calculus or higher-level math course prior to transferring to W&J, in which case the placement test is waived). The e-mail chain thus helps the Nuts and Bolts organizer determine which orientation activities will be necessary for the student. The e-mail chain is forwarded to the student’s major advisor, thus enhancing her ability to help the student make immediate progress in the major.

Nuts and Bolts is another area where the evaluation of student transcripts as early in the admissions process as possible has proven essential. Course equivalencies now are entered into our information system before the student arrives on campus for advising and course registration. In the past, this was seldom the case, with the result that advising was nearly blind: We would read transcripts, make our best guess as to course equivalencies, and then register the student in classes according to a “first do no harm” philosophy. Now, with a database of equivalencies and designations, we can better place transfer students in courses that will help them progress toward graduation.

Until recently, the assistant dean for academic advising was responsible for all transfer student advising. However, beginning in summer 2012, transfer students who know their intended major (greater than 80 percent do) are assigned an advisor within that major. Again, this change required additional work by departments. We were reluctant to ask that faculty commit to being available throughout the semester and the summer. But because everyone understood the overall goal and was committed to helping students make the right decisions as soon as they enrolled at
the College, the change was adopted fairly readily. Summer advising is made less onerous by the fact that we are a small institution, and many faculty live within an easy commute.

Having students fully entered into the system prior to Nuts and Bolts has improved other aspects of their orientation. Our ITS group cannot create a new student’s e-mail account, authorize his ID card, enter him into math placement systems, etc., until he is fully matriculated. Typically, several days elapse between student matriculation and Nuts and Bolts, so when new transfer students meet with financial aid or the business office, select their meal plan, obtain their ID cards, etc., everything can be associated with their account in our enterprise information system.

Other changes have further improved transfer students’ transition to our campus. A new mentoring program under the auspices of student life matches an upper-class W&J student with each new transfer student, usually by major. Often, the mentor is a student orientation leader who is familiar with issues common to new students. Our fall matriculation ceremony, originally conceived to welcome the new freshman class, has been revised to include all “new students”—matriculating freshmen, transfer students, and international students. For spring transfer and exchange students, a separate spring matriculation ceremony provides a similar welcoming experience; the ceremony’s highlights include a presidential welcome, the distribution of College pins, and the signing of the mission statement. The spring event, though smaller, also includes transfer student mentors, faculty advisors, coaches—anyone who has been involved in helping the students transition to our campus. A few new events (such as a student excursion to nearby Pittsburgh and a fall dessert reception at the president’s house) were scheduled in recognition of the fact that transfer students differ from other new students: They don’t want to be treated like freshmen; they’ve “done that” already at their previous institutions, and they appreciate being treated as unique additions to the student population.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

During the past two and a half years, we have met regularly to review changes to our transfer student procedures and to discuss ways in which to improve them further. One issue that remains to be addressed is the reserving of seats in courses for in-coming transfer students. Transfer students typically need to enroll in courses both at the lower level (often to satisfy general education requirements) and at the upper level (to make progress in the major). This has not been a significant problem in the past, but our goal of increasing the number of transfer students to approximately 40 each year suggests that it might become one. A precedent for “preferential enrollment” does exist on campus in that in-coming international exchange students typically are enrolled in courses after seniors have registered. The faculty have understood both that international students need to enroll in certain courses and that their presence is an important component of the campus’s overall diversification efforts. However, most incoming transfer students matriculate at the College at a much later date—weeks or even months after freshmen and continuing students register for the following semester. Predictive analysis of past trends may help identify patterns in the courses that transfer students typically need so we can begin to reserve seats accordingly.

Another challenge pertains to language placement tests. W&J requires students to complete two semesters of a foreign language and uses an online test to determine the appropriate starting level. (Some students “test out” of this requirement by demonstrating proficiency.) Matriculating freshmen take the language placement tests during the summer; language faculty review the completed tests individually in order to make final placement determinations. This process helps prevent students from “registering down”—i.e., enrolling in a lower-level language course despite having studied the language for several years in high school. Because faculty review of placement tests is manual, it is difficult to meld it into the transfer student process, which has become a nearly year-round effort. Just as we identified a faculty member from each department who is willing to advise transfer students throughout the year—including during the summer—so we anticipate needing to approach the language faculty about designating someone from each language to support the language placement process for transfer students. Additional challenges are technical and workload-related: All new students—freshmen as well as transfers—need to be enrolled in the Sakai course site that is used to administer the language placement test. The College’s ITS group manages this enrollment as a batch for incoming freshmen but would need to enroll transfer students manually.
well in advance of each student’s Nuts and Bolts program. Although this seems a minor request, such additions to workload and routine can be difficult to implement.

Despite our best efforts to streamline enrollment processes for transfer students, it is inevitable that some transfer students will approach the College on very short notice—sometimes as late as the first week of classes. We do everything we can to facilitate these students’ transition, but it is difficult to provide a comparably high level of service in such a compressed timeframe. Overall, however, the College’s efforts to increase the numbers of transfer students while maintaining academic standards and the centrality of the liberal arts curriculum are paying off. Alongside other efforts, such as the development of articulation agreements with local community colleges and advising guides written specifically for students at those colleges, we are facilitating students’ transition to a four-year degree program with academic integrity and minimal loss of credits. Within the local context of our campus and curriculum and within the national context of a challenging economy and an increased need for a better-educated population, the extra effort required of everyone involved is being justified by tangible results.

About the Author

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How to Train Your Dragons and Live to Tell About It

By Jerry Ross and Kylie Edmond

OVERVIEW
As the work of registrars’ offices becomes more complex and increasingly reliant on technology, there is a heightened need for more and better training. Because of these rapidly changing technologies and the void of training programs, the Office of the University Registrar at West Virginia University (WVU) has had to create training programs on multiple systems over the last few years. WVU is a large, land grant institution of more than 30,000 students with a rich diversity of programs and people. Our size makes any training program a challenge because we have to be careful of how to deliver training to a large number of people and to make sure the training is relevant. For these programs to be successful, we needed them to be well designed and the transfer of learning to be intentional. As we found through our process, building a training program from scratch is both exciting and daunting. Below you will find how this office adapted to meet the increased demands of the university.

In July 2009, the Office of the University Registrar at WVU was born out of a crisis that brought into question our rules, procedures, and use of technology. Traditional registrar functions were previously included within the Office of Admissions and Records, and the institution was behind on technology related to enrollment management. With the creation of the new office, there was an effort to invest heavily in new technologies which would bring the university up to current standards. In addition, changes in process and policy caused us to rethink how we make certain that end users are prepared to use the technology; and a final catalyst for implementing our training programs came from AACRAO, who provided several recommendations which necessitated that we implement and ensure that these new technologies were being used.

SYSTEMS
Over the course of two and a half years, the office implemented several new technologies including a new electronic degree audit system and a catalog management system, as well as launched mandatory training requirement on the student information system. To say this was a change for the institution is an understatement. We had to address many cultural issues through training and documentation. For the degree audit system, the institution had previously relied on a paper system for auditing degrees, so we had to work to make certain that the advisors across campus were familiar enough with the system to rely on it as an advising tool and that those who need to certify students for graduation could utilize the system as well.
As the office implemented a new catalog management system to update and publish our academic catalogs, we had to make sure multiple users across campus could adequately use the system. In addition, we needed to maintain a decentralized system where more than 100 individuals across campus worked on one or more catalogs each year. These users included department chairs, program coordinators, administrative assistants, assistant/associate deans, and many others. Our training model had to be relevant enough for each group to ensure they were prepared to work on a project that only comes around once a year and includes groups already suffering from time constraints.

Lastly, WVU had utilized a student information system for over ten years but had never required users to be trained on the system. Users spread across campus were given access to a system they didn’t fully understand and then never shown how to use it. This was akin to giving someone their first car but never teaching them how to drive it. Over the course of several months, the office launched a training program on the system having first made it voluntary and then making it mandatory for any new user who accesses any information related to registration or academic history. Other units within the university handle access to their areas within in the system in their own way.

**TRAINING MODEL**

As we looked to implement a new training model for our systems, we had several factors to consider including, but not limited to time and resources. We were unable to hire additional staff to perform this function so training was handled primarily by a member of the staff who worked on the degree audit system, as that was the first area where we established training. For some projects, especially the catalog management system, other staff members were involved in both the development an execution of the training program. For the training related to our student information system, the same model was followed although we also engaged with our Office of Information Security to include relevant content from their area. Our guiding principle in all of our training efforts was that the training needed to be interactive and meaningful for the end users. We wanted the participants to come to training, learn what they needed, and then test it out before they left the room.

Our current training model contains three key components, and though the content and structure vary for each system, the themes and methods remain the same. All of our training sessions generally start out by discussing what the system is and why it is important for our users. Next, they all have components discussing how users log in, navigate through the system and obtain or input the necessary information. The third key portion of all of our trainings is a hands-on practice portion, where end users get to test the knowledge they’ve accumulated over the course of the training.

We begin the introductory training on our degree audit system by discussing what the system is and why it is important. Next, we cover the basics of searching, reading an audit, and how to utilize the various features; and we conclude by getting all of the trainees logged into the system and letting them work through some of their own students. We encourage training attendees to bring in some sample students that they may be working with or advising.

For our student information system training, we start out with a presentation from our information security office that helps our trainees understand how important it is to keep our student data confidential and accurate. Then we cover the structure of the system, followed by the step by step process that we use to access information in the system. We pause here for some hands on practice using the navigation tools that were just covered; and then we move on to some special features available in our student system. We then pause to practice using those features and conclude the training with a set of challenge questions that help users practice everything that was covered.

Our training for catalog management starts off discussing dates and deadlines since we offer this particular training in conjunction with our catalog update cycle. We then discuss any new overarching changes that have been made to the catalog since the last cycle. Finally, we run through each area of the catalog, providing a quick refresher on how to make the changes and pausing briefly after each area to allow users to make their updates. There’s usually time left over at the end for users to circle back or to work with them one on one if they have specific questions. With this system, we also encourage our training attendees to bring in their catalog updates so they have something to work on during the user practice session. In some cases, attendees have finished their updates during training.
The time for each training session varies by content and by how much user practice is needed. We strive to make the sessions as long as they need to be but no longer. The total amount of demonstration time for our degree audit system varies from group to group depending on how interested they are in specific features, but it generally sits between twenty and thirty minutes. Since this training is very demonstrational and toggling between a slide show and the system itself would be cumbersome, we use a power point presentation as a handout only. The handout is structured to align with the demonstration topics and gives trainees something to take notes on as we go through the system. We have comprehensive training documentation in PDF form on our training and documentation website, and we are in the process of developing video training modules.

Our student system training usually takes about an hour and a half including the user practice portions. The handouts that we offer for the student system training consist of a cheat sheet list of frequently used forms, a list of contact offices who are responsible for different portions of the system and gives trainees something to take notes on as we go through the system. We have comprehensive training documentation in PDF form on our training and documentation website, and we are in the process of developing video training modules.

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What Worked and What Didn’t

When developing our training model, we went through a period of trial and error which brought to light several key things that did not work well for WVU. These, in turn lead to the development of several key things that do work well for the institution.

The first discovery on the list of what didn’t work was the size of our training sessions. The initial trainings for our degree audit system were huge. We’d sometimes have 30 to 40 attendees at a time. With groups this large the training would often devolve into an academic debate about what curriculum should be instead of focusing on the new system at hand. Second, we did not include a hands-on portion in our initial trainings. After getting questions about items we thought had been well covered during training, we realized we needed to re-think our approach. Thus we added the hands-on part. This hands-on practice combined with smaller training sessions has made a huge difference in the amount of information our trainees leave with.

There are two additional issues that stalled our trainings at first: end-user log in difficulties and computer lab mal-function. For the first one, log in difficulties, we encountered this in our student system and catalog management. Trainees would come to training and not have the credentials necessary to log into the systems. We’ve cleared this up in two ways. First, for our student system trainings, end users must verify that they have log in credentials before they can access the sign up form for training. If they don’t have credentials they are directed to the web page where they can request the access they need. For our catalog management system, we now double check the list of trainees against the catalog pages and workflows that they are responsible for. This ensures that when we get to the hands-on portion of the training, everyone can log in and no time is wasted on sorting out access.

In terms of computer lab malfunction, we also saw this in our student system and catalog management trainings, with inaccurate versions of software installed or lack of internet connection. We mitigate this by using computer labs on campus that are well supported and also by adding in a little extra time up front to check all of the systems and take care of any issues should they arise. This has led to more successful and timely training sessions.

What Didn’t Work

- Large numbers of trainees
- No hands on practice
- Assuming all trainees could access the systems
- Assuming that computer lab equipment would work consistently
Now that we’ve covered all of the things that didn’t work well at first, there is one thing that we have done from the start that has greatly aided the success of the technologies we have implemented and that is the continued support we provide outside of the training lab. Our staff has consistently provided excellent assistance to end-users over the phone and via email, which has created a positive rapport between the Registrar’s Office and end-users. This relationship with our end-users allows us to better understand their evolving needs and helps us prepare new ways in which to meet them.

**What Did Work**

- 10 to 15 trainees per session
- Hands on practice
- Verifying trainee log in credentials
- Adding a few extra minutes up front to test equipment
- Continued support after training

**WHAT’S NEXT**

So far, our training programs have reached more than 600 faculty and staff across the university; and we hope to keep that number growing. Currently, we’re working to develop online pre and post training components for each of our trainings. The pre-training module is being designed to provide insight into specific concepts that trainees may need extra help with, and the post-training module will be set up to provide a quick refresher for those technologies that may only be utilized once or twice a semester. In addition, we will continue to add additional items to training as new functionality comes online. For example, as we expand document imaging, we will include more information on this function in our training on the student information system.

**CONCLUSION**

Every institution differs in size and scope; and what we have presented here is what worked best for WVU. For WVU, we have created a training model that works for us and is fulfilling our mandate to promote usage of these systems. Certainly, this is not intended to be one size fits all approach as each institution differs in what they need to accomplish through training, but we hope that sharing our trial and error experiences will help stave off a similar learning curve for others who are developing training models. We continue to assess the effectiveness of our training through formal surveys and through informal dialogues with our users. We follow up each training session with a survey to gauge the effectiveness as well as look for new content for the training. This survey also gives us an opportunity to remind them that we continue to be available for assistance after training.

Training is never static and must evolve over time. Ours certainly has and will continue to do so. The training we offer today is better than what we offered when we started, but it is always a work in progress. As new issues and features come along, we modify our training accordingly. Each time we offer a new training, it is built on what worked in the previous training efforts and probably more importantly the feedback and continued discussions we have with the end users. The adult educator Jane Vella has said that “adult learning is best achieved through dialogue…and adults have enough life experiences to be in dialogue with any teacher, about any subject, and will learn new knowledge or attitudes or skills best in relations to that life experience” (Vella 1994, p.3). As trainers, we must work to ensure that learner needs are not forgotten in the training process and this can often be achieved through continued open dialogue.

**REFERENCES**


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BACKGROUND

Many institutions of higher education have adopted programs that allow incoming students to register for courses prior to orientation (Black 2007, Cunningham 2006). Prompted in 2009 to do so, the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) developed the Pre-Orientation Registration Process (PORP) to address several registration challenges, including informing students about curriculum, allowing students to register prior to orientation, and relieving the need for on-campus computer labs during orientation.

To better understand the background and context of the PORP program, it is important first to review the research on registration processes.

REGISTRATION PROCESSES

Colleges and universities consistently seek to provide the consumers of education with the best possible services. Consumers include students, parents, and government agencies (Thelin 2004). Some in higher education believe that prescribing a course schedule for incoming students is the best way to manage enrollment, provide students with appropriate courses, and complete the registration process. Typically, the prescriptive registration method involves academic advisors registering on behalf of incoming students. Many institutions also utilize block scheduling as a means of providing entering students with a pre-packaged set of courses (Black 2007). In contrast, the developmental philosophy is built on the understanding that college students are adults who should have the freedom to choose their own courses; as they do, they engage in autonomous development. Boyer (1987), Chickering and Reisser (1993), and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found autonomy to be an important area of growth and development for college students. Autonomous development involves a type of “learning which is characterized by personalization, self-directedness, and less dependency on the educator for affirmation” (MacDougall 2008). The research presented here focuses on developmental methods that enable incoming students to play an active role in their registration and academic planning.

The earliest form of mass registration took place in large open areas where students waited in the hope of securing a seat in a particular course. Cunningham (2006) found that it was common during the 19th and 20th centuries for registration to occur in large arena settings. These were one-stop shops where students were advised, registered, and charged for courses; however, they often engendered frustration—primarily because they were unorganized (Cunningham 2006).
In an effort to address issues related to space limitations and student frustration, many institutions moved to a distributed method of registration in which students were assigned different registration appointments and locations (Cunningham 2006). This method reduced the chaos associated with arena registration and shortened lines, but students demanded (and technology enabled) further improvements to the process.

In the 1980s, telephone and touch-tone registration systems became the norm at U.S. higher education institutions. By the end of the 1990s, web-based registration systems soon replaced all others. Online registration systems simultaneously enhanced institutional abilities to manage enrollment, registration, and students’ academic records (Cunningham 2006).

In 2000, Duke University introduced a web-based registration system based on the concept of “book bagging” (Cunningham 2006): Each student is given an online “book bag” that functions like the virtual “shopping cart” on various retail websites. Prior to meeting formally with an academic advisor, students are required to fill their online book bags with courses that meet all established policy limitations (e.g., no time conflicts, course availability, prerequisites, etc.) related to course scheduling. In addition, students may identify up to 25 alternate courses that could fill their schedule if their preferred courses were not available. This method is being emulated at other institutions and serves as a guide for pre-orientation registration programming.

Recently, institutions (including UNCW) began to re-evaluate the way in which incoming students register for courses. In particular, we at UNCW began to explore ways in which we could use web-based registration systems to enable incoming students to register prior to attending our traditional orientation programs. UNCW, Georgia Perimeter College, and other institutions have created online tutorial systems that educate, prepare, and permit students to register online (Lipschultz and Leonard 2007). Since 2009, UNCW has provided incoming students with the information and the tools they need to register for courses prior to orientation. This unique program may serve as a model for other institutions (Hogan 2011).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

The creation of PORP was a response to registration challenges that limited UNCW’s ability to serve students during orientation. Traditional freshman orientation at UNCW takes place on campus during the months of May, June, and August. Incoming freshmen and their parents attend two full days of orientation that incorporate introductory workshops on financial aid, housing, campus safety, and academic policies. During the second day, students are introduced to the University’s registration portal, meet with an academic advisor, and register for courses; however, limited institutional resources compromised this experience.

The key institutional limitations related to student registration during orientation were:
- lack of time to properly educate incoming freshmen about academic policies, registration techniques, and the core curriculum; and
- insufficient numbers of computers and computer labs during orientation.

The orientation schedule for incoming students included one hour of discussion about academic policy, a twenty-minute presentation on how to register online, and one hour of access to an academic advisor. Incoming students registered for classes with little understanding of an academic plan and often chose their classes on a whim. Institutional representatives were justifiably concerned about whether sufficient numbers of computers would be available to handle the increasing number of students attending orientation sessions. Because all registration utilizes a web-based portal, the availability of properly functioning computers and IT systems is paramount.

PORP was designed to address these limitations and to provide a better registration experience for students. Its specific goals were to:
- provide an interactive educational experience that increased students’ knowledge and ability to make informed course choices while registering online before attending orientation; and
- reduce the need for on-campus computers and computer labs during orientation.

Historically, when more than 300 students attempted to register simultaneously using on-campus computers, network problems and outages occurred. Moreover, enrollment management seeks to identify proactive means of anticipating course demand.
HISTORY

In 2009, Elaine Hogan, then coordinator of orientation programming within University College (UC) at UNCW, spearheaded an effort to address registration challenges and provide incoming freshmen with the ability to register for courses prior to attending orientation. Hogan sought assistance from such other institutional offices as Admissions, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Information Technology Services Division (ITSD), the Office of the Registrar, Student Accounts, and Transition Programs. Each office played a unique and important role in the development of PORP (Hogan 2011).

A set of three pilot phases was identified during the PORP design stage. The phases would allow the team to evaluate and reflect upon implementation strengths and weaknesses. The first pilot phase took place for a subset of incoming fall 2010 students; the second phase took place during spring 2011; and the third was for all incoming fall 2011 students. Each phase differed slightly according to the number and type of students involved and the methods utilized (Hogan 2011).

The majority of PORP’s methods remained consistent throughout the three phases: Select groups of incoming freshmen were invited to participate in PORP, were...
required to complete an online tutorial, and then were given a week-long window—prior to orientation—during which they were asked to register for classes (Hogan 2011).

During each phase, participating students were required to complete an online tutorial that focused on core curriculum requirements and the online registration system—including how to register for courses. After passing a quiz on the content of the tutorial, students were given an alternate pin that enabled them to register for courses prior to orientation (Hogan 2011).

At UNCW, a full-time course load is twelve hours or more; yet PORP’s goal was not to ensure that students would build a complete, full-time schedule prior to orientation but rather to enable them to register for several appropriate courses. This reflected the registration limit the College of Arts and Sciences requested in order to best manage course enrollment. Further, any courses for which students registered prior to orientation were not expected to necessarily be definitive choices; during orientation, academic advisors reviewed and suggested changes as necessary. Students also had access to advisors via phone and e-mail during the week in which they were permitted to pre-register.

UNCW’s University College completed the sixth implementation of PORP for spring 2013 students. (See Table 1 on page 65 for the results of each PORP iteration since 2010.)

**DISCUSSION**

As mentioned above, the College of Arts and Sciences requested that a course registration limit be set for students participating in PORP. Implementing such a limit helped prevent students from registering for too many classes and helped maintain course availability during each orientation session. The credit hour limitation is ten hours for fall-admit students and varies for spring-admit students; during spring 2013, no limit was set.

On average, fall 2012 students pre-registered for nearly the maximum number of course hours allowed, and spring-admit students pre-registered for more hours. (See Table 1.) Several conclusions may be drawn:

- Students entering during the spring encounter less competition than their fall counterparts when pre-registering for courses during PORP. (In fact, the average number of spring students participating in PORP is 99 whereas the average for fall students is 705.)
- Course pre-registration limits have been more liberal for spring-admit students, with the result that they pre-register for more credit hours than do fall-admit students.
Spring-admit students may be better prepared for pre-registering for classes given that they have more time than fall-admit students to carefully consider the courses in which they wish to enroll. Many spring-admit students attend college elsewhere during the fall semester prior to their enrollment at UNCW, with the result that they gain college course pre-registration experience. Communication with spring admits may be more effective than with fall admits: Advisors are in more frequent contact with spring-admit students during the fall semester than with fall-admit students during the spring prior to their enrollment.

Research should be conducted to determine whether these conclusions are sound. In particular, further research to determine whether the courses registered for during PORP are relevant to students’ core curriculum and/or major specific course requirements is of import. Further research also would inform decisions about whether and how the pre-registration limit should be adjusted.

CONCLUSION

The registration process for incoming students during orientation can be daunting given the complex and extensive academic information and the traditional short duration of registration. Often, the registration process provides insufficient time for students to process information that will prove vital to their academic success and retention. Cuseo (2011) encouraged first-year administrators and professionals to raise institutional consciousness regarding policies that do not provide students with adequate time for academic discovery and personal growth. Institutions should implement programs such as PORP as means of providing incoming students with additional opportunity to understand the importance and complexity of their academic requirements. By giving students additional time to consider course options and future curricular plans, universities can encourage them to be actively engaged in and knowledgeable about their academic future. Further research about programs similar to PORP will help higher education institutions determine how they can best prepare incoming students for the registration process.

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Many dedicated people enter our profession intentionally and carefully.

Then there are the rest of us.

My venturing into the world of the registrar came through a phone call from the academic dean, also a good friend: “The registrar’s leaving. Would you take over as interim registrar?” The choice seemed felicitous: I had long experience as a faculty advisor and as a department and program chair; a certain level of facility with information technology and with issues of study abroad; and I was a tenured member of a department perceived as overstaffed. So, after 35 years on the Davidson faculty, I took over as registrar—and wound up staying, not as interim, but for another dozen years as registrar—while still teaching a class each semester. (I wouldn’t have accepted without continuing to teach, a vocation that I genuinely love.)

I saw the opportunity as precisely that, deciding rather quickly that despite no formal preparation whatsoever for the job, I could bring some strengths to it—especially with an office staff in place that collectively had many years of experience.

And I knew two things: one was that I needed to learn; the other, that I needed to lead. After a while, I realized that they were not two things, but two sides of the same thing. Give me a few more pages, and perhaps I can clarify that assertion.

Let me pause for a little background. Davidson College is a highly selective four-year baccalaureate college. Our students represent entirely what we call the traditional age, eighteen–twenty-two; all are full-time, and all are residential. A large majority will aspire to and achieve education beyond the bachelor’s degree at graduate and professional schools throughout the United States and elsewhere. Tuition is high, although donor generosity means that financial aid is relatively abundant. High tuition does, however, encourage both students and their parents to expect a comparably high level of service. Even that brief outline should alert anyone that the registrar’s challenges at Davidson match only in part those faced by colleagues in our rich variety of colleges and universities.

Some aspects of the profession, however, do confront just about all of us. To begin with, a registrar—especially a new one—needs to learn a great number of things. We might be able to collect them into three categories. If this were a presentation, the three categories would demand either an acronym or alliteration. I’ll settle for the latter and gather what I needed to learn into headings: Procedures, Politics, and People. The procedures, obviously, are
the office routines and the needs behind them, along with the mechanisms (such as software) that support those routines and needs. The politics are largely but not exclusively local: how we develop procedures to address the needs of others on the campus and beyond—and what institutional avenues and structures make the registrar’s office effective in simultaneously preserving routine and facilitating change. People underlie both of those categories, of course: procedures exist, after all, to serve the needs of people; and institutional structures for governance are not really mere charts, but the people named within them. Moreover, and crucially, any office itself consists of people expecting leadership and collegiality.

I decided early on that it would be useful for me to learn at least the basics of our student information system (Banner). One person within the office, involved in the original installation, had exemplary knowledge about the information system itself, a strong sense of how what we did within it related to the work of others, and a great deal of patience in teaching me what it could and couldn’t do. Others on staff were skilled at using the software to accomplish tasks that traditionally had fallen to them, although I concluded that some cross-training in those tasks would be a reasonable priority not merely for the general effectiveness of the office, but because continued learning could and should help everyone avoid the stultifying consequences of unchanging routine. I wanted to know how it all worked, not just to provide a sense of how long a task should take, or how complex it might be, but frankly because I enjoy that sort of learning. In the process, and over time, I learned the downside of cross-training—being reminded on occasion that a task that becomes everyone’s responsibility becomes no one’s. Were I to start over, I’d be more aware of the dangers of trying to move away from “her job” toward “our job”; that formulation is appropriate, but may not communicate individual expectations well.

As luck would have it, I came into the registrar’s office at the time Banner moved strongly toward self-service for both students and faculty. With the support of our information technology department, we quickly went about replacing some of the items the office had been using for years. What I learned in that process was how to use Access, certainly—but much more importantly, how much people in the office enjoyed learning even at an elementary level how to use new tools to accomplish old tasks.

Politics can suggest a number of things, but I’ll use the word in the broadest possible sense: negotiating the eccentricities of both the local and broader communities that have a reasonable stake in what the registrar’s office does and learning how to exert, or at least understand, influence within those communities. As a longtime faculty member, at least I had the advantage of already knowing everyone and being able to get to anyone rather directly; and I knew the local politics well. (In the words of the then college president: “Hansford knows where the bodies are buried, and probably buried some of them himself.”)

The wider community presented a different challenge. The registrar must also live in the world of law, of accreditation, and the like. Not having the advantage of coming from a program in higher education administration, I had not been through one of the standard courses: legal issues in higher education. Knowing no more about FERPA than the average faculty member—which means not much—I welcomed eagerly the support provided by AACRAO through both publications and extensive presentations at conferences. That support, supplemented by contacts with colleagues at other institutions, became my cram course about the wider community in legal and other ways. It helped with office efficiency (and sustainable practices) when we concluded we could cease filing, on paper, every
Leadership Lessons: Vision and Values for a New Generation

If the finest voices in higher education were gathered together in one room to discuss leadership, what would you learn? Leadership Lessons: Vision and Values for a New Generation took that notion to create a compilation of 22 articles on the topic of leadership, written by today’s leaders in higher education. Filled with unique kernels of wisdom, each chapter shares the authors’ visions and values in ways that inspire, motivate, and illustrate how to be an exceptional leader. Authors include many who have worked in the registrar’s office for decades to others with varied backgrounds in theater, student activism and German literature. This is a book you will want to share with colleagues, friends and employees; all of whom will benefit from the lessons learned by these remarkable, wise and fascinating professionals.

AACRAO’s Professional Development Guidelines for Registrars: A Self-Assessment

For nearly 40 years, AACRAO has published the Self-Assessment, and this 185-page update will provide a cost effective and simple way to evaluate your office operations by stimulating thought, encouraging self-reflection, and evaluating policies and procedures. The Assessment is arranged by topical area with chapters addressing most basic registrar functions. Within each chapter are Basic Principles, which provide a foundation for the discussion topic and guide the development of the questions that follow. The questions give direction, evoke thought, and allow for a variety of approaches to a given topic. Action Plan items are provided to expand your expertise and allow more in-depth study of a topic. Finally, a Further Reading section has been added to the end of each chapter to direct the reader to useful resources on the topics discussed.

To order these and other AACRAO publications, call (301) 490-7651 or visit us on the Web at www.aacrao.org/bookstore.
student request to have transcripts sent to a grad school or a study abroad program. It helped when we decided to quit sending semester grade reports automatically to parents, because it enabled me (among other things) to clarify for them the difference between stipulating what a college may do and what it must do. Of course, many parents still were unsettled by the policy. During panel discussions for parents at orientation, the issue continued to arise — and I tried humorously to poke fun at the extreme decisions of bureaucrats while defending, in good conscience, the principle behind both FERPA and our decisions relative to it. (I did cut back on poking fun at bureaucrats when one mother of a new freshman expressed interest in my snide comments about the FERPA bureaucracy — and introduced herself as the Secretary of Education.)

The wider political context does remind us, however, that our responsibilities as registrars extend beyond the edges of our campus and even that our professionalism can demand on occasion that we stand our ground against our own faculties and administrations. I cannot help noticing in media accounts of occasional scandals about grades and credentials how seldom a registrar is mentioned, and I take that as a sign of campuses on which the registrar has been relegated to a role lacking the respect and the influence that the office must have. When deans of various sorts have been implicated in grade changes or questionable regulations, it’s not hard to figure out that campus politics have impeded the registrar’s responsibility — and hence that of the campus — to the wider community.

People present the biggest challenge, in part because there is so much to learn in the attempt to meet that challenge. We can read and hear a great deal about leadership (which certainly implies leading people) and about managing, and we can take grateful note of the many who observe that while leadership and management may have much in common, they are not the same thing at all. Unfortunately for my snobbish stylistic tastes, much of what we read and hear hides both insights and truisms under writing of the sort that assumes useful concepts arise from converting nouns into adjectives or verbs, from removing human subjects from as many sentences as possible, and from overusing admirable terms until they have all the uplift of a three-day old balloon. (I suspect I can live happily for several years without ever again reading or hearing “innovation” or “excellence.”)

Of course, I’ve just illustrated — deliberately — why someone coming from a faculty background might have held positions of responsibility while learning little about managing others. We often don’t manage well because we’re bound to our own academic and stylistic convictions — and we aren’t managed readily for the same reason.

So I was led under protest — and not too effectively — to concede the value of such genuinely productive managerial insights as the importance of establishing goals that are smart: specific, measurable, attainable, and the rest.

But part of my protest persists: leadership requires smart management, to be sure — but it’s something far greater.

And that’s where I sum up a dozen years, at a career’s end, spent as a registrar: “learning to lead” means more than just learning what it takes to lead an office, to master its procedures, or to respect its role in both smaller and larger communities.

The phrase “learning to lead” suggests, for me, that the act of learning is itself an act of leadership. I had a great advantage: I came into an office knowing less than others with whom I worked every day. Learning from them made me demonstrate respect for them. Learning with them allowed us together to respond to changes because we could understand, together, that learning something different was an opportunity, not a threat. Perhaps someone whose vocation was learning itself could, by example, be an effective leader precisely because of that vocation.

What could be a better model in education, after all? Learning involves three directions: mastering the past, questioning the present, and suggesting the new. Helping to create that climate in an office that provides professional and essential support for education might have been a good day’s work. Or a good twelve years.

About the Author

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Everyone should have the experience of working in higher education. The customs and traditions of academia, the diversity of backgrounds and experiences among faculty and staff, and the excitement that comes with the beginning of each new semester are truly unique. Sixteen-week blocks of time come and go in what seems like the blink of an eye. In the midst of preparing for semesters, closing out semesters, and trying to move initiatives forward in the sparse time between, it is easy to overlook what a privilege it is to be part of a campus community that helps students achieve their goals and fulfill their dreams.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to be a college leader. However, as I reflected upon what words of wisdom I might share for this leadership series, it occurred to me that not everyone shares my sense of gratitude. There are far too many days when higher education leaders get bogged down by the weight of responsibility and the day-to-day distractions that are part of college administration.

Of course, we shouldn’t feel burdened or distracted because we are leaders (at least that’s what the world wants us to believe). Walk into your local bookstore, find the leadership section, and glance at what is on the shelf: There are books detailing how great leaders became great, books with five- and ten-step plans to becoming great leaders, books to help teach the great leaders of the future, and dozens of other leadership texts that extol the virtues of leadership.

Both the popular and scholarly literature perpetuate this halo effect. Leaders are equated to heroes who rush in and save the day. The subtle message is that leadership is the answer to whatever ails an organization! Leaders have all the answers! And if you just hire the right one, everything will be fine.

Society suggests that we should search for leaders who are excellent (or, to quantify excellence in academic terms, leaders who would earn As in our classrooms), but perhaps we should help leaders to acquire a few Fs. To those currently in leadership positions—young leaders who are just beginning their careers in new roles—and to those who aspire to become leaders in higher education, I offer three Fs they should strive to attain: failure, followership, and flexibility.

FAILURE
One of my favorite movie scenes is from the 1987 film Wall Street: The hot shot stockbroker Bud Fox, played by Charlie Sheen, is moments away from being arrested for insider trading. Before this tragic fall from grace, an older, wiser colleague puts his arms around Bud and says, “Man looks into the abyss, and there’s nothing staring back at
him. At that moment, that’s when a man finds his character, and that’s what keeps him out of the abyss.”

Leaders fail. I believe that we learn from failure not only how to perform tasks better, but also—and more importantly—about our character. Failure teaches us to acknowledge our humanity and to realize that perfection is a fool’s errand and an expectation that we should not set for ourselves or those we lead. Rather, we should strive for excellence, improvement, and the satisfaction that comes with knowing we have given our best effort to the task at hand.

Likewise, failure helps to build the character that is vital when we experience loss or bend under the weight of great responsibility. Bending and not breaking is the result of having learned from failure. A leader in higher education faces any number of challenges on a daily basis. We want leaders who can face challenges with the fortitude required to rebound from momentary defeat.

Failure and how we handle it are vital to successful leadership. As a character from another movie once uttered, “Failure is not an option.”

FOLLOWERSHIP

Enrollment management leaders play a pivotal role in attracting and retaining students for the institutions we serve. Like most leaders, we are credited with great success when things go well (i.e., when enrollment increases) and blamed when things take a turn for the worse (i.e., when enrollment decreases). Yet too often the successes and failures of organizations are evaluated solely on the basis of the perceived performance and abilities of a single person.

Think again of the bookstore I mentioned earlier. The leadership section likely includes many books about leadership but very few about followership. Leadership is observed, evaluated, and discussed according to a leader-centric rather than a follower-centric approach. While authors such as Barbara Kellerman and Jean Lipman-Blumen have begun to explore followership, the subject is still largely unexplored and ignored.

All leaders have had experiences as followers. Leaders should be mindful of their past and present roles as followers and should remember the concept of followership as they interact with those around them. To become a good leader, one must explore his own followership: Think about how you perceive and react to actions by leaders and the positive and negative results in the interactions in which you are a follower. Use these lessons to improve your relationships with followers and to gain a better understanding of how they perceive your communication and behavior. In addition, teach supervisors in your departments to consider followership.

To put it simply, stand in the shoes of those you lead, and consider how they perceive your leadership. Taking time on a regular basis to reflect on followership will help you become a better leader. After all, it is followers and their actions that are most likely to lead not only to your success but also to that of your institution.

FLEXIBILITY

Franklin D. Roosevelt is believed to have said that “rules are not necessarily sacred; principles are.” During my tenure as a college administrator, many new hires from outside higher education have shared their difficulty in adjusting to an environment with so many policies, procedures, and regulations. At a public institution—a college or university system, in particular—the rules are even more complex.

Of course, we need rules, and it is imperative to spend time developing policy and procedures for our institutions. A good leader emphasizes the importance of adhering to the rules and of ensuring that we are ethical and transparent in all of our dealings. Institutional accreditors emphasize this as well, and we all are aware of the consequences to our institutions and students when policies and procedures either are disregarded or are nonexistent.

Nevertheless, leaders must take President Roosevelt’s statement to heart and be open to the possibility of being flexible in their application of the rules. This is one of the differences between a manager and a leader: A manager is likely to enforce the rules to the letter whereas a leader should be willing at least to consider extenuating circumstances, the best interest of the student, the best interest of the institution, and other mitigating factors. I am not advocating that leaders break from policy and procedure without considered judgment. However, leaders must understand the value of flexibility and their greater duty to ensure that students and institutions are not harmed by blanket enforcement of the rules.

Flexibility has one other application as an “F word” for leaders, and that is in relation to the work environment we provide for our followers. Leaders should not make
difficult the work of those they have been entrusted to lead. Unfortunately, I have seen too many so-called leaders make work and life unnecessarily difficult for their followers. I urge leaders to be flexible in their supervision and understanding of each individual’s professional situation. Our goal as leaders should be to help develop our followers and to make every effort to create the best work environment for them that we can. To do otherwise is a breach of the trust that has been placed in us as leaders and is contrary to the essence of good leadership.

We should be willing to incorporate some other “F words” into our leadership practice: Forgiveness, though often recognized solely as a spiritual concept, is critical if we are to avoid revenge, anger, and other pitfalls of leadership. Fortitude is also necessary for any good leader to survive both the highs and the lows that come with the position. Fidelity should be another element of leadership as we honor our commitments as higher education leaders to students, faculty, staff, and the community.

My advice to leaders is to earn a few Fs: Be willing to fail; understand followership; and practice flexibility.

About the Author

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HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE
BY WILLIAM G. BOWEN IN COLLABORATION WITH KELLY A. LACK
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013. 172 PP.
Reviewed by Marguerite J. Dennis

Higher Education in the Digital Age by William G. Bowen, President Emeritus of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Princeton University, is the literary by-product of lectures delivered at Stanford University as part of the Tanner Lectures. The book lays out the problem of “cost disease” in higher education and the potential for technology to impact the problem in a positive way.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part covers the issues of productivity and affordability. Part two explores the challenges, threats and opportunities of technology to address and potentially assist in resolving rising higher education costs. President Bowen makes the case that if colleges and universities do not address cost and affordability issues, federal and state officials may mandate solutions.

In part two, President Bowen outlines the potential for online education and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) to improve productivity, create flexible teaching schedules, and improve retention and graduation rates. The reader is urged to consider the possibility that new technologies and online education will eventually be able to unbundle traditional academic functions and create new decision-making models.

Contributors to the publication include: Andrew Delbanco, the Mendelson Family Chair of American Studies and the Julian Clarence Levi Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University, Howard Gardner, and the John H. and Elizabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard University and senior director of Harvard Project Zero, John L. Hennessy, the president of Stanford University, and Daphne Koller, the Rajeev Motwani Professor of Computer Science at Stanford University and cofounder of Coursera.

PART 1
Costs and Productivity in Higher Education

This part of the book outlines the economics of higher education, the forces in higher education that contribute to increase costs, and the concerns about affordability both within higher education community and the public. Included in all of these issues is the role of the erosion of public confidence in higher education, “sticker price,” financial aid bidding “wars,” and the creeping stratification in higher education between a handful of elite colleges with endowments that provide unlimited resources and
the rest of the colleges and universities that make up the higher education landscape.

President Bowen defines “cost disease” in simple terms: “in labor intensive industries such as the performing arts and education, there is less opportunity than in other sectors to increase productivity. As a result, labor costs will increase.”

Factors other than cost disease pushing up educational costs include:

- Inefficiencies and a lack of business-like practices in colleges and universities
- Regulatory requirements that compel colleges and universities to spend more and more resources on compliance
- “Bureaucratic Creep” that pervades higher education and creates an “army” of administrators and layers of administrative structure
- An Ingrained Desire to “Buy the Best” driven by rankings and boards of trustees impressed with their school’s number on the “U.S. News” list.

Also included in part one is President Bowen’s discussion of the problem of student degree completion and the evident implications for productivity. Inadequate guidance, a mismatch of student with school at the application stage, and insufficient places in gateway courses all contribute to increasing the time it takes students to graduate. The successful completion rates of students in elite colleges and universities mirrors the stratification of enrollment in those select schools of students from high income families with the economic stratification of students from disadvantaged backgrounds enrolling in schools with less resources. President Bowen also raises the question of what the SAT examinations really measure. Would it not be better to compare the high school grades of college applicants rather than the scores of college applicants who can afford expensive test preparation classes?

Finally, part one addresses the issue of college affordability, parents’ ability to pay versus willingness to pay, discount rates, net tuition and student debt. President Bowen makes the case for the often inaccurate and headline grabbing reports of newspapers throughout the country regarding student debt. Several reports are cited including the U.S. Department of Education data that illustrates that most students graduate from college with manageable debt. According to Department of Education data, three-quarters of four-year graduates owe less than $33,857 at the time of graduation. The Pew Research Center reported that the outstanding student loan balance was $26,682 in 2010.

President Bowen ends part one with a clear statement that there is a crisis in U.S. higher education. Low completion rates, financially unsustainable tuition costs, and an increase in the attainment gap between rich and poor students have been widening, not closing. However, President Bowen closes part one on a positive note, with a belief in the staying power and resiliency of our colleges and universities.

I was reminded that the challenges and threats we face in higher education today is not something new. Consider that in 1850, Francis Wayland, then president of Brown University, said:

*Our colleges are not filled because we do not furnish the education desired by the people. We have produced a product for which demand is diminishing. We sell it at less than cost, and the deficiency is made up by charity. We give it away, and demand still diminishes* (Dennis 1998, p. 1x)

**PART 2**

**Prospects for an Online Fix**

In this section of the book the author suggests that higher education is at the beginning of re-engineering that could transform parts of how students learn. President Bowen maintains that technology has the potential for:

- Increased faculty collaboration
- Promote “active learning” by students and provide individualized feedback
- Create a more diverse student body and engage students from around the world and
- Potentially slow tuition increases

Professor Bowen is a convert to the belief that technology can lead to comparable learning outcomes relative to classroom instruction. However he cautions about the barriers that still need to be overcome, including:

- Lack of hard evidence about learning outcomes and potential cost savings
Lack of shared but customizable teaching and learning platforms and

The need for fresh thinking about decision-making.

The Lack of Hard Evidence

There is no definitive answer to the question of how effective online learning has improved learning outcomes. Small student sample size and the lack of good estimates of likely cost savings make it impossible to predict with certainty, the long-term effects of online learning. What is also impossible to project is the potential of online learning to change the way courses are scheduled and transfer credits and prior learning are evaluated. Could a hybrid system reduce time-to-degree completion and positively impact cost and productivity?

With regard to MOOCs, President Bowen is encouraged by the collaboration of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with two community colleges in Boston. An adapted version of a MIT online course in computer science will be offered to a community college population, very different from the students at MIT. A careful assessment of the learning outcomes of this experiment will be instructive to the higher education community and could provide a template for future, similar collaborations.

The cost effectiveness of online course offerings and MOOCs is impossible to assess at this time. As the authorconcisely concludes, start-up costs for any educational endeavor will skew the potential savings at a later date, after those start-up costs are no longer a part of the financial equation. Space utilization, capital costs, and indirect costs, are difficult, if not impossible, to accurately estimate.

President Bowen outlines the possibility for MOOCs to raise productivity system-wide, lower costs and allow third parties to determine if a MOOC is transfer-worthy. The American Council on Education and Coursera has announced a pilot project that will allow faculty-led assessments of certain Coursera courses. Students who complete the designated Coursera course and who pass the required examination will have a transcript of the course sent to individual colleges and universities. It is then the discretion of the school to determine if they wish to award credit.

In concluding, Bowen states that the biggest obstacle to utilizing technology system-wide in higher education at the present time is a lack of “a sustainable platform that allows interested faculty either to create a fully interactive, machine-guided learning environment, or to customizing a course that has been created by someone else as their own.”

President Bowen, however, presents the possibility that leading MOOCs may meet the need for adaptable platforms. The developers of Coursera, edX, and Stanford’s ClasszGo platform have agreed to develop systems that can be used widely by others. A rare combination of technical capacity, strong financial resources, and prestige of the schools involved in the academic community, makes this possible.

There are too many unanswered questions about MOOCs. Critics are vocal and push-backs inevitable. Even the most ardent supporters of MOOCs will agree with the author that to date there is no coherent business model, no fee structure, no widespread acceptance of MOOCs for transfer credit. (Maybe Sam Goldwin said it best: “Never make forecasts, especially about the future.”)

President Bowen makes a compelling case for the need for new mindsets and fresh thinking about academic decision-making. He calls for the need for faculty to embrace new ways of thinking, including the desirability of “flipping the classroom.” That would allow faculty to spend less time lecturing and more time coaching students. Shared governance and nimbleness, in response to internal and external threats, are other aspects of the suggested new mindset.

President Bowen concludes part two with a caution against media hype and frenzy associated with MOOCs and urges patience as the academy moves forward.

APPENDIX: THE ONLINE LEARNING LANDSCAPE

This part of the book lists the various online players, including Coursera, Udacity, edX, Khan Academy, Carnegie Mellon University, and the Open Learning Initiative and outlines the following:

- Particular Features of Online Courses
- How Content is Delivered
- Entities Offering the Courses and the Intended Audiences and
- Credentialing and Ownership

The book concludes with essays from prominent educational professionals, including:
Howard Garner of Harvard University who maintains that the virtues of the residential experience cannot be replicated by an online experience.

John Hennessy, the president of Stanford University outlines the cost problem in higher education and concludes that the true crisis is not around costs but around college completion and like President Bowen agrees that technology may be the best answer to the question of how costs can be reduced.

Andrew Delbanco of Columbia University raises the issue of technology and the potential impact of new technologies to increase stratification among colleges and universities and faculty.

Daphne Koller of Stanford University and Coursera effectively makes the case for the benefits of online instruction including the ability of MOOCs to transcend geographical boundaries, improve productivity, and connect the socially mobile student with a format that engages more than the classroom lecture format.

Readers are left to ponder several assumptions. President Bowen and all of the contributing authors maintain that there is a crisis in U.S. higher education today and that crisis includes college costs and college completion rates. All also agree that technology has the potential to both lower costs and increase graduation rates. Further, all agree that there is a need for the academy to consider a different model to make decisions. Patience and caution is needed as is nimbleness.

Higher Education in the Digital Age is informative and thought provoking. Different points of view are presented in a clear and concise manner. The reader is left with the author’s opinions and is challenged to extrapolate those opinions with the needs and challenges of specific situations.

The book focuses on the academy. If online education becomes a reality in higher education, then it will become necessary for a companion book to be written on the impact of new technologies on the “administrative army” that will be needed to support the academy.

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About the Author

MARGUERITE J. DENNIS is an independent higher education consultant specializing in assisting colleges and universities in the United States and around the world in creating sustainable enrollment, retention, and international strategic plans. She was a higher education administrator for more than 30 years, first at St. John’s University in New York, then at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and finally at Suffolk University in Boston. She is the author of more than 100 articles on higher education administration, including A Practical Guide to Enrollment and Retention Management in Higher Education and Anticipatory Enrollment Management: Another Level of Enrollment Management.
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