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An Expanded Role for College and University Registrars
BY MICHAEL E. GORDON, GREGORY F. HERZOG, AND JOSEPH A. POTENZA
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Enrollment Management has become an important leadership function on many college and university campuses. It is also attracting critical attention here and abroad among observers of our system of postsecondary education. With this essay, we continue a series that examines policies and practices that are central to campus-based efforts to manage enrollments and achieve enrollment goals, thereby clarifying an “enrollment management perspective” on issues ranging from admissions marketing, to rankings, financial aid, and student success. The goal of these essays, which will be featured in College and University, is to extend our understanding of enrollment management, examine the underpinnings of this emerging profession, and promote professional dialogue.
Since the emergence of the Enrollment Management perspective in the late 1970s and early 1980s, advocates of the concept have espoused the value and necessity of integrating financial aid into an institution’s comprehensive enrollment strategy. Part of the reason is to better ensure a tight coupling of the complex recruitment, admission and financial aid processes for new students and to integrate financial aid with retention efforts. Part of the reason is to better ensure that there is coordination and complementarity between recruitment and admissions goals and the goals and resources of financial aid for providing access for those otherwise unable to afford college. In addition, financial aid has become a powerful means for shaping the institution’s enrollment profile in ways beyond socioeconomic diversity; in combination with marketing, recruitment, admissions and retention strategies, financial aid has come to be instrumental in achieving an institution’s desired enrollment size, diversity, academic profile, mix across academic programs, geographic draw, residential mix, and so on. Finally, at most institutions the enrollment goals are the revenue goals; successful enrollment management requires the management of financial aid in such a way that the number, mix and profile of enrolled students produces the desired net revenue after aid. There’s no question that at an increasing number of institutions, the management of financial aid has become so tightly intertwined with the concept and the practice of enrollment management that the two are essentially indistinguishable.

Increasingly, the focus on financial aid as a part of enrollment management efforts is raising two important questions. One focuses on internal policy and planning. Campus leaders at private and public institutions must weigh how much tuition revenue they can and should commit to financial aid as a means to achieve wide-ranging goals of prestige, diversity, and net revenue within the context of their academic missions and institutional capacities and economics. As a result, enrollment management leaders increasingly not only have to understand the use of financial aid as a means to achieve narrowly defined enrollment goals, but they also must actively participate in and inform the campus dialogue of the role and impact of financial aid on the institution’s mission and academic goals. Moving beyond these internal, institutional considerations, as a profession, enrollment management leaders have an obligation to engage actively in the national (and increasingly international) dialogue about the role of financial aid policy and practice in the pursuit of broad societal goals of access and equity of educational opportunity.
In this essay we focus on those internal policy issues, to bring perspective to the integration and intersections of financial aid with enrollment strategy and institutional priorities.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

As we noted in our first essay, the role of financial aid in comprehensive and integrated enrollment management has been the focus of much of the scrutiny of the practice of enrollment management and its increasing prevalence in higher education administration. What is often missing in a critical examination of institutional practices is a sound understanding of how different institutional contexts can and should shape the strategic use of financial aid in enrollment management.

Higher education in America has had a long-standing commitment to ensuring equitable access to a college education for all. That commitment was manifested in the 1965 Higher Education Act that put into place and into motion many of the policies, processes and perspectives that define financial aid today.

However, we now face a complex array of institutional and societal challenges that are well known to all university administrators and well documented in the countless analyses and commentaries on today’s higher education environment. The societal complexities include the following.

- The tuition price associated with a college education has escalated dramatically.
- Nevertheless, the price of a college education does not mirror the cost of providing it; many of the costs incurred in delivering that education are offset by revenue from sources other than the net price charged. But as some of those alternative sources of revenue are in decline (e.g. state appropriations), most institutions are becoming increasingly tuition dependent.
- While the list tuition price of a college education continues to increase at rates exceeding inflation, many institutions have increased institutionally budgeted financial aid for students at rates greater than their published tuition, resulting in rates of net revenue growth lower than gross tuition revenue.
- One result is that the list price of a college education—the published tuition and fees—has become increasingly meaningless as fewer and fewer students actually pay these amounts.
- Both the list price and the net price of a college education is financially out of reach for a growing proportion of students and families. Despite growing levels of institutional aid, the escalating cost of college tuition relative to family income coupled with the declining rate of family saving results not only in limiting access and choice, but in dramatically increasing levels of student borrowing and indebtedness as well.
- There is a growing inequity of access to college in America today; the most academically talented poor students go to college at the same rate as the least academically prepared wealthy students; as family income declines, the likelihood of a student earning a baccalaureate degree declines as well.
- The demographic future suggests that much of the projected increase in college-age students in the years to come will be among those of minority and low-income backgrounds. In many states, any increases in the number of graduates will come largely from the ranks of recent Latino immigrants. These trends will place greater pressures on socioeconomic concerns about access and affordability.

All of these factors and more contribute to the growing complexity of the environment facing today’s institutional leaders of enrollment management. There are relentless pressures on institutions to address these realities while at the same time pursuing a wide variety of enrollment goals and ambitions ranging from improving the academic profile of the student body, improving retention and graduation rates, ensuring student diversity, and so on. Responding to these expectations has led institutions to introduce new uses of financial aid besides ensuring affordability for those unable to meet tuition costs. A growing number of institutions provide financial aid to students in order to address an unwillingness rather than an inability to pay list price, and to shape the enrollment profile through merit-based and characteristic-based grants and scholarships. As the number of students receiving institutionally-budgeted financial aid increases and the average size of these scholarships and grants increase as tuition escalates, some institutions face declining net revenue as a result. Many private sector institutions have been dealing with the convergence and consequences of these tensions for at least two decades. However, many public four-year
institutions now use financial aid to achieve enrollment goals to offset declining state funding. For boards of trustees, presidents, and enrollment managers in the public sector, these are new challenges and ones for which many institutions have had little previous experience.

For both the private and the public four-year sectors, the strategic enrollment management challenge resides at the intersection of the pursuit of a balanced enrollment portfolio and the net revenue that meets the institution’s myriad goals on the one hand, and the growing specter of unaffordability and inaccessibility that surfaces in any external scan of the current situation and any forecast of the future of American higher education on the other hand. Bringing clarity and perspective to these dynamics faced by colleges and universities has become one of the primary obligations of senior enrollment officers.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES

The enrollment management leader should understand that the root cause of these pressures can be found in part in four underlying challenges:

- The challenge of language
- The challenge of technique
- The challenge of market structures and subsidies
- The challenge of mission clarity

Language

One of the roles of senior enrollment management professionals is to bring precision and perspective to the campus dialogue about enrollment-related policies, strategies and issues. There is perhaps no area more in need of disciplined dialogue than financial aid strategies in enrollment management. A significant share of the confusion and consternation about financial aid strategies may lie in the language we use. Our evolving professional vernacular spawns substantial misunderstandings and misgivings among many critics of enrollment management practices and can lead to internal miscommunication and tensions around the trade-offs associated with conflicting enrollment management goals.

A few examples are offered here of some common yet problematic concepts interwoven throughout the dialogue about financial aid and enrollment management: tuition discounting, financial need, and merit aid.

Tuition Discounting

As we noted in our first essay, even in the earliest writings and discussions of enrollment management in higher education, the utility of financial aid as a tool for shaping a wide range of enrollment outcomes was recognized. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, sessions appeared regularly at the national EM conferences on "leveraging financial aid" and "tuition discounting," introducing novel analytic techniques designed to plan and manage financial aid packaging to achieve a variety of institutional enrollment goals, not the least of which was net tuition revenue. The intentions of early adopters was to show how viewing institutional financial aid as a discount off of tuition price brings into sharp relief numerous strategic and market dynamics that shape enrollment outcomes, and identifies opportunities for effectively managing enrollment and revenue outcomes through offering differential net prices to certain students or groups of students. The goal, in other words, was to reframe financial aid as a strategic tool to be leveraged in balancing multiple institutional goals.

In those early years, therefore, part of the EM agenda was shifting the prevailing mental models underlying financial aid, models deeply-seated not only in the standards of the financial aid profession, but as importantly in the standards used for university financial accounting and reporting. On the one hand, financial aid officers traditionally viewed financial aid as budgeted resources to be used solely to meet the demonstrated financial need of applicants and tended to view other uses of budgeted aid (e.g. to improve yield among higher ability applicants) as inappropriate, at best. Indeed, many of today's most veteran financial aid administrators were so socialized to their profession in a period where financial aid was viewed solely as the guarantor of access that in the early years of enrollment management there were many tensions between aid administrators and enrollment managers. As Rupert Wilkinson's recent book on the history of financial aid in the United States demonstrates, however, the multiple purposes of institutional financial aid have always been complex and at times in competition with one another.

On the other hand, financial reporting standards at the time required that institutionally-budgeted financial aid appear on financial statements as expense items, thereby concretizing for CFOs and board members a perspective
that defined a financial aid budget as a limited resource to be managed independently of a net revenue outcome.

Early EM thought-leaders and advocates therefore had a two-fold agenda:

1. To broaden the professional mental model in financial aid toward one which viewed aid as a tuition discount to be strategically leveraged to shape an overall enrollment profile in middle-market institutions—particularly to improve the student academic profile and increase net revenue—and not solely to respond to demonstrated student need.

2. To shift the typical CFO’s perspective from one which saw budgeted aid as an expense to be minimized toward one conceiving and defining institutional aid as a tuition discount to be optimized in pursuit of enrollment goals and to be understood in the context of net tuition revenue.

In a fascinating example of how prevailing mental models are transformed, a breakthrough came when NACUBO changed its reporting standards to have budgeted institutional aid appear in university financial statements as discounts off tuition revenue ‘above the line’ instead of as an expense itemized ‘below the line.’ With that simple change in financial reporting standards, the perspective at most campuses was completely reoriented, and the frequency of financial aid being defined, described and accepted as a tuition discount managed in light of net tuition revenue exploded overnight.

But in an equally interesting outcome, as all institutionally budgeted financial aid has come to be calculated and reported as a tuition discount and the most common measure of an institution’s commitment to financial aid is now summed up in that institution’s “discount rate,” we’ve introduced an overly simplistic parsimony to the strategic dialogue. As this measure of discount has entered the lexicon and mental model of board members, presidents, faculty, and budget committees, it has taken on a life of its own independent of the nuance and context that budgeted financial aid requires. It is not uncommon to find boards and executives putting boundaries on a discount rate, setting goals for reducing a discount rate, or just raising concerns about the discount rate in ways completely independent of other outcome measures. The enrollment management leader often faces a persistent challenge in helping others understand that the discount rate is not as meaningful or consequential an outcome as the net revenue realized; i.e. would one rather have the net revenue resulting from a 33 percent discount on a $2,400,000 tuition or a 40 percent discount on a $2,800,000 tuition?

Finally, any institutional conversation about tuition discounts and net revenue only has meaning in the context of enrollment capacities: the capacity of facilities, the capacity of the teaching faculty, of student services, etc. (we return to this topic later in this essay). The meaning of the tuition discount as part of a comprehensive enrollment strategy is to be found at the nexus of net revenue goals, institutional capacity and institutional mission.

Financial Need

So much of the debate about the appropriate role of financial aid in institutional strategy starts with the premise that meeting students’ financial need is the superordinate purpose of all financial aid. Our dialogue is replete with references to students’ calculated ‘financial need;’ we talk about meeting full need, about unmet need, about processes being need-blind, aid being need-based or non-need-based, decisions being need-sensitive.

The debates about financial aid strategy are contingent upon a complex and standardized approach to estimating students’ and families’ financial need and thereby determining eligibility for financial assistance. The goals for doing so are laudable, in service of equity in allocating government and institutional financial assistance. But the pervasive and insistent reliance upon concepts and definitions of “need” suggest a precision and meaningfulness that is hardly warranted.

Need is computed after calculating a student’s estimated financial contribution (EFC) toward educational costs. There is wide debate about the complexity of this process for families and the value to be gained from simplifying the process of calculating family resources and determining aid eligibility as a result. And there has been a great deal of discussion in recent years at both the institutional and the federal policy level about moving away from EFC, or at least significantly revising EFC as a method for determining financial need.

But it is commonly understood that in reality this calculated family contribution borders on being meaningless. It is a useful tool for determining relative levels of eligibil-
ity for limited aid resources, but no one believes that EFC is a reliable estimate of any given family’s ability to pay for college. The notion of “need” is problematic at its core.

Finally, if we are candid with ourselves as a profession, any objective review of college admissions calls into question the legitimacy of any claim to ‘need blind’ processes. While it may be true that admissions officers may not see the formal assessment of a student’s financial need when making admissions decisions, claiming any admissions process is truly blind to need denies a host of harsh social and economic realities. The daughter of an investment banker is in a different situation than the son of a custodial worker; and parent profession is prominent on most applications. Family income is highly predictable from home address and in many cases from high school attended. Even academic profile and other characteristics explicitly considered in admissions reviews are not unrelated to a student’s relative affluence. Defining any admissions process as blind to need may be a rather disingenuous claim. Consistent with our concern about the language of need, perhaps we need a new term that more accurately captures what we mean by “need blind.”

**Merit Aid**

At many institutions the phrase merit aid is used with such imprecision that presidents, trustees, and faculty misunderstand how it aligns with campus goals and strategy and cannot appraise its costs and its benefits. Useful, meaningful dialogue about merit aid in an institutional enrollment strategy must start with much-needed clarity about what merit aid is, what it does, and why it is used. It also must start with an appreciation of the highly stratified marketplace of colleges and universities in America, a topic addressed further later in this essay, since one cannot understand merit aid independent of the market context. A student who receives a merit scholarship from one institution may be barely admissible at another more selective institution. Some campuses use large scholarships to induce small numbers of only their very best applicants to matriculate while others use broader definitions of merit with relatively small amounts of financial aid to increase the enrollment yields of relatively large numbers of academically attractive students who are also able to pay more of their own tuition. The failure to be explicit about an institution’s goals and its market context confounds any discussion with trustees, deans, and faculty, about the benefits and liabilities of merit aid.

Typically the critics’ focus when discussing so-called merit aid is any aid awarded to students not demonstrating financial need. Naturally, as noted earlier, the entire definition of financial need is so problematic to begin with that it renders definitions of a grant or scholarship as either need-based or non-need-based problematic. Regardless, the typical concern is that a non-need-based merit scholarship diverts resources from lower income students who need assistance to those who do not, all in service of some presumably less laudable institutional outcome or aspiration than providing access for those with need. But institutions have multiple goals competing with financial accessibility, legitimate goals which can often be attained through the use of scholarships, grants or discounted tuition incentives funded in their own right expressly for these purposes. Perhaps the intent is to elevate the institution’s academic profile or strengthen an honors program by enrolling more high ability students. Perhaps the intent is to field a more competitive tennis team, or a forensics team, or a string quartet by providing scholarships to the most talented applicants. Perhaps the intent is to balance an enrollment portfolio by filling currently undersubscribed academic programs through targeted scholarships, effectively discounting tuition on programs with limited demand while keeping published tuition structures simple and consistent. Any aid award allocated toward these institutional purposes that may in effect not meet demonstrated financial need can be and often is summarily lumped into one large calculation of non-need based or merit aid, though their purposes are many. It is the responsibility of senior enrollment managers to help trustees, presidents, vice presidents, deans, and faculty leaders to think carefully about these multiple goals and understand the inherent trade-offs they are making as they decide the scope of campus budget commitments to merit scholarships.

It is worth noting that these issues and complexities are not specific to private institutions. At public universities, where tuition rates are lower, the cost of a merit scholarship can be relatively higher when recruiting top in-state students because high ability students still expect large scholarships relative to the tuition revenue derived from student tuition. We have seen financial aid models that demonstrated that top students at public universities
might need scholarships as large as $10,000 or more to influence yields, and yet tuition, room and board costs might only be $16,000. Relative to tuition revenue, this can make a merit aid strategy for in-state students very expensive for public institutions.

When recruiting non-resident students at public residential institutions, the economics of merit aid scholarship can look much more similar to that of private institutions if non-resident tuition is high. Indeed, this can often be more of a net revenue strategy than an effort to significantly improve student quality. In these cases, campus aid often goes to pretty good, but not necessarily outstanding students in order to increase the probabilities these students will enroll and pay tuition rates that are often 2–3 time higher than the tuition rates for state residents. In these cases the goal is usually to offset declines in state funding. In such instances, what appears to be merit aid is intended to increase net revenue from out-of-state students to subsidize the education of in-state students, including those with need.

**Technique**

One of the contemporary hallmarks of financial aid management is increasingly sophisticated and complex analytic technique. The techniques, tools and technologies that now characterize the process of planning and packaging financial aid and that are now commonly used to shape and evaluate enrollment and net revenue outcomes are often equated with enrollment management and enrollment management is in turn equated with them.

Today’s practice of enrollment and net revenue management typically uses a precise segmentation of student populations based upon multiple characteristics that are known to affect the likelihood of enrollment; these include financial resources, academic profile, geographic origin, academic program, and any number of demographic and so-called non-cognitive factors. Any combination of these variables can be used to profile and segment a group of applicants, calculating the statistical likelihood of enrolling at a given institution, all other things being equal. By estimating what level of tuition discounting through financial aid is required to increase the projected yield of a group of students by a given increment, one can determine a threshold of net price optimization for any given segment. Taken in aggregate, these subgroup optimizations comprise a financial discounting regimen designed to shape the yield of the class at large and achieve the desired mix of students with the desired revenue outcomes.

There is an extraordinary precision that is implied with these statistical econometric techniques, one that gives enrollment management an aura of calculated empiricism and a for-profit corporate mindset. Indeed perhaps early in the evolution of the field of enrollment management, and possibly early in the career development of many enrollment managers, there was too much emphasis on such technique. But the technique in and of itself invites much of the criticism lodged against enrollment management’s encroachment in the financial aid process. And any celebration of technique—either by practitioners or consultants promoting their services—certainly warrants suspicion when technique is applied independent of institutional context, mission and purpose.

But therein lies the critical role of the senior enrollment management leadership. One of their most important roles is to make sure that at the very least, even if behind closed doors, boards of trustees and senior campus policy makers engage in informed discussions about the tradeoffs associated with financial aid to ensure that technique in itself doesn’t overshadow institutional purposes and priorities. As noted in the first essay, enrollment management practices are guided by institutional purposes; these sophisticated techniques are only as valuable as the outcomes they are designed to optimize are clear. And those outcomes—be they academic profile, student diversity, financial accessibility and affordability, or net tuition revenue—are seldom established by an enrollment management team independent of an institution’s executive leadership, its strategic plans, and its budgetary and governance processes and structures.

But conversely, institutional purposes and priorities must be informed by an enrollment management perspective. It is neither appropriate nor accurate in most cases to suggest that these techniques are benign, that they are simply means toward ends decided elsewhere. To the contrary, it is only through these kinds of statistical techniques that the many competing demands and priorities of complex universities can be understood for what they are: tradeoffs that require the careful balancing of goals and priorities that in many ways are in direct conflict with each other. For many institutions, it is only through these analytic techniques that
executives, boards, and faculty come to an understanding of the price of their principles and priorities. These techniques provide the analytic crucible within which many institutions grind out the consequences of their convictions and the price they are willing to pay for their priorities, and do so with heretofore uncharacteristic precision and attention to inherent conflicts and tradeoffs.

Market Structures and Subsidies

Much of the dialogue about the use of financial aid in enrollment management is internal, looking at how institutions allocate budgeted aid toward multiple institutional objectives. But an enrollment management perspective by necessity begins by first looking outward rather than inward, by understanding the external market realities and market structures that constitute the competitive context within which pricing and financial aid strategies are crafted and evaluated.

The tuition price established and commanded by colleges and universities is not independent of market realities. There is a clear correlation between tuition price and market position, with that position defined by levels of demand, selectivity and quality of enrolled students, by endowment and assets per FTE, or even by external rankings and reputation. The market confirms in its behavior what is often difficult to fathom: price connotes quality. And it is impossible to design financial aid strategies as part of a comprehensive enrollment strategy without affirming that these strategies are employed in a market context.

Colleges and universities exist in a highly stratified market hierarchy, often referred to as higher education’s pecking order or the food chain. But as Zemsky and his colleagues have illustrated in their work over the years, an institution’s relative place in that stratified market can be largely defined by its student mix. That market segmentation ranges from the most prestigious medallion institutions with national student draw and mostly fulltime residential students who graduate in four years to so-called convenience institutions seeking to straddle these extremes, seeking to pursue the prestige of the medallion schools while in the meantime not losing their share of the convenience market.

It’s within this market context that financial aid becomes a strategic enrollment management and marketing resource. As institutions seek to hold on to their place in the market, much less seek to elevate their position, many establish price strategies that send a clear signal about market position and then use financial aid to discount that list price to enroll a tier of students who financially and academically may have other options available to them but who, without that discounted price, would likely not choose that school. As such, the level of financial aid required to achieve the university’s enrollment goals is a direct function of its market position and cannot possibly be assessed or understood independent of that competitive context.

Effective enrollment management uses financial aid not only as a means of shaping enrollment outcomes but also for evaluating an institution’s market position. The same analytic techniques that guide the optimization of aid to affect yield are effective tools for defining and assessing an institution’s competitive market position. An institution with improving market position finds itself over time commanding higher yields with lower discounts for the same types of students; an institution with an eroding market position will find that it requires higher discounts to sustain the same yield rates over time, all other things being equal. From the most strategic marketing perspective, financial aid and its rigorous evaluation offers the enrollment management leader one of the most powerful means of evaluating and describing an institution’s comparative and competitive market position as well as evaluating mission effectiveness. Viewing the outcomes of the financial aid process as a reflection of underlying market realities and market structures and as a measure of an institution’s market position shifts the entire enrollment management approach toward a far more strategic orientation.

Understanding Subsidies

Many of the critics of enrollment management practices focus on the intentional use of tuition discounts to optimize net revenue, the offering of differential price advantages to students regardless of their financial need.

As we have tried to note in this essay, things are more complicated than many suspect. Regardless of financial aid, most universities operate with significant cross-subsidies that often are hidden to all but those who do the fi-
nancial analyses of marginal costs and revenues of various academic programs. The widely accepted practice of cross-subsidization exists at the program level rather than at the student level. At many universities, for example, the cost to provide an undergraduate business degree exceeds by considerable margin the price charged to its undergraduate business students (e.g., low marginal revenue); in many cases, undergraduate students, regardless of their particular financial situation, benefit from a subsidy provided in large part by that same college’s M.B.A. program, which may generate, by comparison, much greater revenue above its costs (e.g., higher marginal revenue). These are concepts that most chief financial officers of colleges and universities as well as presidents, provosts, and deans of large schools understand. But it is often overlooked by external audiences and too often insufficiently understood by less experienced enrollment management leaders.

When an institution looks only at a freshman financial aid leverage analysis and calculates how much net tuition revenue from “full-pay” students is required to underwrite the deep discount provided to high-need students or high ability students, the practice of using some students to subsidize others is considered suspect, often described as a Robin Hood practice of robbing from some to give to others, poor or not. But using a M.B.A. program with high marginal revenue to underwrite a music program with low marginal revenue is a natural part of institutional economics, though it is every bit as much a Robin Hood practice in effect. The focus of most enrollment management activity is on intentionally shaping enrollment and revenue outcomes to keep an institution in balance. If the EM role is just managing freshman enrollment, one’s focus tends to be on the cross-subsidization that occurs solely within the confines of that class. If the focus is on the entirety of an institution’s enrollment profile, the cross-subsidization cuts across academic schools and programs, across freshman and transfer populations, across graduate and undergraduate programs, and across on-campus and online delivery.

Mission Clarity

In what is likely to be a recurring theme in this series of essays, the importance of institutional mission as a beacon for guiding enrollment strategy cannot be overstated. This is particularly true in terms of pricing and financial aid strategies. Without mission clarity, where is the standard or the litmus test for evaluating the uses of financial aid in achieving an institution’s enrollment goals? Without mission clarity, enrollment management strategies risk being rudderless; conversely, absent the outcomes achieved through enrollment management strategies many statements of mission are empty rhetoric. At many institutions, mission statements are sweeping affirmations of espoused purposes, statements that serve neither to differentiate the institution from others nor to define the criteria by which its leadership could evaluate progress or success. In that situation, virtually any use of financial aid toward any enrollment outcome is as good as any other. But the first and best recourse for the enrollment management leader needing to articulate the purposes and priorities of the institution’s financial aid strategy is to look to the institution’s mission for clarity and coherence.

Achieving and sustaining mission clarity is no small undertaking and of course doesn’t rest within the purview of the enrollment management area. But the delineation of explicit, measurable enrollment outcomes that would be evidence of mission accomplishment is a valuable means by which an institution can achieve greater clarity. As noted earlier, financial aid research can be used to effectively map an institution’s comparative market position. Likewise, evidence of an institution’s mission priorities can be found in its financial aid policies and practices. Such evidence is found in the relative investment in institutional aid as a percent of revenue, the relative balance of aid based upon need versus merit, the varying percent of need met across different segments of the student body, levels of self-help and indebtedness, and so on. There may be few better indices of an institution’s values and priorities than how it allocates its resources to and through financial aid as part of its comprehensive enrollment strategy. As a result, there may be fewer more important roles for the enrollment management leader than framing the institutional dialogue in this manner.

CONCLUSION

As should be clear by now, the strategic use of financial aid is multidimensional and far more complex than most external observers appreciate or understand. Unfortunately, in some cases it is more complicated than senior enrollment management leaders realize as well. There are multiple challenges to those responsible for making strategic use
of financial aid within a comprehensive and integrated enrollment management plan, and this essay has attempted to elucidate some of those challenges as a way of assisting the enrollment management leader with that responsibility.

So where does one start in developing a tighter integration between financial aid and enrollment management strategy? One can look first to the external market for insight into the role of financial aid in enrollment management, since the marketplace offers ample evidence of the interactive effects of price, net price, and market position—all of which are critical ingredients in integrating financial aid with a comprehensive enrollment strategy.

Defining the role of financial aid in an enrollment management strategy more typically begins by looking to internal dynamics and institutional economics for guidance. By understanding the various capacities of different academic programs, the marginal costs and net revenues by academic programs, and the aid required to achieve the desired mix of students and produce the institution’s optimal net revenue, the enrollment management leader can effectively bring financial aid into a comprehensive institutional enrollment strategy.

Balancing these issues is no small task. It gets to the heart of enrollment management; indeed, it may be the heart of enrollment management, at many institutions.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ACADEMIC and STUDENT AFFAIRS RELATIONSHIPS to Student Success

Higher education’s accountability movement has brought pressure to colleges and universities to do all that they can to impact student access and success. Strategic collaboration among academic and student affairs leaders has become vital in this effort. While most institutions can benefit from strategic collaboration, community colleges in particular are vulnerable when the leaders of its two primary functional areas do not set out in the same direction, since community colleges are much more influenced by market forces than public and private four-year institutions.

The first part of this article reviews the historical reasons why collaboration has been largely unnecessary. The link between collaboration and differentiation is then explored, as well as the necessity of using differentiation to position an institution in the educational marketplace. Finally, a case study from Ivy Tech Community College–Bloomington is reviewed to demonstrate how strategic collaboration between academic and student affairs can be used to develop and implement programs that add value and benefit students.
Calls for cooperation and collaboration between the faculty and student affairs are as old as the introduction of student services personnel to the field of higher education. The academy has tended to view those who make their primary mission to recruit and retain students as ancillary to the learning process. Terms such as “paper pushers,” “bureaucrats,” and “salespeople” have been the kindest of those employed by some who view their disciplines as intellectual kingdoms. Likewise, student affairs professionals have developed a dim view of the role of faculty, perceiving some to be uncooperative with any portion of the education mission occurring outside the classroom. Invectives such as “narrow-minded,” “aloof,” and “arrogant” are just a few that one might hear if he were to stumble upon a conversation in many a student affairs’ hallway.

In the education environment of old, where modest accountability and artificial competition among institutions for future students ruled the day, collaboration between academic and student affairs was a nice sentiment but was not considered crucial to an institution’s effectiveness. Higher education institutions could operate in much the same way as they always had, relying either on reputation or economic forces for sustained enrollment. More recently, however, as the era of accountability has dawned and as competition for students has increased, it has become necessary for colleges and universities to do all that they can to ensure better access and outcomes to satisfy stakeholders and attract new students. The importance of academic and student affairs collaboration and the results of such efforts are now essential if an institution is to differentiate itself in the education marketplace.

**HOW DID WE GET HERE**

American higher education finds itself in a changing environment, where many of their public and political stakeholders are demanding increased accountability. The workings of the 110th Congress in early 2008 demonstrate that legislators are facing the necessity of compromises regarding cost and accreditation policy recommendations emanating from the Spellings Commission. Members of Congress find themselves dealing with a multitude of accountability issues as they consider the Higher Education Act, and recent literature is replete with beliefs that colleges must be improved in striking ways to enhance students’ educational experience (Field 2008; United States Department of Education). Since 1984 no fewer than eight studies have been commissioned to scrutinize increasing dissatisfaction with the quality of higher education, student outcomes, and the overall efficacy of the undergraduate experience.

The higher education metrics of the 1970s demonstrated that more people than ever before were gaining access to college and that the number of colleges and universities was increasing: an all-time high of 8.65 million students were taught by some 381,000 full-time professors at 2,500 institutions nationwide. Access to higher education during this time significantly increased for underrepresented populations and women, which led Clark Kerr to comment that the period from 1960 to 1980 was “the
great transformation in higher education” (Thelin 2004, p. 318). Much appeared to be going well in the collegiate universe, but the beginnings of change and the makings of what eventually would become the focus on accountability were taking shape.

Thelin (2004) suggests that higher education—beginning in the 1960s—was a significant enterprise that was beginning to experience a crisis of confidence with both its external and internal stakeholders. Several events during this period appear to have precipitated this calamity. First, 1967 marked the first time the federal government decreased its share of research support provided to colleges and universities; this decline continued through 1977. The Sputnik launch long past, the government’s emphasis on scientific research began to wane. Second, in 1971, the 26th Amendment to the Constitution passed, extending voting rights to 18-year-old citizens and further removing any lingering doubts about the in loco parentis role of American universities that had existed for the previous 300 years.

Because many colleges and universities are public institutions, they perhaps suffered fates similar to that of government during the late 1960s and 1970s. Both the Vietnam War and Watergate splintered the integrity of government and social institutions. These seminal events provided fodder for a movement that resulted in student demonstrations and increased demands for accountability. The student movement increased suspicion of all social and governmental institutions and provided a durable legacy, including increased awareness by higher education of the need to acknowledge students’ rights both as members of the campus community and as consumers (Lilly et al. 1987; Thelin 2004).

The advancement of consumerism caused colleges and higher education generally to grant more universal access to its institutions (Thelin 2004). As new student constituencies were enrolled, colleges and universities reluctantly began to alter academic programs and to commit rapidly decreasing resources to support an influx of students who were not academically prepared for the rigors of postsecondary education. The arrival of technology that changed both access to and delivery of education further strained higher education. As a new millennium approached, higher education found itself under assault from many quarters of society.

The literature notes that “unreasonably high tuition, neglect of undergraduate teaching in favor of inconsequential research, and garbled educational purposes” (Rhodes 1998, p. 4) have battered public confidence in colleges and universities at the very time the United States requires high-quality higher education and institutional leadership. The implied compact that served as the foundational agreement among higher education, government, and its citizens, through which higher education previously had been perceived as a strong public good, has eroded (Burke 2005). As a result, various interest groups call for increasing accountability (Trow 1998). Community developed between an institution and its students supposes the creation of an identity and common purpose to encourage student success. Community thus can be affected by the ways in which academic and student services interact and support their students. Unfortunately, higher education today appears to be an institutional paradox: college and universities “constitute one of the largest industries in the nation but are among the least businesslike and well managed of all organizations” (Birnbaum 1988, p. 3).

Table 1.
Emphasis on Students:
New Way of Thinking About Markets, by Market Segment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ivy League</th>
<th>For Profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name Brand</td>
<td>Convenience/User-Friendliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional, Full-Time Students</td>
<td>Non-Traditional, Part-Time Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School Preparation</td>
<td>Workforce Preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominated by Privates</td>
<td>Mostly Public, For Profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Time Faculty</td>
<td>Part-Time Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name &amp; Prestige</td>
<td>Experimentation for Efficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Zensky et al. (1997)
COLLABORATION AND DIFFERENTIATION

Organizations deceive by defying expectations and then “camouflaging the results,” suggesting that the “sum of complexity, unpredictability, and deception is rampant ambiguity” (Bolman and Deal, 2001, p.26). This translates into organizations where (1) stakeholders are unsure of how decisions are made, (2) administrators lack the ability to establish benchmarks because the interpretation of goals is at the mercy of the community, and (3) participants generally are unsure of how the processes work to support the institutional mission.

Leadership is about people and their interactions, which “each day bring opportunities to raise important questions, speak to higher values, and surface unresolved conflicts to make a difference in the lives of people” (Heifetz and Linsky 2002, p.2). The important guiding principle for higher education in the upcoming years is for academic and student services leadership to reinforce the interorganizational linkages necessary for collaborative problem-solving to establish or restore a community that supports students’ achievement of their educational goals.

In addition, and perhaps more important, researchers continue to suggest that higher education will be driven by increasing volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (KnowledgeWorks Foundation). To bring clarity to both internal and external constituencies and to face the challenges of what has been termed a “VUCA” world, academic and student services leadership must find collaborative methods, tactics, and strategies to enable institutional as well as student success. Furthermore, it is these collaborative opportunities that should distinguish one institution from another in an environment where accountability and competition are, for better or worse, steering the educational ship.

Collaboration is “a process [by which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray 1989, p.5). Considering the wave of accountability directed toward colleges and universities, coupled with resource constraints creating the need to do more with less, leaders throughout higher education increasingly must focus on balancing individuality with collaboration. Both Senge (1990) and Morgan (1997), for example, describe how an organization that does not embrace change and collaboration experiences unchanging environments that may produce unwanted consequences. In fact, collaboration may create an ‘environment of the possible’ permitting not only student but also institutional success.

Fortunately, Kezar, Hirsch and Burack (2002) have held that high levels of collaboration generally exist between academic and student affairs in activities related to counseling, first-year experience programs, orientation, and recruitment. Unfortunately, many institutions mistake a series of joint events for collaboration. To truly be competitive and to meet the rigors of accountability, institutions must go beyond activities and embrace collaborative dialogue. Such dialogue creates strategic collaboration that enables an institution to differentiate itself and so to position itself to compete in the educational marketplace.

Consider the Zemsky et al. (1997) model of marketing higher education institutions, which presents a spectrum of marketing segments (see Table 1, on page 14). At one end of the spectrum, Zemsky suggests that Harvard and Yale represent very specific brand identities within this market. Such institutions attract the best and the brightest students, garner a voluminous share of resources, and, not surprisingly, enjoy high persistence and graduation rates. Throughout the remainder of the spectrum, senior four-year institutions, community colleges, technical institutes, and proprietary institutions must do more to differentiate their institutions in order to gain a competitive advantage. In essence, we are talking about educational commodities. For example, one institution’s mathematics course can easily be substituted for another institution’s. Consequently, what makes one institution unique may have an impact on determining its share of the educational market. To put it in truly consumer-oriented terms, think for a moment about baking soda. Arm and Hammer is the brand that immediately comes to mind. Likewise, if colleges and universities are to survive in the present era of accountability and competitiveness, then external constituents must be able to distinguish among them.

Academic and student services leadership, working with presidents and boards of trustees, must seek strategies and tactics that will distinguish their college from other institutions prospective applicants may choose. The central question to be considered is how an institution can differentiate itself sufficiently to attract students to its campus. Alfred (1990) suggests that energetic dialogue
among an institution’s stakeholders can create collaborative ideas to add value and so differentiate the institution. If the ideas are implemented properly, the result can be a sustainable advantage for students, faculty, staff, and the institution as a whole.

**HOW STRATEGIC COLLABORATIONS CAN BENEFIT STUDENTS**

While strategic collaboration can benefit most, if not all, institutions as they attempt to separate themselves in the public consciousness, the benefit of strategic collaboration is magnified for smaller four-year institutions and community colleges. Larger institutions often have academic programs (e.g., medical and law) that tend to define their identities, as well as non-academic elements such as athletic and cultural programs that foster a perceived difference. Smaller institutions, however, typically lack these bastions and so must be strategic in their attempts to differentiate themselves. The results, fortunately, benefit higher education institutions and the students they serve.

Consider the outcomes of strategic collaboration at Ivy Tech Community College–Bloomington, a campus of more than 5,000 students in a university community in south central Indiana. As the campus developed its strategic plan, it realized it would need to differentiate itself as compared to other smaller institutions in the state. Collaborative strategies between academic and student affairs were created in an attempt to distinguish the institution in ways focused on enrollment growth, graduation rates, transfer and articulation with four-year partners, and student development.

Academic and student services employed compelling strategies to attract students. Student affairs created a dynamic and unique organization that included enrollment services (admissions, financial aid, and records), marketing, and student development. Among colleges and universities—particularly community colleges—the inclusion of marketing in the student services function is somewhat unique, but it permitted the institution to create an image of the campus that could be targeted to prospective stu-
students. Simultaneously, new programs and credit transfer agreements were initiated to provide students with a full menu of educational choices. During a five-year period, sixteen new curricula were added to the program inventory, and a collaborative dialogue with Indiana University (IU) was established that resulted in an increase of transfer credits from 39 hours to a current total of more than 425 hours. These strategies benefited the institution by increasing enrollments by double digits for the past twelve semesters; they benefited students by enabling them to either enroll in new programming or to transfer courses to a distinguished senior institution. Implementation of these strategies added value; the programs and processes are sustainable; and a significant outcome is competitive advantage as a result of strategic differentiation.

Likewise, in the area of retention and graduation, collaborative strategies were shaped that centered on socialization experiences. Typically, community colleges are not residential campuses; thus, they lack the plethora of socialization experiences that have been proven to increase retention and graduation rates at four-year institutions. In fact, critics suggest that the primary purpose of community colleges is to affirm the right of citizens to a higher education; after all, resources are too limited to allow more students to enroll at four-year colleges and universities (Brint and Karabel 1989). Yet when Ivy Tech Community College—Bloomington’s academic and student affairs utilized socialization experiences, both within and outside the classroom, the outcomes were increased persistence and graduation rates. Inside the classroom, service learning and additional experiential learning opportunities were offered while student affairs added a menu of student life activities ranging from recreational sports to cultural and civic engagement experiences. The results were increased persistence and graduation rates: graduations increased by almost 62 percent just from 2006 to 2007.

In an effort to further differentiate the institution, academic and student services collaborated to create a residential program with Indiana University called Hoosier Link. Under the current Hoosier Link agreement, a cohort of approximately 100 students who failed to gain admission to IU are chosen to participate in a program that allows them to take courses at Ivy Tech with the promise of guaranteed admission to IU should they earn 26 credits and meet acceptable academic standards of progress. The students live in IU residence halls, take courses at both Ivy Tech and IU, and participate in socialization opportunities outside the classroom. Researchers suggest that students persist as they become involved and integrated with their institution (Milem and Berger 1997; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991); that has been evident as the majority of the Hoosier Link cohort has transferred to the four-year institution.

Higher education accountability has an impact on community colleges specifically in the areas of student persistence and graduation rates. Dougherty (1994) notes that community colleges’ open-door admissions policies represent the democratization of higher education. That is, even students who possess only minimal academic skills may gain admission (particularly in comparison to the skills required for admission to most senior, or four-year, institutions). Yet community college persistence and graduation rates are quite controversial. The success of academic and student affairs collaborations at Ivy Tech Community College—Bloomington has shattered these traditional notions and has allowed the institution multiple opportunities to position itself strategically in a competitive educational market.

CONCLUSION

In a global economy where competition is fierce and the benefits of information technology have created a so-called flat world, education institutions continue to have difficulty breaking free from what must appear to outsiders as feudal structures. Educational kingdoms build themselves up, establish their own sets of bureaucratic rules, and communicate only minimally with other parts of the realm. It has been said that colleges and universities “remain, for the most part, a series of independent kingdoms connected by athletics and common parking lots” (Cook et al. 2007). Given this view of the educational landscape, both from within the academy and through the political framework of our external stakeholders, is it any wonder that calls for accountability continue to spring from Washington and state capitols all over the country?

It is time for academic and student affairs professionals alike to realize that it is only through the breaking down of current barriers—real and perceived—that institutions will achieve the outcomes they seek. Through strategic
collaboration, both segments of our institutions can work
to develop and implement programs and processes that
add value and benefit students.

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The seeds of California’s community college marketing and “image” challenges were planted as a result of their conception and history (Denton 1970; Zeiss 1986). California started its first community college nearly 100 years ago as a high school extension program in Fresno (Palinchak 1973; Witt, Wattenbarger and Gollattscheck et al. 1994). The high school provided lower-division college coursework and vocational “technical work” (Witt et al. 1994). At the same time, administrators at the University of California at Berkeley agreed to accept the transfer students as juniors (Witt et al. 1994). In 1909, the state provided high schools the resources to create “junior colleges” (Witt et al. 1994). In the early 1970s, the state system officially adopted a new name—“community college”—to reflect its local community education focus (Palinchak 1973; Witt et al. 1994).

In conjunction with the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) systems, the state legislature created America’s first comprehensive master plan for higher education in 1960 (Kerr 1994). The master plan directed junior colleges to provide vocational and lower-division education and to award associate of arts degrees. The CSUs were to provide lower- and upper-division courses and to award bachelor’s and master’s degrees. And the UCs were to focus on research and to provide academic coursework for bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate degrees (Kerr 1994). The master plan established a role and position for each system within the state’s higher education hierarchy.

Community colleges are funded in the same manner as K–12 schools. Colleges receive financial resources based on daily attendance. The Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) student contact hours accounting system is based on the state master plan’s mandate, which means that junior colleges are dependent on steady enrollment for steady funding (CCCO 2004). The funding system inextricably ties enrollment and funding; as a result, the junior colleges are in the position of constantly trying to attract students and
This article is based on a dissertation that was an exploratory examination of how presidential perceptions influence organizational commitment to higher education marketing at high-performing California community colleges. This article provides the background of the study, a discussion of the study’s conceptual underpinnings, and the purpose, findings, discussion, implications for practice, conclusions, and limitations of the study.

Community colleges are struggling to overcome prestige, reputation, and image problems in their effort to compete for students and resources (Consand 1968). Watts and Barista (2005) write, “Warranted or not, community colleges have gotten a reputation for being ‘junior’ institutions that provide a second-rate education compared to four-year schools” (p. 26). A review of the literature suggests that community colleges face specific image and marketing problems, including elitism (Palinchak 1973; Witt et al. 1994), a lack of scarcity (Lynn 1992), myths, misconceptions (LeClaire 2006), insufficient information (Hayward et al. 2004), and fragmentation (Ryan and Shanklin 1986).

The literature also suggests that it is these challenges that have contributed to community colleges’ enrollment and funding deficits. The literature demonstrates that many American colleges and universities have faced and overcome these and other challenges through leadership that was dedicated to marketing. More specifically, these organizations have succeeded because they had leaders who recognized and embraced the potential offered by marketing philosophy and were committed to making the needs of students and the community a top priority on campus (Hanson 2003; Kotler and Goldgehn 1981; LaFleur 1990).

CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS
Marketing in Higher Education

Business and public policy literature indicate that marketing is a concern for universities and colleges and that these institutions are engaged in marketing whether their leaders intend to be or not (Berry and Allen 1977; Kotler 1979). For example, higher education institutions must recruit prospective students and donors; create compelling courses; determine appropriate tuition and fees;
schedule the products (classes) at appropriate times and locations; and promote the products and the institution's benefits through catalogs, publicity campaigns, and Web sites (Kotler, Ferrell, and Lamb 1987). The literature also shows that marketing can help higher education leaders respond to image, enrollment, and funding challenges (Gould 2004a; Kirp 2003; Kotler and Fox 1985; LaFleur 1990; Watts and Barista 2005).

Kotler (1975) writes that marketing is the studying, planning, execution, and operation of "carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives" (p. 5). The emphasis of a marketing-based organization is a customer-centric orientation; the constituent's needs and desires must be understood to plan pricing, production, distribution, and communication to efficiently service the organization's markets (Kotler 1975).

Leadership

The literature indicates that organizational leaders influence the organization's potential for success. The literature reveals further that college presidents, like other leaders, are responsible for creating environments where higher education marketing can take root; they have power over the organization's commitment to marketing. Ryans and Shanklin (1986), Gehrung (1980), Fisher (1980), Sweet (1980), Rabbino (1980), Romine (1982), and Shaw (1980) write that it is the presidents who make a college into a marketing, or student-centric, institution. However, the research suggests that the majority of university and college administrators do not fully understand marketing concepts and principles (Berry and Allen 1977; Blackburn 1980; Brooker and Noble 1985; Grossman 1987; Kotler and Levy 1969). For example, most university and college administrators perceive marketing primarily as promotion even though it is defined to be much more than advertising, catalog production, and public relations (Grossman 1987; Kotler and Levy 1969; Williford 1986). Williford writes that college and university marketing efforts continue to focus on promotion and communicating to students rather than on "planning, gaining institution-wide support, and then developing strategy that will create and deliver an institutional message" (p. 18).

Grossman (1987) points out that among those universities and colleges that are using marketing, most organizational leaders perceive such efforts as short-term quick fixes to an immediate problem and are not engaged in long-term strategic and customer-centric planning. Grossman argues that short-term results may "delay the inevitable" (Grossman 1987, p. 16) decline for some universities and colleges, but long-term success is reserved for those institutions which recognize that marketing requires a holistic approach and a planning process that is "philosophically committed to implementing the marketing concept" (p. 16). In a study of Colorado colleges and universities, Cooper and Gackentach (1983) suggested that although universities and colleges were using marketing, such activities often were fragmented within and across the institution.

Other work in this area reveals that despite a lack of administrative acceptance or understanding of marketing, there has been a strong academic interest in higher education marketing for more than three decades (Berry and Allen 1977; Kotler and Levy 1969; Krachenberg 1972). This research includes a number of studies specifically examining the relationship between a college president's understanding of, and the organization's commitment to, marketing (Brooker and Noble 1985; Cooper and Gackentach 1983; Fisher 1980; LaFleur 1990).

Organizational Commitment

Research in higher education marketing indicates that one way to investigate an organization's commitment to marketing is to study the institution's marketing officer (Berry and Allen 1977). An organization that is committed to higher education marketing will have a marketing officer who has the right mix of qualifications, roles, and responsibilities. Qualifications include the officer's experience and expertise in higher education marketing; roles can be thought of as the officer's sphere of influence on campus and access to the president; responsibilities include who they are accountable to and by what measures (Brooker and Noble 1985; Cooper and Gackentach 1983; Kotler 1979; LaFleur 1990). Berry and Allen (1977), Brooker and Noble (1985), and Kotler (1979) claim that a college or university that has a marketing officer who approaches the "ultimate marketing officer model" has a much greater chance at marketing success. The "ultimate marketing officer" can be thought of as an administrator who has the
“vital qualifications for the top administrative job in marketing,” to include education, experience, leadership, and demonstrated success in marketing (LaFleur 1990, p. 3). The ultimate marketing officer should have the knowledge base and experience to conduct marketing research (Berry and Allen 1977; Kotler 1979). She should be familiar with a college’s unique needs, challenges, and cultures (Berry and Allen 1977; Kotler 1979). She also should have the blessing of—and direct access to—the college’s president (Berry and Allen 1977; Kotler 1979). Finally, the ultimate marketing officer needs to have authority and to be included in discussions about the college’s curriculum, scheduling, tuition, and promotion strategies (Berry and Allen 1977; Kotler 1979). In Strategies for Introducing Marketing into Nonprofit Organizations, Kotler (1979) outlines a job description for an ideal college marketing director (see Figure 1, on page 24).

**PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Public higher education in America continues to receive less state support than in the past even as it faces ever-increasing competition from other public and private institutions over a diminishing supply of potential students (Berry and Allen 1977; Grabowski 1981; Kirk 2003; Kotler and Fox 1985; Krachenberg 1972; LaFleur 1990; Scigliano 1983). Change, competition, and its consequences are particularly salient for California’s community colleges (Curtis 2006; Gould 2004a; Nussbaum 2003; Zeiss 1986). At its peak in 2002, California’s community college system educated more than 2.5 million students annually. It is the world’s largest public education system: Nearly 85 percent of all students in public higher education in California were enrolled in the state’s community colleges (“Community colleges lag” 2004). Nevertheless, California’s community colleges receive the smallest proportion of the state education budget while enrolling nearly three times more students than the CSU and UC systems combined (Nussbaum 2003). Since its 2002 zenith, California’s community colleges’ enrollments have declined 13 percent in the face of competition for funding and students (Curtis 2006).

A significant reason for the funding imbalance and enrollment decrease is that California’s community colleges have a marketing and “image” problem (Curtis 2006; Gould 2004a; Zeiss 1986). Research suggests that California’s community colleges are at risk and may not be able to meet their mandated mission because enrollments are slipping even as state and local political leaders are not funding the system as full and equitable partners in the state’s higher education system (Nussbaum 2003). The state’s taxpayers and students cannot afford to see the system fail because the colleges play a vital role in California’s “education master plan” as the gateway for higher and vocational education (CCCO 2004b; Nussbaum 2003).

Marketing and education scholars have laid the groundwork for understanding marketing in higher education, the president’s function in effective marketing, and organizational commitment to higher education marketing; however, none of the extant research has focused specifically on California’s community colleges (Berry and Allen 1977; Fisher 1980; Grossman 1987; Kotler 1979; LaFleur 1990; Noble 1986).

**Purpose of the Study**

Studies over the last 40 years indicate that marketing is present and necessary in American public and private higher education. Furthermore, there is documentation in the literature demonstrating a strong link between a president’s perception of marketing and the organization’s commitment to marketing. However, little, if any, work in this area has examined California’s community college presidents and the degree to which their institutions have committed to marketing. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore presidential perceptions and the commitment of high-performing California community colleges to marketing. High-performing California community colleges were chosen specifically because this is an exploratory study, and high-performing colleges might provide insights into the ways in which presidents are utilizing marketing. This investigation was designed to understand what leaders at the most successful colleges were thinking and doing. The results of this study ultimately may contribute to the development of philosophies and paradigms that presidents can integrate on their campuses.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the president’s perceptions of higher education marketing at individual high-performing California community colleges? Specifically, what do presidents believe marketing is, and what should their marketing officers be doing to fulfill that belief?
How committed are these colleges to higher education marketing? Specifically, how closely do these officers’ responsibilities, functions, and qualifications match the literature’s ultimate marketing officer model (see Figure 1)?

**FINDINGS**

All members \( (N=108) \) of the California Community College Public Relations Officers statewide organization were e-mailed a letter inviting them to participate in an online version of the Marketing Index for Higher Education (MIHE) survey. Because of the exploratory nature of this investigation, only five California community colleges were selected for further study based on their MIHE scores. Colleges who scored at least 20 (out of 30) on the MIHE scale were selected for participation in this investigation. A second criterion used in the selection of participating colleges was their proximity to the author. All schools selected for participation in this study were within a 200-mile radius of the author’s home on California’s central coast.

Five community college presidents and their respective marketing officers were contacted, and in-person interviews were scheduled. During these face-to-face sessions, each president completed a Q-sort classification rating to assess and rank his beliefs about higher education marketing and the perceived role of the campus marketing officer. Marketing officers were interviewed separately utilizing a questionnaire based on Kotler’s (1979) description of the ultimate marketing officer (see Appendix A). Formal job descriptions were collected from each marketing officer to complement their interviews and to triangulate (Fraenkel and Wallen 2003) their responses regarding their roles, duties, and activities.

---

**FIGURE 1.**

**Job Description of Director of Marketing for a University**

*(The Ultimate Marketing Officer)*

Position: Director of Marketing
Reports to: A vice president designated by the president
Scope: University-wide

Position Concept: The Director of Marketing is responsible for providing marketing guidance and services to the university officers, college deans, department chairmen, and other agents of the university.

Functions: The Director of Marketing will:
- Contribute a marketing perspective to the deliberations of the top administration in their planning of the university’s future
- Prepare data that might be needed by any officer of the university on a particular market’s size, segments, trends, and behavioral dynamics
- Conduct studies of the needs, perceptions, preferences, and satisfactions of particular markets
- Assist in the planning, promotion, and launching of new programs
- Assist in the development of communication and promotion campaigns and materials
- Analyze and advise pricing questions
- Appraise the workability of new academic proposals from a marketing point of view
- Advise on current new student recruitment
- Advise on current student satisfaction
- Advise on university fundraising

Responsibilities: The Director of Marketing will:
- Contact individual officers and small groups at the university to explain services and to solicit communication about problems
- Prioritize the various requests for services according to their long-term impact, cost-savings, potential, time requirements, ease of accomplishment, cost, and urgency
- Select projects of high priority and set accomplishment goals for the year
- Prepare a budget request to support the anticipated work
- Prepare an annual report on the main accomplishments of the office

Major Liaisons: The Director of Marketing will:
- Communicate most closely with the president’s office, the admissions office, the development office, the planning office, and the public relations department
- Relate secondarily with deans of various colleges and chairmen of various departments

Source: Kotler 1979 (p. 42)
Marketing Index for Higher Education

Table 1 shows the mean MIHE scores collected from the community colleges participating in the online survey.

A *t* test was used to explore any statistical difference in the MIHE mean scores between the high-performing group in total and the colleges selected for participation (“participating colleges”). A two-tailed *P*-value of 0.88, with a 0.09 difference in means, indicates that the difference in mean scores between the high-performing colleges and those studied was not statistically significant. The absence of a statistical difference between the total number of high-performing colleges and those participating in this investigation indicates that the members of the sample pool were statistically similar and therefore a valuable measure of the entire high-performing population.

Research Question 1

What are the presidents’ perceptions of higher education marketing and marketing officers at high-performing California community colleges? Specifically, what do presidents believe marketing is, and what should their marketing officers be doing to fulfill that belief?

This question was addressed using a presidential Q-sort classification rating. Five presidents arranged 36 statements (see Figure 2, on page 28) from a high score of positive 5 to a low of -5 to quantify their subjective beliefs about higher education marketing. The presidential Q-statements were divided into four literature-based themes: “Definition,” “Environment,” “Organization,” and “Marketing Officer.” The Q-statements were sorted from “Agree” to “Ambivalent” to “Disagree” to reveal patterns within the four themes. These themes were used to pinpoint presidential preferences and priorities. Each Q-statement was examined to determine whether the presidents’ aggregate perceptions were reflective of the literature.

The presidents’ aggregate perceptions coincided with the literature 61 percent of the time. The “Environment” and “Organization” themes had the highest percentage of congruence with the literature, at 80 percent and 75 percent, respectively. The “Definition” theme showed a 57 percent rate of congruence with the literature, and the “Marketing Officer” theme had the lowest, with 41 percent congruence with the literature. Although the “Environment” theme had a relatively high rate of congruence, the statement *The marketing officer should measure student (current and potential)* and community needs to help guide program development, financial aid, and scheduling scored a low 1.2 out of 5 possible points. The relatively low congruency rates in the “Definition” and “Marketing Officer” themes combined with the low score for research indicates that these presidents may not fully comprehend the scope of higher education marketing’s potential and/or the benefit of having a powerful research-based marketing officer on their campuses. The high rates of congruence with the literature in the “Environment” and “Organization” themes demonstrate that these presidents have perceptions that are approaching the models described in the literature. Furthermore, these rates indicate that although these presidents may not fully comprehend the meaning of marketing, they do realize that it is important—that the environment influences their institutions and that they are trying to integrate marketing practices.

Table 2, on page 26 presents presidential congruence with the literature in total and in the marketing themes of “Definition,” “Environment,” “Organization,” and “Marketing Officer.”

Research Question 2

How committed are these schools to higher education marketing? Specifically, how closely do these officers’ responsibilities, functions, and qualifications match the literature’s ultimate marketing officer model?
The second question was addressed through semi-structured interviews with these presidents’ marketing officers and by analyzing the marketing officers’ job descriptions. Organizations were considered committed to higher education marketing when their marketing officer’s responsibilities, functions, and qualifications matched or approached those described in the literature as those of the “ultimate marketing officer” (Kotler 1979).

Responsibilities

The five marketing officers in this investigation had many similar professional responsibilities, including such tasks as producing their college’s catalogs, schedules, advertisements, and press relations campaigns. All the officers described how closely they worked with their presidents and said that their input on policy decisions that might affect the college’s public image was routinely sought. In terms of marketing research, all the officers reported that they depended on the college’s instructional researcher for data pertaining to the college’s students and community. The officers also reported that the researcher’s office was a separate entity from theirs and that they competed for the instructional researcher’s resources.

Only one officer, from College “E,” noted that she was responsible for taking a bird’s eye view of the college’s environment and for making policy recommendations. Two of the officers reported additional professional duties compared to their peers in the study: one directed the college’s fundraising foundation; the other, again from College “E,” was responsible for scanning the environment and proposing policies to help the college adjust to demographic, economic, and social changes. This marketing officer (who held the title Vice President, District Communication, Marketing, Community Relations, and External Relations, and whose college earned the highest score on the MIHE) had directors under her to handle the day-to-day operations of public relations, advertising, and catalog and schedule production.

Functions

Interview responses of the officers in this study indicated that on the whole, they shared a similar vision of their position: to work closely with the president to develop and protect the college’s image, prestige, and reputation. None of the interview data demonstrated that the officers had a strong research focus, and four of the five officers used promotion-based language to describe their jobs. They believed their priorities were to work with the press, printing vendors, and community leaders to advance the college’s image. Only one officer had a distinct strategy focus: to identify the needs of the community and to help the college meet those needs through policy formulation and program development.

Qualifications

None of the officers held degrees in marketing, though each had earned a bachelor’s degree in a related field; two had earned a master’s degree. All had several years of professional experience prior to serving in their current position. For example, the marketing officer at College “D” had owned and operated television and radio stations; the marketing officer at College “B” had been the public information officer for a large energy company and a chamber of commerce; and two of the participants had public relations and teaching experience.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of data from this exploratory study suggests the following five conclusions:

Table 2.
Rates of Congruence: Presidential Perceptions versus Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of statements</th>
<th>Congruous</th>
<th>Incongruous</th>
<th>Percent congruous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Officer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are gaps between presidents’ perceptions and the literature’s definition of the role of a powerful, research-driven marketing officer.

Discrepancies between presidents’ perceptions of and the literature’s definition of higher education marketing may limit colleges’ commitment to marketing.

Marketing officers reported that they did not have the authority to create an environment where marketing theory and research could be translated into practice.

Community college presidents—even at high-performing colleges—have no formal training in higher education marketing.

Using t-tests and Pearson’s correlation tests, no statistically significant relationship between gender, pay, experience, staff size, and education and MIHE score was found.

Data from this investigation indicate that the presidents who participated in the Q-sort had no formal training in higher education marketing. In many cases, the presidents’ perceptions of higher education marketing did not coincide with the literature, especially when it came to understanding the definition of higher education marketing, marketing research, and the role of a marketing officer. For example, the statement *The marketing officer should measure student (current and potential) and community needs to help guide program development, financial aid, and scheduling* scored a 1.2, just above the threshold for agreement.

The presidents were ambivalent about creating five-year marketing plans, and they disagreed with the statement that *A marketing officer should have a large sphere of influence or authority over college operations (admissions, public relations, scheduling, financial aid, course development).* However, a number of statements did align with the literature. For example, the statements *Every contact with the college creates a perception of the college; A college really only needs promotion campaigns during enrollment periods; The administration should communicate that every employee is a representative for the college; and I shouldn’t have to work directly with the marketing officer* were congruent with the

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literature, suggesting that presidents understand that marketing is positive and not a sporadic college operation.

Given the low rates of congruence in the “Marketing Officer” and “Definition” themes, along with the relatively low rating of the importance of marketing research, it is not surprising that many of these high-performing community colleges are not as committed to marketing as they could be. This lack of commitment is evidenced by marketing officers’ comparatively limited responsibilities, functions, and qualifications, which approached but did not meet Kotler’s (1979) ultimate marketing officer model. For example, none of the marketing officers had a degree in marketing or had a researcher in the department who was under his or her authority and dedicated to marketing research. When these officers did work with their presidents, it was primarily to consult on promotion-oriented operations rather than to provide strategic counsel and guide college policy. Only one marketing officer held the position of vice president, a position in the hierarchy that entails a certain amount of authority over college operations.

Implications for Practice

California’s community colleges are struggling. They are competing for students and resources in the face of “prestige,” reputation, and image problems (Consand 1968). The literature indicates that American colleges and uni-
versities can succeed in the educational marketplace by having leaders and organizations that are committed to marketing (Hanson 2003; Kotler and Goldgehn 1981; LaFleur 1990; Ryans and Shanklin 1986; Scigliano 1983). However, as this study suggests, most California community colleges are not as committed to higher education marketing as they could be. Often, presidents’ perceptions of higher education marketing are not congruent with the literature, particularly in terms of the definition of marketing, the role of marketing research, and the role of a marketing officer on their campus. For example, presidents did not strongly believe that research was vital to marketing; that marketing plans should be planned up to five years in advance; that marketing officers should have a large sphere of influence; or that marketing officers should not have control over the marketing budget. However, presidents did note that they needed to work directly with their marketing officers; that every employee is a college representative; and that marketing was a process that needed to take place beyond enrollment periods.

As the literature indicates, marketing is not an overnight fix for colleges in crisis. Rather, it is an intangible spirit—a culture—which the entire college community must adopt over the long term if it is to create an environment where student success and community need are the top priorities (Kotler and Fox 1985).

CONCLUSIONS
This study suggests that the literature is correct when it predicts that higher education institutions will be organizationally committed to marketing when their presidents believe in marketing’s mission and purpose. The presidents in this exploratory study had perceptions that often did not coincide with the literature; as a result, though high-performing, their colleges were not committed to higher education marketing. The discrepancies between the literature and perception are not surprising given that four of the five presidents had doctorates in education yet none had any formal background in higher education marketing. As the literature indicates, presidential support for marketing in terms of resources and participation in the college’s administrative hierarchy is essential or the college’s marketing efforts will be limited to the comparatively minor function of promotion and publicity. Furthermore, without a commitment to marketing, the college’s long-range enrollment, funding, and scheduling programs will be fractured, scattered, incongruous, and, therefore, ineffectual (Ryans and Shaklin 1986). If community college leaders want their campuses to have long-term success, they need to commit to marketing research and empower their marketing officers.

Community colleges have marketing, “image,” and reputation challenges (Zeiss 1986). They will never have the prestige or name recognition of a CSU or UC institution or the support of the K–12 system. If community colleges want to emerge from the shadows and differentiate themselves from their more powerful partners in California’s education master plan, they must commit to marketing, continually use marketing research to understand their students and community, and give their marketing officers authority on campus. When community college leaders start taking advantage of marketing theory, research, and practice, they can focus on their unique service to their community and thereby gain an advantage in today’s highly competitive educational marketplace.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
This was an exploratory study of high-performing California community colleges. Neither low-performing colleges nor high-performing community colleges outside a 200-mile radius of the researcher’s home were included in the follow-up study. Furthermore, only five of the eleven high-performing colleges were included in the study. Data from the remaining six colleges could reveal more precise conclusions. Moreover, the highest score on the MIHE was 23; a study that included colleges that scored higher could generate more specific conclusions. Only 31 of the 109 campuses in the community college system agreed to participate in the study; a greater sample rate also could enhance the study’s results. This study also was limited by the fact no comparative Q-sort data measuring presidential perceptions of higher education marketing were available in the literature. Further studies using this methodology may refine the Q statements and so may come to different conclusions. This study, therefore, is not designed to be a definitive examination of higher education marketing by California’s community colleges.

REFERENCES
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**About the Author**

**ZACHARY MARTIN HALL** is a California community college graduate, and a third generation California community college instructor. Dr. Hall has been a speech communications instructor for nearly ten years and has taught at four California community college campuses. His personal and family experience led him to be a passionate advocate for the California community college system and has led him to study the subject.

Dr. Hall also has professional experience in the field of corporate marketing and in the for-profit communication industry. In the 1990s, he worked for San Jose-based marketing and multi-media production firms, and was the communications director for a state assembly campaign.
Public concerns regarding illegal immigration are currently polarizing the United States. Regardless of one’s position, the children of illegal (also referred to as undocumented) immigrants are in a particularly vulnerable situation. While undocumented children are allowed free public primary and secondary education, their path to skills attainment and economic improvement may end at high school. Many state legislatures have yet to codify or coordinate policies to manage access for this growing population of students, a population that by 2015 will make up as much as 30 percent of all students. In fact, much policy confusion and inconsistency exists at both the state and federal level, particularly in regards to postsecondary education. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the issues related to undocumented students and their access to public higher education. Exploring state and federal regulations will illuminate how this issue may affect higher education administrators and the institutions at which they work. In conclusion, the authors provide recommendations on how higher education administrators may seek to mitigate the consequences of access for undocumented students.
We must also find a sensible and humane way to deal with people here illegally. Illegal immigration is complicated, but it can be resolved. And it must be resolved in a way that upholds both our laws and our highest ideals (Bush 2008).

Illegal immigration is polarizing the United States. No fewer than 900 bills containing the word “immigration” are being considered by the 110th Congress. Groups both for and against immigrants volley salvos back and forth that undermine authentic policy development and implementation. Pundits for immigration reform believe that this group constitutes a drain on national resources, costing the United States $45 billion a year (Rhymer 2004). Yet in 2007 the Council of Economic Advisers found that immigrants have a positive influence on the economy and make up more than 15 percent of all workers in the United States (Council of Economic Advisers 2007). Regardless of one’s position, the children of immigrants are in a particularly vulnerable situation. While undocumented students are allowed free public primary and secondary education (Plyler v. Doe 1982), their path to skills attainment and economic improvement may end at high school.

The confusion that has resulted from inconsistent state and federal policy on undocumented immigrants has rarely been addressed by the literature. This is particularly true with respect to how higher education is affected by such inconsistency. Literature on this topic tends to be positional: either for undocumented student access to public higher education (Brickman 2006; Diaz-Strong and Meiners 2007; Drachman 2006; Matthews and Ewan 2006; Olivas 2004; Ruge and Iza 2005; Salinas 2006; Seif 2004; Stevenson 2004) or against it (Maki 2004; Rhymer 2004; Stein 2002).

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the issues related to undocumented students and their access to public higher education. Federal case law and regulations that encourage or inhibit access will be reviewed. While the federal government is preeminent in matters of immigration policy, states also play a role in managing access to their systems of higher education, often in contradiction to federal code. By way of illustration, the status of access for undocumented students in three states will be considered: Texas allows full access; Georgia denies access; and Virginia is currently undecided on this issue. Exploring these state and federal regulations will illuminate how this issue may affect higher education administrators and the institutions at which they work. Finally, suggestions will be made on how to mitigate the consequences of access for undocumented students.
THE NATURE OF UNAUTHORIZED, UNDOCUMENTED, AND ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

We focus on undocumented students and their access to public higher education. For the purposes of this paper, we differentiate this segment of the immigrant population from unauthorized immigrants, as these students typically entered the United States at a very young age and were not consulted by their parents when the decision to immigrate was made (Diaz-Strong and Meiners 2007). While their presence is still a violation of federal law, these students have attended public school and so are acclimated to the American education system (Olivas 2004; Salinas 2006). Unauthorized immigrants (also referred to as illegal), on the other hand, have made individual decisions to leave their homes and to pass undetected into the United States (Hoefer, Rytina and Campbell 2006). Knowingly, they remain in the United States unlawfully.

The Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics has estimated that 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants were in the United States in January 2005 (Hoefer et al. 2006). Mexico is the leading source country, with an estimated 6 million of its citizens residing illegally in the United States (Drachman 2006; Hoefer et al. 2006). California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois are the main receiver states, accounting for 58 percent of the unauthorized immigrant population in the United States (Hoefer et al. 2006). Children figure heavily in this population: one out of every five children born in the United States is born to a foreign-born parent (Matthews and Ewen 2006). Researchers estimate that by 2015, the children of immigrants will make up as much as 30 percent of the nation’s public school population (Matthews and Ewen 2006). The pressure that this burgeoning population will place on the capacity of the nation’s public higher education institutions upon graduation from public secondary schools must be addressed by lawmakers.

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE REGISTRARS AND ADMISSIONS OFFICERS
FEDERAL LAWS, CODES, AND REGULATIONS THAT AFFECT UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

The federal government has attempted on many occasions to legislate issues regarding the presence of immigrants in the United States. Often, these attempts overlap, confuse, and contradict. For example, a Supreme Court decision may protect an immigrant even as a federal statute may punish the immigrant for the same behavior. The following review of federal case and constitutional law illustrates this problem.

Supreme Court Cases and Constitutional Law: Plyler v. Doe; Toll v. Moreno

In 1982, the Supreme Court rendered its decision on Plyler v. Doe (1982), determining that undocumented children of unauthorized immigrants have the right to free public primary and secondary education. This case denied the state of Texas the ability to force these children (and their parents) to pay fees for public education and held that the state may not discriminate against undocumented children based on immigration status. This case did not address access to postsecondary education but did demonstrate that residents of a state—regardless of immigration status—are allowed free public education in that state.

Plyler v. Doe also was the first time unauthorized immigrants and their children sought equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment. The Equal Protection Clause states, “...nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws” (U.S. Constitution, Amendment XIV, § 1). This case determined that unauthorized immigrants and their children qualified as “persons” and thus were protected under the Constitution and so should be afforded all the protections of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Also in 1982, the Supreme Court decided Toll v. Moreno (1982). In the first postsecondary case to be heard that affected foreign students, the Court ruled that the University of Maryland’s policy of denying reduced in-state tuition to students who were not residents of the state but who held legal alien status violated the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution.

This opinion clarified that under Article IV (Olivas 2004), the federal government holds exclusive powers over immigration policies and that states may not interfere with this power. While the history of this case is confusing and deals with treaty organization aliens, the decision represents the first time the federal government interfered with the residency policies of a public higher education institution and allowed a non-U.S. citizen access to in-state tuition.

Federal Statute: Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996

In contrast to the Supreme Court cases described above, the IIRIRA (1996) restricts states from granting public benefits to unauthorized immigrants and often is cited as the reason to deny undocumented students physical and financial access to public higher education. This federal statute laid the groundwork for California’s Proposition 187, an initiative that called for creation of a state-run system that would verify residents’ immigration status before they could receive public services. This proposition added public education “from kindergarten to university” to the list of services for which undocumented immigrants were ineligible (Martin 1995, p. 255). Eventually Proposition 187 was repealed.

Section 505 of the IIRIRA also discourages states from enacting in-state, resident tuition policies for all students, regardless of immigration status, who graduate from that state’s high schools (Olivas 2004). This section of the act “provides that a state’s public postsecondary educational institution may not grant in-state tuition benefits to illegal aliens unless such an institution also grants in-state tuition to out-of-state United States citizens” (Olivas 2004, p. 349). This section of the statute puts public higher education institutions in an untenable position due to their dependence on revenue generated from out-of-state students (Morphew 2006). Maki (2004) suggests that the strict guidelines set down by IIRIRA encourage undocumented students to change their immigration status and to apply for naturalization, yet the statute provides no process for this to occur.

Pending Legislation: The Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act (DREAM)

In response to IIRIRA and the growing undocumented student population, many legislators have supported legislation that would allow states to offer in-state tuition to students whose immigration status is uncertain and that describes a process that would allow these students to pursue permanent legal status. The DREAM Act,
introduced in 2001 by Orrin Hatch (R-UT) in the Senate and by Chris Cannon (R-UT) in the House, “would clarify states’ abilities to offer this reduced tuition rate to students who have entered the country prior to their sixteenth birthday, have lived in the states for at least five years, and have either graduated from high school or enrolled in college” (Stevenson 2004, p. 555). While this law would provide for current undocumented students, it does not clarify the status of future immigrants to this country with regard to access to public higher education.

Critics of this federal legislation and of similar state legislation argue that it is a drain on taxpayer resources and that these same benefits should be allowed to out-of-state legal U.S. residents, who must pay higher tuition if they choose to attend college in another state (Stein 2002). The DREAM Act would not permit certain financial aid (e.g., the Pell grant) to be awarded to undocumented students. Yet “more than lower tuition for residents lies in the balance, as many other benefits may accrue to state residents in public (and private) colleges, such as preferential admissions, scholarship or loan assistance, inclusion in quota programs...” (Olivas 2004, p.328).

In May 2006, the DREAM Act passed the full Senate, as part of the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act (S.2611). Yet the act was not brought to the floor for a vote in the House in 2006, as “House leadership could not be persuaded to bring it up” (National Immigration Law Center 2007). In the fall of 2007, the DREAM Act was introduced in the House as an amendment to the Department of Defense authorization bill, but again it failed to pass (S.1348). The bill’s failure means that Congress is likely to postpone further action on immigration until after the 2008 elections. Because of this inaction, federal law and policy pertaining to undocumented students and their access to higher education remain inconsistent and confusing.

STATE LEGISLATION ON UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT ACCESS TO PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION BENEFITS

In light of this federal policy vacuum, several state legislatures have sought to define this issue on their own terms. The National Immigration Law Center (NILC), an advocacy group for immigrants, cites Texas, California, Utah, Washington, New York, Oklahoma, Illinois, Kansas, New Mexico, and Nebraska as states that have passed laws permitting undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at public colleges and universities (NILC 2006). Yet as recently as 2007, it was reported that Nevada, Minnesota, and Arizona either have passed legislation preventing undocumented students from receiving tuition benefits or are in the process of creating legislation that is in line with federal code on the matter (Fischer and Hebel 2007). Many states—including Connecticut, New Jersey, Missouri, and Virginia—continue to debate this highly contentious issue. By way of illustration of these policy choices, legislation (approved and pending) in Texas, Georgia, and Virginia will be explored.

Texas: Supporting Access

In the early 1980s, members of the Texas state legislature fought for the right to deny undocumented students access to public primary and secondary education. In Plyler v. Doe (1982), the Supreme Court ruled that all students, regardless of immigration status, were allowed free public education in the states in which they were residents. In 2001, responding to the nearly 1.5 million people in the state who are unauthorized immigrants (Hoefer, Rytina and Campbell 2006), Texas became the first state to make higher education affordable to immigrants, regardless of status.

HB 1403 (2001) amended the state’s education code (Title 2) to classify undocumented students as residents of the state of Texas for the purposes of in-state tuition at public higher education institutions (Note the contradiction against IIRIRA [1996].) This bill also established criteria for students to obtain resident status (e.g., graduate from a state secondary school) and waived tuition for Mexican residents who enrolled at The University of Texas at San Antonio and demonstrated financial need. In addition, Chapter 52 of Title 2 of Texas state education code further clarifies that “if the person is not a citizen or permanent resident of the United States, an affidavit stating that the person will apply to become a permanent resident of the United States as soon as the person becomes eligible to apply” (2 T.S.C § 052) is sufficient to obtain in-state residency. It is important to note, though, that the student must have graduated from a Texas secondary school in order to receive in-state residency.

Not all elected officials in Texas agreed with this policy direction. In 2007, several representatives sought to remove from Texas law the provisions for in-state tuition rates for resident immigrants (American Civil Liberties Union
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The issue of undocumented students has appeared on the public agenda of the House of Delegates every year since 2002. In 2006, Delegate Reid (R) pressed the issue again with his H.B. 2623, which addressed in-state tuition benefits by stating that an “[a]n alien who is unlawfully present in the United States, and therefore ineligible to establish domicile...shall not be eligible on the basis of residency within Virginia for any postsecondary educational benefit, including in-state tuition, unless citizens or nationals of the United States are eligible for such benefits in no less an amount, duration, and scope, without regard to whether such citizens or nationals are Virginia residents” (H.B. 2623). This wording of this bill was not strong enough for some delegates, so H.B. 1961, offered by Delegate Frank Hargrove (R), was incorporated into H.B. 2623 by the House education subcommittee. This bill stated that “an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States shall not be eligible for initial enrollment in any public institution of higher education in the Virginia” (H.B. 1961). In February 2006, H.B. 2623 was passed in the House and was referred to the Senate Committee on Education and Health for consideration. On February 15, 2006, H.B. 2623 was “passed by indefinitely.”

In that same general session, Governor Kaine (D) amended and signed H.B. 1673, offered by Delegate Marshall (R); this bill called for the creation of a Commission on Immigration. This broad-based, bipartisan group will act in an advisory capacity to the executive branch and will help analyze the impact of immigration on the Commonwealth. The commission is expected to make recommendations on policies that relate to education as well. The commission met in September and November 2007 and currently is in the fact-finding phase of its work.

In July 2007, Virginia Attorney General Bob McDonnell notified the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) that students with “protected status” can establish Virginia residence and can become eligible for reduced in-state tuition. This protected status applies only to foreign nationals residing in the United States whose homeland conditions are recognized by the U.S. government as being temporarily unsafe or overly dangerous for them to return. While this ruling does not cover all undocumented students of college age, it does open the access door for some and unquestionably will inform future conversations.
While some states have been very clear regarding undocumented students’ access to in-state tuition breaks, others—including Virginia—have been unable to establish laws that govern the policies of public higher education institutions. This lack of congruency between state and federal policy puts those attempting to manage this population in a precarious position. Higher education administrators, from the provost to the registrar’s office, often must interpret and implement policies; this may generate a legal battle, for individuals as well as the institution.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS**

In 2004, the presidents, rectors, and boards of visitors of George Mason University (GMU), James Madison University (JMU), Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC), the University of Virginia (UVA), Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), and the College of William and Mary were sued by two undocumented students and a nonprofit organization, Equal Access Education, claiming to represent the interests of immigrant students in the Commonwealth of Virginia (Equal Access Education, et al. v. Alan G. Merten, et al. 2004). This case marked the first time that undocumented immigrant students sued the leaders of state higher education institutions directly in an attempt to gain admission. Summary judgment was granted to the defendants, Alan Merten, et al.

In 2006, the Student Advocates for Higher Education, La Raza Student Organization, and Jennie Doe brought suit against Charles Reed, in his official capacity as Chancellor of the California State University, and the Cal State Board of Trustees because of a practice at the university in which students with undocumented parents were being prevented from receiving in-state tuition and financial aid benefits (Student Advocates for Higher Education v. Trustees of California State University 2006). A consent decree was issued in this case in 2007 by the San Francisco Superior Court in which Cal State was no longer allowed to make residency decisions based upon the immigration status of a student’s parents. In 2006 and 2007, plaintiffs Robert Martinez et al. brought suit against the Regents of the University of California claiming that state legislation on in-state residency requirements conflicted with federal legislation on immigration (Martinez v. Regents of University of California 2006). This case was dismissed on both jurisdictional status and merit.

Also in 2007, Kristen Day et al. brought suit against the Kansas Board of Regents and the registrars of the University of Kansas, Kansas State University, and Emporia State University challenging a state statute that allows certain non-U.S. citizens to pay in-state tuition rates while attending Kansas postsecondary education institutions (Day v. Bond 2007). The district court dismissed Day’s claims on lack of standing. The case was then appealed and the 10th Circuit of the United States Court of Appeals reaffirmed the dismissal (Day v. Bond 2007).

Each of these cases had different outcomes, yet each had a similar impact on university budgets to the extent that administrators and their institutions expended significant time and money on these cases. Continued policy confusion regarding undocumented students and public higher education guarantees future litigation for administrators throughout higher education and the resultant expenditure of public funds to combat it.

**WHAT CAN HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS DO?**

By staying abreast of legal issues confronting states with defined policies, higher education administrators may be able to adopt broad institutional policies that can discourage loss from litigation. “The number of lawsuits filed against colleges and universities is not abating” (Roberts, Fossey and DeMitchell 2005, p. 203). On the basis of a thorough review of the literature on the subject, university officials can anticipate the effects of a lack of clearly defined policies on all levels of the university. Areas particularly sensitive to issues of student access include the registrar’s office (which implements and enforces in-state residency requirements), financial aid officers (who award loans and scholarships), as well as admissions officers (who interpret and implement university admissions standards). Experts in higher education law recommend that university officials adopt a risk management stance by taking measures to identify risk and to develop strategies prior to the onset of legal disputes (Roberts, Fossey and DeMitchell 2005).

Higher education administrators, in tandem with K–12 leadership, should be seeking opportunities to increase the likelihood of matriculation and the retention of academic talent. In 2000, it was estimated that only 59 percent of undocumented students completed high school (Ruge
and Iza 2005). Clearly, barriers to academic success exist at the secondary level. Administrators should consider developing ties with K–12 institutions to facilitate the transition of undocumented students from high school to college. Examples of possible connections between K–12 and higher education include collaborative English language programs to increase the proficiency of incoming students, mentoring programs, and financial aid counseling. If the DREAM Act is enacted by the federal government, education administrators would be in a strong position to support undocumented students’ transitions and to increase their chances of retention and academic success at the postsecondary level.

Administrators need not merely react to federal and state regulations. Instead, they may assert agency in these matters and attempt to influence policy at both levels. National professional associations such as the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) have demonstrated significant influence on federal policy. For example, the U.S. Department of Education frequently seeks expert advice from AACRAO staff on issues regarding foreign diploma evaluation, SEVIS, FERPA, and the Higher Education Act Reauthorization. AACRAO staff, with other higher education associations, have solicited members of Congress and have requested that the DREAM Act be adopted in the interest of the higher education community (Ward 2006).

Finally, administrators should seek to treat undocumented students with the compassion and humanity that President Bush spoke of in his recent State of the Union address. Immigrants to the United States tend to have lower levels of educational attainment than native residents. They also tend to have higher unmet financial needs that may deter educational attainment at the college level (Erisman and Looney 2007). A lack of information regarding higher education, concerns regarding immigration status, family responsibilities, punitive immigration laws, and inadequate academic preparation further inhibit this population from pursuing higher levels of education. A culture of fear surrounds this population of students, as anxiety over deportation prevents them from making use of state resources (Diaz-Strong and Meiners 2007). By reaching out to this group of students, higher education administrators may be able to improve students’ chances of economic empowerment, to increase civic participation, and to augment their contributions to society as a whole.

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NOTE: The authors reported some of this article’s content in “Undocumented students and access to public higher education: Legislative acrimony, confusion and stagnation,” which appeared in Volume 14, Issue 1 of Virginia Issues and Answers: A Public Policy Forum.
Given the trend to award higher percentages of “A”s and “B”s, adding median course grades (or other normative data) to student transcripts can help readers make sense of inflated grades. We discuss the pros and cons of this proposal which appears to be relatively benign, straightforward, and technologically feasible.
In addition to reflecting the fundamental accuracy of the teacher's testing and evaluation methods, a useful reporting system must make the teacher's evaluations clear to the PWC (people who count). As long as their meanings are clear to the PWC, what the pigeonholes are called is not important. A system that divided student performances into groups called Rats, Snails, and Puppy Dog Tails would be a perfectly satisfactory three-pigeonhole system if the grade of Puppy Dog Tails meant anything whatever to the PWC. (Durham 2006, p. 95)

Throughout classrooms in the United States there appears to have been a general watering down of academic standards. The percentages of “A” and “B” grades have risen, and at some schools, the percentage of grades of “C” or lower has plummeted. Numerous scholarly articles about grade inflation discuss the extent, causes, and implications of this situation in American schools (e.g., Gordon 2006), and op-ed pieces frequently lament or deride current grading practices. For example, in a sarcastic editorial, the prestigious British scientific journal Nature suggested that American grading trends follow “Moore’s law of U.S. higher education,” according to which, “the quantity and quality of work that undergraduates must do to get top grades halves every decade” (Against Grade Inflation 2004, p. 723).

One of many undesirable consequences of the changes noted above has been to drain information from student transcripts, thereby making them less useful. Numerous colleges and universities have struggled, with varying degrees of success, to mitigate the problem. In an attempt to help reverse this process, we explain why we believe it would be a good idea to include normative data such as median course grades on undergraduate transcripts. For example, the inclusion of median grades offers a context in which the PWC—students, admissions officers at other education institutions, and potential employers—can read transcripts more meaningfully and make more informed decisions. Including normative data also makes transcripts more consistent with judicial understanding of the purpose of grading. Specifically, the courts recognize grades as “symbolic speech” because grades are intended to convey a particular message to an audience that is expected to understand it. Today that speech often is garbled because of variation in grading standards.

Registrars, through their access to student information and their expertise in the handling, management, and presentation of data, play an important role in helping to untangle the meaning of grades. We are confident that the professionalism of registrars guarantees that changes of the kind we advocate would be implemented efficiently if
they became established university policy. But informed input and assistance—and, better still, support—from registrars with regard to any such changes would be desirable. The August 30, 2007, issue of AACRAO Transcript reported the results of a survey of its readers in which only two of the 171 respondents indicated that normative data were incorporated on student transcripts at their schools. Further, many respondents wrote that they saw no useful purpose for this practice. By offering the views of three experienced university teachers, we hope to provide a rationale for adding normative data to transcripts.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF GRADES

Changes in U.S. grading practices have been evident since the 1960s. Juola (1980) reported an increase of 0.39 in the grade point averages of students attending 180 public and private U.S. colleges of different sizes, geographic regions, and curricular emphases over the period from 1960 to 1978. Rojstaczer (2003; www.gradeinflation.com) compiled an oft-cited database of longitudinal reports derived from internal or official school documents at 52 four-year public and private colleges and universities. Although the reports differ in terms of the time periods covered (mostly the 1990s and early 2000s), GPAs increased at 31 of the schools. Published accounts have noted increasing grades at several schools. For example, Bowdoin College Registrar Christine Cote reported that the average GPA earned by students increased from 3.20 to 3.33 between 1996 and 2005 (Yaver 2005; for reports on other schools, see also Kezim, Pariseau 2005; Kolevzon 1981; Manhire 2005).

Grade increases have not affected all disciplines equally. Sabot and Wäkeman-Linn (1991) documented a trend in differential grade increases at Williams College and seven other colleges. In 1985–86, each of these schools had high-grading departments (e.g., English, political science, and art) in which, on average, 32 percent of students received grades of “B+” and above and low-grading ones (e.g., chemistry, mathematics, and economics) in which, on average, only 19 percent of students received grades of “B+” or above. Grade differences between the sciences and humanities also have been reported at Brandeis (May 2002) and Yale (Ziffra 1995). While the reasons for the increases, both absolute and differential, are debatable, it seems unlikely that they derive entirely from improvements in student performance.

GRADES AS COMMUNICATION

The Education Literature

Grading systems serve many purposes, none of which is more significant than communicating the achievement status of students to the students themselves, parents, and others (Guskey and Bailey 2001). For better or for worse, grades are taken very seriously in many quarters and have acquired an almost cult-like importance in numerous places (Olson 1995). Accordingly, grades must portray the fundamental accuracy of the teacher’s assessment methods and provide a reporting system that makes the teacher’s evaluations clear to all who see them, including the PWC (Durham 2006). Above all—and as remarked by Mark Hewitt, University Registrar at Brandeis University—“You want to make sure the external world will understand what your grading system means” (May 2002).

A frame of reference is necessary to make sense of individual grades. As Wiggins (1996, p. 142) observed, “An isolated narrative can never tell us whether laudatory or critical language in the report represents absolute, relative, or idiocy erratic achievement.” Hence, when dissatisfaction with traditional grading methods becomes apparent, educators typically add narrative describing the relative strengths and weaknesses of student performance and other contextual data that convey information about relative standing.

Legal Standing

When conversation turns to ways to change grading practices to deal with grade inflation, questions inevitably arise about infringements on faculty academic freedom. In the course of adjudicating claims about academic freedom (e.g., Brown v. Armenti 2001: Eisen v. Temple University 2002), the courts have spoken about the intrinsic nature of grades, specifically identifying them as symbolic communication intended to deliver a definite message.

1 In the one school where grades did not get higher, there was no differentiation in mean grades across departments (indeed, the standard deviation decreased over time).

2 Consider the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (Kutner et al. 2007) findings that prose and document literacy declined for all levels of educational attainment beyond a high school diploma between 1992 and 2003. These results are consistent with the conclusion of a 2004-05 academic survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute that 41 percent of the nation’s faculty believes that most students lack the basic skills required for college-level study (Lindholm et al. 2005).
As does any communicative act, assigning a letter grade sends a message to the recipient. The message communicated by the letter grade “A” is virtually indistinguishable from the message communicated by a formal written evaluation indicating “excellent work.” Both communicative acts represent symbols that transmit a unique message. (Parate v. Isibor 1989, p. 827)

In Spence v. Washington (1974), the U.S. Supreme Court defined the criteria used to determine whether a symbol is sufficiently imbued with elements of communication. Specifically, a symbol possesses communicative properties if it is “a pointed expression” (p. 410), if the person using the symbol intends “to convey a particularized message” (p. 411), and if, given the circumstances in which the symbol is used, there is a great likelihood “that the message would be understood by those who viewed it” (p. 411).

Attorney Evelyn Sung (2003) maintains, “Grades fulfill the requirements of the Spence test and thus qualify as speech” (p. 1560). Historically, grading systems replaced teacher feedback to students by means of narrative comments when the latter practice became less feasible as the number of children attending school increased (Marzano 2000). Hence, grades were intended to serve as surrogates for written evaluations of students and have become the primary shorthand tool for apprising parents of how their children are faring (Loyd and Loyd 1997; Olson 1995). “Thus, the grade fulfills the first part of the Spence test, by sending a particularized message to the student and third parties who see the grade” (Sung 2003, p. 1561).

In principle, grades also appear to satisfy the remaining Spence criteria because the message is likely to be understood, at least in a general sense, by those who are privileged to see it. To use more formal language, students, parents, business recruiters, graduate schools, and professional schools have a shared idea of grades as a particularized communication. In practice, however, context also matters: Grades are interpreted differently when expectations differ about the school and/or the department assigning them. Common grading practice has changed so much and so rapidly that the notion of a ‘shared idea’ seems doubtful.

MAKING GRADES MORE MEANINGFUL

Colleges and universities have adopted a variety of strategies to restore the meaningfulness of grades. Some institutions have imposed limitations on faculty grading practices. For example, to reduce grading disparities among professors, law schools in increasing numbers have adopted grade normalization practices (9 percent of schools in 1976, 66 percent in 1993, and 84 percent in 1996). Approximately 55 percent of law schools have a distributional component in their normalization scheme (e.g., a suggested distribution or mean; Downs and Levit 1997). At Princeton University, the faculty approved a limit on the percent of “A” grades that each department could award each year. In order to protect the interests of students, Princeton notifies prospective employers and graduate school admissions committees of the university’s tougher guidelines on grading.

Some schools do not regulate grade distributions but find ways to convey additional information about them to potential employers and graduate programs. For example, Swarthmore enclosed with letters of recommendation for medical school a document that describes the college, the quality of its students, and the GPA of graduating students in the sciences. Reed College includes information about grading with all transcripts. The “Grades at Reed” card enclosed with the transcript discusses academic rigor at Reed and reports the average GPA for each graduating class as well as the 90th and 75th percentiles for the distribution of GPAs.

Other schools, principally from the Ivy League, have adopted simpler methods for providing contextual information. For example, starting in 1996, the transcripts for undergraduates at Columbia University included the percent of “A”s awarded in all classes with enrollments of more than twelve students. Similarly, since 1994, the median grade in each class enrolling more than ten students at Dartmouth College has been included on undergraduate transcripts. In fall 2008, Cornell University will begin adding median grades to the transcripts of students in the Class of 2012.4

4 College admissions officers expect this type of contextual information to accompany applicants’ high school transcripts, including data profiles on the applicant’s high school and graduating class. In order to make them more interpretable and to facilitate comparison of graduates from different schools, some states have taken steps to make uniform the format and content of public high school transcripts as well as school profile reports [see, for example, the Virginia Administrative Code (2007)].

4 Because letter grades are ordinal data, the median is the statistically appropriate index of central tendency.
PROS AND CONS OF ADDING MEDIAN GRADES TO TRANSCRIPTS

Proposals to add normative grades to undergraduate transcripts have stimulated vigorous debate and considerable opposition both at our own institution and elsewhere. Some key arguments are summarized and discussed below.

- If it ain’t broke ...
  
  Con — Normative grades are unnecessary because the PWC already have enough information. Advocates of this position observe that admissions to professional and graduate schools and hiring continue satisfactorily despite alleged deficiencies in transcripts.
  
  Pro — We argue that the PWC often devalue transcripts and rely instead on other kinds of information (e.g., standardized exam scores, personal statements, and letters of recommendation) precisely because transcripts provide limited information about relative student performance. In other words, the observation that admissions and hiring proceed with transcripts as they are does not mean that all is well.

- Lies, damn lies, and statistics
  
  Con — Reporting class medians would penalize students who take courses with large numbers of academically strong peers, as in honors classes, for example. In such classes many students deserve grades of “A,” so an excellent student might not stand out. In brief, someone considering class medians may underrated the achievements of a high-performing student.
  
  Pro — To resolve the specific dilemma of the honors student, transcripts could identify honors courses. Reporting of medians may exclude small classes (e.g., those enrolling 10 or fewer students), partly to protect student privacy.
  
  A thornier and legitimate problem arises when comparing students from classes with different distributions of academic ability. Suppose we use grades and grade medians to compare two “A” students, each in a class of 30 taught by the same professor. The student in the stronger peer group who received one of fifteen “A”s may appear less accomplished than the student in the weaker peer group who received one of eight “A”s. As it stands, this argument, which is about unfairness, is true and represents a drawback to incorporating class medians on transcripts. However, overall, we believe that the benefits outweigh this drawback.
  
  In particular, if we take the position that the PWC do not need to know median grades, we invite them to ignore the unfairness of comparing the “A” student who has taken many courses where average grades are high with the “A” student who has not. And what shall we say about the unfairness of comparing students who get “B”s in courses where “A”s are scarce with students who get “A”s in courses where they are common? Comparisons of this kind made with transcripts lacking normative data will not enlighten and, in fact, may well mislead the reader. To interpret transcripts appropriately, the PWC must possess a sizable store of institutional knowledge. For example, they might need to know that, at a given university, one department grades “hard” while another grades “easy.”
  
  Finally, if one believes, as we do not (but as some of our colleagues do), that an “A” is always an “A,” then reporting median grades does no harm to the PWC as they make their decisions. Specifically, if they rely heavily on median grades, then although possibly unfair to a more deserving student in a stronger peer group, they nonetheless will make satisfactory choices.

- Don’t shoot yourself in the foot
  
  Con — Several arguments against adding contextual information to transcripts derive from concerns that reporting grade medians will diminish the perceived value of student accomplishments and the institution’s reputation. First, students who learn that a large fraction of their classmates did as well as or better than they did may feel unduly discouraged, and so may their parents. They also may feel spurred to engage in unhealthy competition. Second, the PWC may think less of applicants and mark them down unfairly in relation to applicants from institutions that do not report grade medians. Finally, legislators, the media, and the general public may question the rigor and seriousness of the institution. We address these three arguments in turn.
  
  Pro — Maintaining student morale, while important, is not the primary purpose of grades and should not determine the manner of reporting them. Most important, grades supply information. Contextualized grades add information that can help students form realistic expec-
The normative data included the number of students in the course section. Often, they have created the special data sets for the study of grade inflation and efforts to make grades more meaningful. It is not clear that reporting median grades will tip the balance toward the latter. Finally, as discussed above, although reporting grade medians may diminish the perceived value of some student accomplishments, it will enhance the perceived value of other student accomplishments.

PWC read transcripts for two related but different purposes: to establish the credentials of applicants or nominees and to choose among candidates when resources are scarce. The inclusion of median grades on transcripts is unlikely to affect readers who want only to check credentials, i.e., to find out whether a student has taken the relevant courses in accredited programs. Thus, we think that reporting grade medians will interest mainly those readers who must allocate scarce resources. We discussed above several cases in which grade medians would be helpful to students in competitive situations and one in which they might not. Still another concern relates to the evaluation of transcripts from different institutions. One institution may report contextual data while a competing institution may not. Although the situation is complicated, on balance we believe that the student with the more information-rich transcript will benefit for two reasons: First, his transcript will be more credible; second, in stiff competition of highly competitive applicants, the PWC very often look at the outlying low grades, which median grades may help explain (i.e., low course average).

As to the regard of legislators, the media, and the general public, we believe that the horse of public perception has left the gate. Justified or not, the public already strongly suspects grade inflation. In this climate, it seems doubtful that the newspapers would criticize an institution for efforts at greater transparency. Perhaps they would even give it some credit.

TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

Registrars have played a quiet but crucial role in the study of grade inflation and efforts to make grades more meaningful. Often, they have created the special data sets needed to assess grade distributions or to incorporate normative data on student transcripts. For example, Sabot and Wakeman-Linn (1991) noted the assistance of the Williams College registrar who developed a "rich" (p. 165) panel data set that, in addition to a student's academic record, included demographic and family background information, as well as a variety of test scores indicating cognitive abilities. At our home institution, which uses in-house software, we were assured that normative data could be added to student transcripts with little fuss.

Recent experience at the University of Indiana is instructive regarding technological constraints that may limit registrars' ability to provide normative information. In 1998, at the behest of the Educational Policies Committee of the Bloomington Faculty Council, the registrar developed programming capabilities that permitted incorporating a variety of contextual information that, at the discretion of the student, could be displayed on her transcript. Subsequently, Indiana adopted a commercial operating system that unified administrative computing but lacked the capability to produce contextualized transcripts. Indiana now must decide whether to pay for customizing the software.

If normative data are to be added to transcripts, certain technical/academic issues must be settled regardless of who programs the computers. Would normative data be reported automatically on all transcripts, or could each student decide whether to include the information? Would normative data be reported for all courses (lecture, laboratory, studio, independent study), all sessions (fall, spring, summer, and winter), all students (full time, part time, transfer, non-matriculated)? It also will be necessary to determine whether normative data for a given class should be recalcualted following any subsequent grade change, thereby making the transcript a living document, or whether a cutoff date for incorporating changes should be established. Institutions will answer such questions for themselves as the need arises.

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The normative data included the number of students in the course section who received the same grade or higher; the number of students who received any of the possible grades in the course section; the number of students who withdrew or otherwise did not receive a grade; the percentage of students who were majors in the given course department; the average grade of all students in the course section; the average grade point average of all students in the course section; and the name of the instructor of the course section.
National discussions are underway about how to build databases that would make it possible to generate and circulate transcripts in digital format at the K–12 and/or college levels. By no means new, work on a national electronic database for grades and transcripts dates back at least to 1989 (see Marton and Stewart 2007 and McConahay and Coté 1998). For easily modified systems, the inclusion of normative data would present no new technical problems beyond requiring additional fields.

CONCLUSIONS

A faculty rethinks its report card, trying to provide more helpful information to students and parents alike, while playing down the more harmful aspects of grades based on crude comparisons of students only. They develop a more narrative-based reporting system, one that costs them many more hours but that seems well worth the effort. Yet, at the first parent conference, parents invariably ask, “OK, but how is she doing?” (Wiggins 1996, p. 141)

Whether we are students, parents, faculty members, registrars, admissions officers, corporate recruiters, or members of the general public, most of us want information to be accurate, complete, clear, and easy to digest. And like the parent above, when we look at a transcript, what we most want to know is “how she is doing.” The courts support this idea (which to us seems commonsensical), having declared that grades should communicate a well-defined message in a way that the anticipated audience can understand it. In our opinion, changes in grading over the last 30 years have undermined what was once, perhaps, a more general agreement about the meanings of grades. The addition of normative data to student transcripts is a step toward restoring such an understanding. Normative data will allow those who see a grade to place the student’s performance in a larger context, which, if not complete, would improve upon what we now have. That, in a nutshell, is the primary although not the only reason for our desire to add medians to transcripts.
Grades exist at virtually all academic institutions; even those who doubt their educational value readily admit to the central role that they play in our society. “The notion of grading and thus ranking people competitively is deeply ingrained in our culture” and, therefore, “grades will be with us for a while, I suspect” (Raebecck 2002, p. 1). Under the circumstances, we believe that universities can serve all constituencies better with grades that represent the achievements of their students in less ambiguous ways. Adding class medians to transcripts appears to be a relatively benign, straightforward, and technologically feasible method of imbuing academic records with more meaning, and one that does not raise objections associated with assertions of academic freedom.

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JOSEPH POTENZA received a Ph.D. in chemistry from Harvard University (1967) and a B.S. in chemistry from the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn (1962). Following two years in the United States Army (1966-68, exit rank, Captain), he entered Rutgers University in the fall of 1968 as an assistant professor of chemistry, becoming Distinguished Professor (Professor II) in 1981 and University Professor in 1996. Professor Potenza also has served as Provost and Dean of the Graduate School at the New Brunswick Campus at Rutgers. With his students and colleagues, Potenza has co-authored more than 150 journal articles. Over the past three decades, his research interests included boron chemistry, collision mechanics in liquids, x-ray crystallography, and bioinorganic chemistry.

NOTE: The order of authorship was determined alphabetically.
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An e-portfolio as defined by Lorenzo and Ittelson (2005) is a “digitized collection of artifacts including demonstrations, resources, and accomplishments that represent an individual, group, or institution” (p. 1). This new assessment method enables students to demonstrate their ability to analyze and synthesize information through problem solving, projects, and written journals, not merely on standardized tests. Elementary and secondary schools are moving toward the use of e-portfolios because they offer teachers and students increased accountability, additional opportunities for reflection-based learning, and meaningful engagement of technologically savvy students.

Based on conclusions drawn from a descriptive, exploratory research study regarding the use of e-portfolios in the acceptance process in higher education in New England, actual use, knowledge, and experience of e-portfolios are limited. Overall, respondents believed that e-portfolios are not important and that they probably will not replace traditional admissions methods. The majority of respondents (86%) had little to no knowledge of or experience with e-portfolios. Ninety-three percent of respondents had little to no knowledge of or experience evaluating an e-portfolio. And fully 97 percent of institutions do not accept e-portfolios. (Cohen 2006).

Traditionally, entrance into higher education has been through limited forms of evaluation, such as the SAT, ACT, senior class projects, grade point averages, and class rank, despite their deficiencies. For example, the SAT and the ACT are divorced from students’ coursework. Administered to large groups of high school students, the connection between these standardized college admissions tests and an individual student’s formal sequence of studies is not easily recognizable.

Presently, there are many alternative high schools, charter schools, and proprietary schools that use alternative requirements for high school graduates. In doing so, they force higher education admissions administrators to base admissions decisions on factors other than an aggregate score, as on the SAT or the ACT. In today’s information age, new technological advancements are creating new resources for higher education. One of these is the electronic portfolio (e-portfolio).

E-portfolios offer education reform a significant means for advancement. Given the increased use of technology in the classroom, a predicament for higher education now exists: should e-portfolios be considered along with traditional measures such as SAT scores, grade point averages, and class rank in the higher education admissions process? If so, should admissions officers evaluate e-portfolios, or...
should the department of a student’s chosen major take on this responsibility?

Higher education soon will be unable to ignore either the changes in high school state graduation requirements or nontraditional schools’ use of e-portfolios as their preferred method for assessment. Some states, like Rhode Island, have mandated changes to their high school graduation requirements and now include the use of e-portfolios as part of the curriculum. In time, students will have built their e-portfolio from kindergarten through high school.

Should e-portfolios constitute an acceptable basis for higher education admissions decisions? Might a combination of traditional measures such as SAT scores, grade point averages, and class rank be used in conjunction with e-portfolios? Many questions need to be addressed, including: Can an e-portfolio be equated to a standardized test? How will e-portfolios be evaluated, and what weight will they carry in the admissions process? What is the measure for standardization of an e-portfolio, and how much time could admissions professionals take to evaluate e-portfolios?

E-portfolios could compliment the admissions process. They offer higher education holistic means for the evaluation of prospective students as they can be used to judge motivation and determination and to provide evidence of growth. With this additional level of information included in the admissions process, colleges can enhance their “fit” with prospective students and increase retention.

REFERENCES

About the Author
DEBRA A. COHEN, PH.D., is the Director of Academic Advising at Dean College. She received her doctorate in Educational Leadership in 2006 and is continuing to publish articles on her dissertation topic of E-portfolios. She has been in the field of higher education for more than fifteen years. She is a board member for the New England Transfer Association (NETA) and is an active member in AACRAO. Her long-term plans include writing a book regarding the use of E-portfolios for the admissions process in higher education.
Understanding the Business of Higher Education: Creating Context for Your Staff Development Plan

By Janet Ward

Editor’s note: A version of this article appeared in 2005 on the Web site of the Pacific Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (PACRAO) (Ward 2005).

Effective organizations strive to impart through staff development plans more than a set of specialized and departmental skills, or information tied to institutional policies and processes. This article expands traditional staff development plans to include encompass topics important to college presidents, administrations, and state legislatures—the role higher education plays within the society, the pillars that support the learning enterprise, and the business fundamentals for a healthy organization.

Each year new professionals enter our offices and begin developing a set of skills (e.g., leadership, management, systems, technology, processes, and policies) that support the overall operation or an enrollment management specialization (admissions, registration and records, financial aid, institutional research, orientation, academic advising, etc). Even as we develop experts within the various specializations on campus, we must provide a broader context for understanding the drivers of public policy and institutional decisions. This article addresses three questions:

What are the administrative pillars that support the learning enterprise?

What are the top ten factors that influence institutional decision makers?

When I entered higher education administration over twenty years ago, it never dawned on me to try to understand the connections between my daily tasks and role in the institution with how higher education benefits both society and individuals. The Institute for Higher Education Policy has provided information that clearly outlines the benefits to the society and the individual (see chart) and answers the first question.

Why is higher education valued? What are the benefits to society in general and to the individual in particular?

It is important to understand the two perspectives—societal and individual—outlined in Table 1, on page 54.

From the societal perspective, research has shown that higher education provides significant economic and societal benefits (see chart) as an educated public has a higher level of productivity and consumption, reduced crime rates, and less reliance on governmental financial support. Higher education moves society toward social cohesion.
and appreciation of diversity, increased charitable giving, and community, as well as improved adaptation to and use of technology. Together, these could be considered the return on investment made by state and federal governments through financial aid, improvements to physical structures, and the attraction and retention of qualified employees (faculty and staff). The critical policy question during budget planning is whether the return on the public’s tax dollars is reasonable and whether continued investment (or, more specifically, an increase in the level of investment) is warranted.

From the perspective of the individual, the critical question is whether the investment of time and financial resources to attend a higher education institution and complete a program of study will translate into personal benefits, including an improved quality of life. Research has shown repeatedly that individuals with college degrees enjoy improved economic and societal status. The higher the educational attainment, the higher the salary and benefits; the greater the savings; the better the work conditions and quality of life; and the greater the mobility.

In marketing our programs, we must understand our prospective students’ motivation for going to college: Is it to improve job skills for that next promotion? Is it for the chance to experience greater personal freedom by attending college in another state? Whatever the motivation, it is important when counseling prospective students to provide a balanced view: discuss the personal sacrifices that may be required, along with the personal benefits in lifetime earning power, increased personal and professional opportunities, and, in general, the improved quality of life that result from earning a degree.

**WHAT ARE THE PILLARS THAT SUPPORT THE LEARNING ENTERPRISE?**

Regardless of the type of institution, the core mission of higher education is learning—in the classroom, online, through internships, study abroad, or co-curricular activities (performing groups, athletics, student government, etc.). Support for academic leaders and faculty who are on the front line of the learning enterprise requires experts in other fields. Without the following “pillars” to support the learning enterprise, institutions would struggle to achieve their mission and vision:

- **Marketing and Communication:** These related efforts develop the brand and messages that will pique interest in the institution and establish the processes and systems to respond to inquiries. Marketing and communication support the entire university; resources are used to support the president, recruiting and admissions, alumni relations and development, and fundraising. Leadership of this effort varies according to the institution’s organizational structure but typically falls to a member of the president’s executive team.

- **Fundraising:** This is a primary revenue stream for most institutions and it provides a funding source that enables the institution to invest in its vision. Figure 1 on page 55 demonstrates the following primary components of fundraising:
  - **Mega-Gifts:** Once in a lifetime gifts
Planned or Major Gifts: May be cash, but more often consists of real estate, stock, or other appreciable assets.

Annual Fund: Unrestricted current giving. Alumni are typically greatest contributors.

Interspersed between “mega” and major gifts are contributions from foundations and corporations. Leadership for fundraising typically is provided by the president and the chief advancement officer.

Administration and Finance: Administration and finance provide leadership and management expertise to ensure that sound business practices are followed and that progress is made toward institutional goals (vision) while maintaining a balanced budget. Leadership typically is provided by the chief financial officer or the chief executive officer.

Facilities and Infrastructure: Facilities and infrastructure ensure that the buildings, grounds, and institutional infrastructures are maintained to effectively support the learning enterprise and administrative operations. The infrastructure includes information technology (e.g., computer network, telecommunications, hardware, software, etc.). Leadership typically is provided by the chief financial officer or the chief executive officer.

Enrollment Management (“recruiting satisfied graduates“): Enrollment management is a comprehensive planning and implementation process that maximizes resources to achieve enrollment and net revenue goals. Key principles focus on recruiting students who will benefit from an institution’s educational programs and retaining them until their educational goals are achieved. A comprehensive enrollment management approach includes academics, student life, residence life, admissions, financial aid, student accounts, registration and records, orientation, academic advising, and institutional research. Leadership typically is provided by the chief enrollment officer, provost, or chief executive officer.

WHEN THINKING OF HIGHER EDUCATION AS A BUSINESS, WHAT ARE THE TOP TEN FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE STRATEGIC DECISIONS ON CAMPUS?

A challenge most institutions face is campus units’ competing demands for resources to support existing or new institutional priorities. Typically, the following emerge as the top ten factors when campus administrators wrestle with decisions about where finite resources (funding or personnel) should be invested and/or redistributed to reflect campus priorities:

- Revenue Structures: This refers to all institutional revenue streams—tuition, fees, room and board, auxiliaries (e.g., bookstore, conference services), fundraising, etc. The key question for the administration is whether new revenue structures should be added or eliminated. New revenue structures could be associated with the addition of new programs which are designed to be self-sustaining, such as new graduate programs, continuing education, new satellite campus or online course offerings.

- Expenditure Structures: The largest expenditure is compensation; as a result, faculty and staff productivity is a key factor when aligning resources with institutional priorities. Other expenditure structures include maintenance and repairs, capital improvements, operational support (e.g., travel, printing, mailing, food service, etc.).
institutions that utilize tuition discounting, financial aid would be considered an expenditure structure (see discount rates, below).

- **Current Fund Revenue and Expenditures:** This refers to the institutional budget for the current fiscal year. The key questions revolve around monitoring of the net revenue goals for each revenue stream (net revenue = gross revenue - expenditures). Departmental budgets must be effectively managed if they are to be deficit free at the end of the fiscal year.

- **Institutional Selectivity and Yield:** Admissions and, to some extent, financial aid professionals have influence in this area. Selectivity depends on the institutional mission and admissions criteria. The higher the admissions standards (e.g., entering high school or transfer GPA, SAT/ACT scores, etc.), the more selective the institution. Yield is the conversion of new student admits to enrolled students. Financial aid strategy and award packages influence yield rates as students compare the “out-of-pocket” costs to attend various institutions.

- **Faculty Workload:** Institutions quantify the amount of time spent on teaching, research, and/or service activities for the institution and academic department (e.g., advising, committee work, etc.). As stated earlier, compensation is a critical expenditure structure, and faculty workload is one measure of productivity.

- **Discount Rates:** This is a measure used to determine what percentage of undergraduate gross tuition revenue is used to support institutional financial aid in the form of merit- and/or need-based aid. For example: An institution charges $18,000 annually for tuition; $5,400 of the gross revenue is used for institutional financial aid. The discount rate is 30 percent ($5,400 divided by $18,000 = 30 percent discount rate). The higher the discount rate, the more tuition revenue dollars are being used to fund student financial aid; dollars available for academic program or other institutional investments are thereby reduced.

- **Tenure Status:** This factor influences expenditure structures. Faculty with tenure status or rank annually

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receive a contract (fixed cost) while adjuncts are hired on a per class section basis. This is important on several levels: The greater the percentage of tenured faculty, the greater the continuity within the learning enterprise; this influences the overall quality of education at the institution. Further, the greater the percentage of instruction taught by adjuncts, the lower the fixed instructional cost and the greater the flexibility as instructors are hired to meet student class section demand.

Mission and Program Mix: Mission and program mix are unique to each institution. Together, they become a primary recruiting message for admissions and provide the foundation for fundraising strategy. It is important to note that enrollment leaders and staff possess the ability to influence program mix as they share with supervisors the new ideas or hopes expressed by students, parents, high school or college counselors, and business leaders. Most institutions are open to exploring new programs and/or new ways to deliver existing programs to better serve the local community.

Maintenance Backlog: While most of us have heard about deferred maintenance due to budget shortfalls, the administration has to make critical decisions when investments need to be made to update existing facilities. Prospective and current students expect the learning environment to be well-lighted, the grounds to be well-groomed, and the buildings to be comfortable and accessible.

Alumni Giving: Alumni giving constitutes an essential component for fundraising as programs focus on sustaining relationships between graduates and the institution.

In developing a comprehensive staff development plan, it is important to remember that employees benefit from learning the societal and individual benefits of higher education; the pillars which support the learning enterprise; and the factors which drive the administration’s business decisions. Within this context, employees should be able to better understand the institution’s mission and how their own role supports the educational enterprise. Enrollment leaders and staff who truly understand the value of higher education are better able to respond to the questions and concerns of legislators, parents, community leaders, and others.

REFERENCES


About the Author

JANET WARD is Associate Vice President for Information and Data Management at Seattle Pacific University (WA) and has 28 years of experience in higher education administration (at a private comprehensive university and a community college), with the past 13 years focused on enrollment management. Ward has been active in AACRAO and PACRAO since 1989 by serving in various leadership roles (including President of PACRAO) and as a presenter and author.
The story of the camel’s nose tells us that if we allow the camel to put its nose in the tent to stay warm on a cold night in the desert, inexorably the whole camel will come into the tent, and worse, we will find ourselves outside the tent and in the cold.

If we consider the University of West Virginia to be the tent of our metaphor, and its current president, Michael S. Garrison, to be the camel, it is not difficult to understand what has happened in this sad series of events, and, by larger implication, what is happening to the American college presidency.

For those unfamiliar with the story, Michael Garrison took office as president of West Virginia University on September 22, 2007. While Mr. Garrison had served in a role related to higher education as past chairman of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, he had very limited experience in preparation for the complexities and obligations of leading a major university in the 21st century. He had taught political science as an adjunct faculty member but his primary employment was as managing member of a Morgantown law firm, the position from which he served as a lobbyist. Previously, he served for two years as chief of staff for former West Virginia Governor Bob Wise. It seems clear that the search committee that chose Mr. Garrison followed what has become an increasingly well-worn path in today’s higher education environment; seeking a president with political connections in order to bring to the role of president fund raising abilities and public relations skills that would serve the institution in its competition for funds with other state agencies. In other words, Michael Garrison was chosen as an “external president” whose responsibilities were largely focused outside the institution, as opposed to a more traditional “internal president” whose focus was on the institution’s core mission of teaching, research and service. His being named a finalist in the search process resulted in charges that the search was rigged, that he was unqualified for the position, and the university’s Faculty Senate voted “no confidence” in the search and Mr. Garrison’s candidacy, all to no avail as Mr. Garrison was named to the presidency.

In October 2007, after Mr. Garrison assumed the WVU presidency, a woman named Heather M. Bresch was quoted in a newspaper article as having earned an M.B.A. from WVU. Ms. Bresch is the daughter of the current governor, a friend and classmate of Mr. Garrison, and an executive with the Mylan Corporation, a major corporate donor to WVU. As events unfolded, it turned out that Ms. Bresch never actually earned the M.B.A. When a discrepancy appeared in the records, university officials appear...
to have acted hastily first by reviewing Ms. Bresch’s credentials over a weekend, and then in deciding to grant her the degree based on their review. A panel charged with a review of the process and its conclusions stated:

“The panel believes that the prevailing sentiment at the meeting, evinced by the actions and comments of the Provost and the representatives of the president’s office, was that a way should be found to justify the granting of the degree, if at all possible. Either no dissenting or contrary views were expressed or they were discounted. Although the Provost asked all four B&E [Business and Economics] participants at the meeting directly whether they agreed with the final decision to award Ms. Bresch an MBA, the Panel believes that the actual or perceived pressure to go along with this decision, not to ‘rock the boat,’ was palpable.”

In the aftermath of this review both the provost and the dean of business and economics resigned their positions. However, the president initially refused to do so in spite of additional votes of “no confidence” by the faculty. Mr. Garrison seemed to believe he could weather the storm with assurances that such an error would not be repeated, while his supporters on the board repeated its confidence in him as president. Those assurances were clearly insufficient as derision rained down on President Garrison and the board from every quarter, including WVU alumni embarrassed by the affair and its attendant publicity. Finally, on June 6 Mr. Garrison announced his intention to leave the presidency of West Virginia University in September, but did not announce his specific plans in regard to the possibility of continued employment at WVU.

What is worth consideration in all of this is what it portends for the nature of the presidency in the coming years in American higher education. It seems clear that as the nature of the college presidency has changed over the past years, so too have the qualifications of those who wish to inhabit the office. While many institutions remain focused on academic leadership, generally arising from a distinguished career in academic life, including academic administration, more and more institutions appear to be willing to suspend that qualification in favor of the individual who can best represent the institution to its various constituencies, particularly those on which it depends for financial support. That translates largely to state legislatures and individuals and corporations that provide private financial support. In other words, the American college presidency looks more and more like a lobbyist in many instances.

In an article in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Paul Fain makes the following observation:

“West Virginia University is hardly the first institution to tap a politically connected leader from outside academia. Former-politicians-turned-presidents include David L. Boren at the University of Oklahoma, and Florida State University’s T.K. Wetherell. Both have received mostly positive reviews as college chiefs. A closer comparison with Mr. Garrison is Bruce Benson, who was named the sole finalist to be president of the University of Colorado in January. Mr. Benson never worked for a university. A former chairman of the state’s Republican Party who once ran for governor, he owns an oil-and-gas exploration company.”

As a member of the faculty of The University of Oklahoma, I can speak with authority to the overall positive review of David Boren’s presidency, and I would urge my colleagues in the academy not to allow the circumstances at WVU to lead to the conclusion that politicians-turned-presidents are inevitably inappropriate choices to lead universities. What seems to be critical is that the person being considered for a university presidency has an understanding and appreciation of the nature and culture of the institution, and does not assume that their corporate, legal, political or other experience can translate automatically to the role of university president. Part of what this means is an extremely difficult assessment; that the candidate is both sensitive and sympathetic to the unique nature of a university as an organization. This means an appreciation of the collegial nature of decision making, or, at a minimum, a willingness to move from a more vertical to a more horizontal decision making paradigm. In an ideal situation, the politician president has experience in higher education, understands and appreciates its idiosyncrasies, and, perhaps most important of all, knows what she does not know. If one comes from a political background, it may be that personal loyalty is the attribute one seeks most vigorously. In such an instance the give and take of competing ideas may not be appreciated or even tolerated. In such an instance, there is not likely to be a “goodness of fit” between the position and the individual. Of course, one might also argue that a good politician is one who sur-
rounds herself with those who can articulate and defend different perspectives, not only those who reflect the individual herself.

If, however, a candidate is not of the academy, and has little sympathy for its nature, a successful presidency may still be achieved if the individual does only those things for which he is prepared and in which he has an interest. For instance, a politician-turned-president who has no interest or knowledge in an issue such as the granting of tenure may be successful if he surrounds himself with an experienced and able academic vice president who is allowed to manage the academic issues without interference. This is perhaps asking too much of an individual in a position of power; to acknowledge her shortcomings and create an organization that addresses those shortcomings, but it is important to acknowledge it is at least possible.

The obvious problem arises when a person arrives at a university presidency without an understanding of, or sympathy for, the nature of the institution, its history, its decision making processes, and attempts to remake the institution in the image of his own experiences. This, effectively, amounts to telling the university community that he does not care for, or about, its uniqueness. We often hear the question asked, “Why can’t colleges and universities be run more like businesses?” a question that completely misses the point that colleges are not businesses and shouldn’t attempt to be. The creation and dissemination of knowledge are long-term goals that can’t be measured in quarterly profit statements, daily changes in the stock price or polling data related to elections.

So what can higher education learn from the unhappy events at WVU? Certainly that circumstance and others compel us to avoid generalizations of good or bad fit as a function only of professional background. What we must look for, as always, is the open mind that is sensitive to its surroundings and sympathetic to the institution’s mission. We must recognize that the nature of the college presidency is changing, but that does not mean that institutions must give up their traditional concerns for academic rigor and integrity in the pursuit of support from outside the institution. It is ultimately up to the faculty to insure that these matters are considered and weighted appropriately in the decision regarding a chief executive, or, if they are not, to make their discomfort known, as well as to articulate the reasons for that discomfort. If we are unable to do so, we will not need to worry about the camel as we will find the tent has been taken down without our knowledge.

About the Author

JEROME C. WEBER, PH.D., Regents’ Professor of Education and Human Relations, teaches in the graduate programs in Adult and Higher Education and Human Relations at The University of Oklahoma, where he has been an academic administrator and faculty member since 1964.
What’s the best way to share your ideas, innovations, and opinions with registrars, admissions officers, and enrollment managers nationwide? Contribute to AACRAO’s prestigious *College and University* quarterly journal.

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Triton College was founded in 1964 in River Grove, Illinois; Triton College district encompasses 63 square miles in the western suburbs of Chicago and includes approximately 320,000 residents and 25 communities. Triton College is known for its modern, attractive campus; the diversity of its career, university, and transfer and continuing education (non-credit) programs; and the quality of its faculty. The College’s low tuition and open admissions policy ensure that postsecondary education is accessible to more than 18,000 students each semester.

Triton’s average class size is 20.5 students; the average age of enrolled students is 30.4 years; the median salary of Triton graduates is $35,000; and more than 88 percent of the College’s graduates are employed within a year of graduation. Triton College has a diverse student body: 52 percent white, 27 percent Hispanic, 17 percent African American, and 4 percent Asian Pacific Islander. The College also enrolls a large population of English as a Second Language students, including many native Spanish and Polish speakers.

In 2005, the Enrollment Services division of Triton College restructured the purpose and function of the Admissions Telephone Center. The restructuring was the culmination of six months of process review and analysis of current and future service needs. In addition, conceptual and financial support was garnered through the College’s strategic plan process. Recognizing the need to connect our students and community with high-quality personalized services equally on campus and via telephone, we moved forward with the creation and implementation of what now is known as the Admissions Call Center.

The goals of the new unit are to:
- Serve as a centralized hub for campus information and resources;
- Be prepared and willing to direct students to the resources they need;
- Improve communication with prospective and current students;
- Reduce the number of misdirected telephone inquiries;
- Automate the delivery and timeliness of information in response to inquiries; and
- Provide person-to-person registration services.

The restructuring of this service unit was all-encompassing. Changes included upgrading staff positions by requiring attainment of at least an associate degree; preferring bilingual staff (Spanish or Polish and English); increasing the number of call center personnel in order to support increased service hours; and creation of a manager position...
to provide leadership for the new department. The Admissions Call Center would be the focal point of Triton College’s effort to improve communications with current and prospective students as well as to collect and process information in a different way.

While talent management was important to the success of the unit and required the greatest amount of time and resources, it soon became apparent that a new technology solution would need to be acquired to facilitate that success. A number of vendors were marketing “Customer Relationship Management” software to support the processing of client information. These turnkey solutions usually focused on the specific aspects of management they were designed to facilitate (e.g., sales, marketing, event management, project management, finance). Most also included a customer component, but none addressed either the unique needs of an educational environment or student issues and concerns.

In an effort to meet Triton College’s unique needs, the Enrollment Services and Programming Services areas partnered to develop a custom solution that now is known as the Communication Management System (CMS).

Several high-priority goals were identified as the specifications for this system were developed. The system had to be:

- easy to use;
- able to interface with the college database;
- web-based;
- expandable;
- inclusive of a reporting module.

The primary function of the CMS system is to provide automated support for front-line staff in the Admissions Call Center. The Admissions Call Center consists of approximately eight part-time and full-time staff members who serve as the first line of contact for current and prospective students. Prior to CMS, the Call Center had no automated means of recording and retrieving information that would assist in recruiting and tracking students through the enrollment process.

The system is divided into six modules: Student, Marketing, Inquiry, Contact, History, and Reporting. The Student module is the heart of the system. It provides a user-friendly interface that allows for quick updating and maintenance of current student records as well as entry of prospective student information.

The Marketing module provides valuable information regarding college recruiting correspondence that has been sent to prospective students. When communicating with a prospective student on the phone, Call Center staff can quickly assess what information has been sent to students and where they are in the decision-making process as it relates to attending classes at Triton College. Admissions Call Center staff then can follow up with more specific brochures and information regarding a particular program or curriculum.

If a current or prospective student has a question that Call Center staff cannot answer, the question is entered into the Inquiry module and is forwarded to an “expert.” Experts represent departments and specialty areas on campus as well as key faculty with whom students would
work. It is hoped that the Inquiry module will foster connections between faculty members and prospective students and ultimately will result in new enrollment for the College. Subsequent to submission of an inquiry, the expert receives e-mail notification of and a Web link to the inquiry. The system also has a tracking mechanism to ensure that open inquiries are brought to quick resolution, including referral to a second expert, if needed.

The Contact module was developed specifically for our College Relations Associates. This module provides Relations Associates a unique place to track and follow their own recruitment efforts, including dates, response codes, and methods of contact. Recruiters are able to monitor communication with prospective students on a day-to-day basis.

The History module provides a chronological record of all College contacts with the current or prospective student. This can be especially helpful if multiple contacts have been made by different staff.

Finally, the Reporting module includes the following yield reports:

- Yield by Call Center Operator
- Yields by Academic Interest
- Yields by Prospects with Multiple Contacts
- Yields by Advertising Interest

All of these reports can be run on demand, covering a variety of timeframes. The combination of reports allows us to organize and view the information in a number of different ways—for example, by the number of prospects contacted, the number of times contacted, the number of prospects who have applied, and the number of prospects who have enrolled. The Academic Interest Report further breaks down data by prospects’ area of interest, and provides student names and contact information in a spreadsheet format that can be shared with department chairs.

This solution fully supports our Admissions Call Center purpose: To connect with students while providing high-quality services. We routinely modify and enhance this technology tool. At present, we are working to expand the reports available in the Reporting module and to add a new module devoted to student retention.

About the Authors

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Using Relationship Marketing in College Student Recruitment

By Brian A. Vander Schee

College admissions counselors traditionally visit high schools, attend college fairs, give campus tours, and answer questions posed by prospective students and their families. In doing so, they build a relationship with prospective students that will extend to the institution and transfer (it is hoped) into lifetime institutional loyalty. Admissions counselors at small colleges in particular have the opportunity to utilize relationship marketing strategies to enhance customer loyalty. With training in relationship marketing strategies, they are equipped to implement a relationship marketing model.

The literature on applying relationship marketing to college student recruitment is limited. There is a clear gap in terms of studies which examine the implementation and outcomes of a relationship marketing model in higher education. The present study adds to the body of knowledge in the field by extending the work of Gyure and Arnold (2001) on training admissions staff on relationship marketing principles. This study goes beyond the work of previous researchers by including student recruitment and retention measures as well as student satisfaction with relationship marketing strategies and their principal mediators (i.e., those factors which lead to customer loyalty) to assess the effectiveness of relationship marketing efforts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea that marketing has a place in student recruitment has traditionally been received with skepticism by many in higher education (Litten 1980). However, as budgets tighten, resources become more limited, and competition for students intensifies, the adoption of marketing practices seems more acceptable. Certainly the admissions profession recognizes that marketing is essential to many colleges’ survival; admissions counselors have had to become experts on the subject (Kotler and Fox 1995).

Relationship Marketing Effectiveness

Relationship marketing, first defined as attracting, maintaining, and enhancing customer relationships, was introduced in the early 1980s (Berry 2002) but became more dominant in the 1990s (Sheth and Parvatiyar 2002). Current advancement and sophistication of relationship marketing is reflected in more recent definitions, which specify the linking of individual customers, employees, suppliers, and other partners with an organization for their mutual long-term benefit (Kerin, Hartley, and Rudelius 2007).

Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, and Evans (2006) suggest that the relationship marketing model is centered around the idea that relationship marketing strategies influence
Relationship mediators which determine relational outcomes. The most commonly sited relationship marketing outcome is customer loyalty (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler 2002). Mediators or factors which influence customer loyalty include commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994), trust (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol 2002), relationship satisfaction (Reynolds and Beatty 1999), and relationship quality (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles 1990).

Palmatier and colleagues (2006) further identify several strategies in the relationship marketing model which affect the level of performance of the mediators mentioned above. These include relationship benefits (Reynolds and Beatty 1999), seller expertise (Lagace, Dahlstrom, and Gassenheimer 1991), communication (Mohr, Fisher, and Nevin 1996), and interaction frequency (Doney and Cannon 1997).

The idea that relationship marketing is more effective when relationships are more critical to customers and when relationships are built with an individual person rather than a selling firm (Palmatier et al. 2006) is germane to higher education. This is particularly true when, in the hope of making a sale for the college, an individual admissions counselor strives to build a relationship with a prospective student. The institution stands to benefit from increased tuition revenue, and the student stands to benefit from the credential earned at graduation.

**Relationship Marketing in Higher Education**

Because higher education institutions face many of the same challenges as for-profit operations, the relationship marketing strategies used by these companies are a viable strategy for colleges and universities (Arnett, Wittmann, and Wilson 2003). Over a series of interactions, the student and institutional representative determine whether the potential exists for a good fit between the student and the institution. Viewing a student as a collaborative partner rather than as a customer acknowledges the complex, evolving nature of the relationship (Bay and Daniel 2001).

Many small colleges are heavily tuition-dependent institutions with moderately or minimally selective admissions criteria, limited resources, and strong religious affiliations. Because 90 percent or more of their operating expenses are funded by tuition revenue, they are forced to focus on marketing (Kotler and Fox 1995). And because these institutions represent approximately one-third of all four-year colleges and universities in the United States, the competition for students is fierce. The institutions must use relationship marketing in the admissions process to convince prospective students that they will experience a relationship with the college that larger institutions cannot match.

**College Admissions Counselors**

In 1952 the Committee for Professional Development of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers developed a training program that was approved at its annual meeting in Washington, DC. The successful admissions officer displays, it reported, “... an enthusiasm for completing tasks and an eagerness to undertake new ones,” with attention to “service above all other means of personal satisfaction” (Deering 1954). This early definition reflects current practice, according to which the provision of high-quality customer service is among the main responsibilities of college admissions counselors (Huddleston 2000).

Pressure recruiting can lead to short-term success and long-term dissatisfaction (Gyure and Arnold 2001). Thus, an important element in training new admissions counselors is to keep the focus on prospective students and their families. This emphasis on relationship marketing rather than transactional selling results in doing what is best for the student and the institution. It also requires assessment to determine whether the changes are having the desired enrollment outcomes.

**METHOD**

**Institutional Setting**

This study was conducted at a small, private, religiously affiliated college in the Southeast. Admissions counselors were trained in relationship marketing strategies before the recruitment year began. However, the term “relationship marketing” was never used in the training, which focused on interpersonal communication, role plays, and personal selling techniques. Each admissions counselor then was assigned to respond to prospective student inquiries and applicants on a rolling basis. This allowed each admissions counselor to work with the same group of prospective students throughout the year.
Measures

Measures for student recruitment and retention — namely, admissions yield and freshmen retention — were recorded for the year of implementation (Year 1) and for the year following implementation (Year 2). Admissions yield is defined as the percentage of new students who enrolled out of those who were accepted. Freshmen retention is defined as the percentage of first-semester full-time freshmen who persisted to the second-year fall semester out of the total number of first-semester, full-time freshmen enrolled in the first-year fall semester. The outcomes of the training were measured by changes in student recruitment and retention.

A survey was administered to newly matriculated students at the end of the fall orientation period, which immediately preceded the beginning of the fall semester in Year 2. The sample of 69 students who completed the survey represented 28 percent of the incoming freshman class. The survey asked students to respond to several statements pertaining to the matriculation process and their experience with their admissions counselor. Using a 7-point Likert scale, students assigned a level of importance to and indicated their level of agreement with each of the statements. Each statement corresponded to a relationship marketing strategy or mediator.

Survey responses were used as a basis for the questions posed to freshman students in four separate focus groups. Other questions regarding pre-enrollment processes and experiences were also included. The focus groups were led by a senior student at the institution and comprised five to seven freshmen each. Student volunteers were solicited via a request made in four sections of the required freshman seminar course. Transcriptions that recorded anonymous comments were provided to the researcher for further review. The effectiveness of relationship marketing strategies and mediators was measured by student survey responses and focus group comments.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the change in enrollment outcomes for measures in student recruitment and retention. Year 1 refers to the year during which training took place. The impact is reflected in Year 2, the year immediately following training. The average admissions yield over the eight years prior to Year 2 was 41.1 percent. The admissions yield of 54.3 percent in Year 2 was a record high for the institution and remained at this level the following year. Average freshman retention over the eight-year period prior to Year 2 was 64.3 percent. The 76.1 percent freshman retention rate reported in Year 2 was also a record high and remained at this level the following year.

The survey administered to new freshmen included eight items; four referred to relationship marketing strategies. The results for those items are shown in Table 2, on page 70.

The average student rating was between important—agree (6)—and very important—strongly agree (7)—for both their perceived level of importance and their level of agreement for each relationship marketing strategy item. Although there were no significant differences in the average level of importance and average level of agreement, respondents indicated that the seller expertise item was most important and the communication item was most effectively executed.

Four additional items referred to relationship marketing mediators. The results of those items are shown in Table 3, on page 70.

The average student rating was between important—agree (6) and very important—strongly agree (7) for both their perceived level of importance and their level of agreement with three of the relationship marketing outcomes. The item regarding commitment rated between neutral and somewhat important—somewhat agree — and was significantly lower on importance (p = 2.08E-14) and
agreement ($p = 1.77E-14$) at the .05 alpha level. Again, there were no significant differences in average level of importance and average level of agreement for each of the relationship marketing mediator items.

When asked how well their admissions counselor performed, focus group participants centered their comments around caring about each student as a person, extending the admissions counselor relationship to parents, and having all questions answered thoroughly or finding the answer and following through with responses. The following student comment was representative of the overall responses: “It made college less intimidating. She cared about me, not just about my college decision. She always answered my questions or found out the answers.” However, only 17 percent of the students represented in the focus groups mentioned their admissions counselor when asked about the most significant factor in their choosing to attend the institution. This suggests that other factors may have played a significant role.

**DISCUSSION**

Small colleges with limited resources have the advantage of demonstrating their personal touch through the work of admissions staff. Trained admissions counselors can extend the reach of individual attention to prospective students and their families. In for-profit industries, relational exchanges are commonly seen as resources that marketers can use to lead to long-term competitive advantages (Hunt, Lambe, and Wittmann 2002). The same can be said of colleges and universities which structure recruitment activities around the relationship marketing model.

It is clear from student enrollment measures as well as survey and focus group responses that significant improvements were made in both student recruitment and retention. The selection and training of admissions staff is vital in improving institutional enrollment and customer loyalty (student retention). Even though other factors may play a significant role in student college choice, the importance of prospective students’ relationship with the admissions counselor should not be understated. Mahoney (2001) suggests that the credibility of the admissions counselor decreases when families form a poor impression of admissions professionals who are unable to provide deeper insights into the nature and quality of the learning experiences at their institutions. This is supported by the finding that seller expertise was rated as the most important admissions counselor characteristic.
Students clearly indicated that relationship marketing strategies were important and were executed to their level of satisfaction. Because these strategies influence relationship marketing mediators, it makes sense to train admissions counselors to use them effectively. Students also indicated that three of the four relationship marketing mediators were important and, for the most part, that they also were executed to their level of satisfaction. This is understandable given that mediators are the natural outgrowths of relationship marketing strategies. Increasing the effectiveness of relationship marketing strategies leads to increased effectiveness of relationship marketing mediators, which leads ultimately to greater outcomes in student recruitment and retention.

The results do not clearly indicate whether the advances in enrollment measures are attributable solely to the implementation of relationship marketing strategies. In fact, focus group comments suggest that the influence of student finances may overshadow relationship marketing efforts. This might be particularly true of students who choose not to enroll.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of this study are significant, but additional factors should be considered when making direct application to the admissions office setting. The study was limited to admissions counselors at one institution. Thus, enrollment administrators may need to vary their approach to implementing relationship marketing strategies based on institutional characteristics, admissions staff, and available resources. The researcher did not seek feedback from students who chose not to enroll at the institution. Such information would be helpful in corroborating the results of matriculates. In other words, it is possible that the admissions counselors were not effective in forming relationships with those who did not enroll. It also is possible that other factors not related to the relationship marketing strategies utilized by the admissions counselors played a significant role in students’ decision to attend college elsewhere.

Capturing student persistence data beyond the first year of enrollment also would be beneficial. A longitudinal approach could focus on the long-term effectiveness of relationship marketing strategies, to include training of student services staff in other offices, such as financial aid and student accounts, as well as alumni and institutional development. It is hoped that future studies in other institutional settings will enhance the body of knowledge relating to higher education relationship marketing. The ultimate objective is to provide improved satisfaction for students and greater success in meeting enrollment goals for colleges and universities.

REFERENCES


**About the Author**

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Academic Turnarounds: Restoring Vitality to Challenged American Colleges and Universities

Edited by Terrence Mactaggart
Reviewed by Brian A. Vander Schee

Publicly funded institutions of higher education perform a service for many college students and their surrounding communities. At the same time, some claim that they are laden with bureaucracy, tightly controlled, and generally resistant to change. The challenges faced by state universities are balanced by the benefits of public funding, including the fact that employees are not left wondering whether shortfalls in student enrollment will lead to pay cuts or layoffs. Private institutions—particularly those lacking a significant endowment and an Ivy League reputation—do not have access to the same financial safety net. Academic Turnarounds: Restoring Vitality to Challenged American Colleges and Universities, edited by Terrence MacTaggart, addresses this very plight.

Although two public institutions are highlighted, most of the book deals with how struggling private institutions can stop negative cash flow and reverse the trend of desperately grasping for any minimally qualified student. MacTaggart, former chancellor of the University of Maine System, takes a logical and sequential approach to a growing problem faced by many American institutions of higher education. The case study method is well suited to providing practical guidelines for restoring financial and academic vitality.

The first four chapters outline the three stages common to academic transformations: restoring financial stability; marketing and branding; and strengthening academic programs and culture. MacTaggart uses the opening chapter to elaborate on these three stages by providing clear and accurate descriptions with examples of institutions in each stage. His definition of “marketing” in the context of higher education and his turnaround matrix regarding the roles of trustees, presidents, and faculty are illustrative of the practical approach of the entire book.

In Chapter 2 MacTaggart describes stage one turnarounds at Green Mountain College, Syracuse University, and Regis University. His insight regarding the inability of an incumbent president to lead an institution out of stage one is telling: New leadership is a must for colleges and universities on the brink of or heading toward financial collapse. MacTaggart cites the experiences of one institution in particular to illustrate the benefits of providing special training for supervisors who have to dismiss staff members. Yet this is also a source of criticism: The description of how faculty bought into a process that resulted
in professorial layoffs seems somewhat unrealistic. It is hard to believe that any group of faculty would be satisfied and would happen to move on after some (or many) of their teaching colleagues were let go. This is not to suggest that difficult personnel decisions can be avoided; rather, a more realistic synopsis may be that faculty are more willing to “buy in” when they are led to believe that certain things will happen with or without their consent. For the sake of public relations, they ultimately may acquiesce to the wishes of the college administration.

In Chapter 3, Jerry Berberet focuses on marketing and branding issues for institutions in stage two of an academic transformation. He considers comprehensive institutions that clearly are neither pure liberal arts colleges nor research universities. This brand limbo classification presents unique challenges for private institutions competing against lower-priced public universities with similar offerings. Berberet discusses successful transformations at North Central College, Drury University, and the University of the Redlands.

Adrian Tinsley addresses stage three, academic revitalization, in Chapter 4. After a two-year process in stages one and two, an institution can turn inward to address educational mission and institutional culture. Tinsley outlines success stories at the University of Denver, The College of New Jersey, and Northeastern University before tracing the institutions' different paths to success. It is interesting to note that The College of New Jersey is a public institution that is engaged in a transformation process similar to that undergone by many private colleges and universities. In an effort to reduce reliance on test scores as an indication of prospective students’ academic quality, the University of Denver invested in personal interviews as a determining factor in the admissions process. A potential concern for some readers is the author's citation of the U.S. News & World Report rankings as a benchmark for assessing progress and success at a time when many believe the rankings to be counterproductive and so do not participate in the surveys.
In Chapter 5, Michael Townsley examines finance in higher education and provides several tools to measure fiscal trends, viability, and future outlook. He goes into significant detail regarding the use of ratios in financial analysis to assess the fiscal health of an institution. One example is the Composite Financial Index (CFI) score, which can readily identify the institutional financial condition. This tool can be used as part of a financial strategy based on leadership, money, revised work flows, and revised policies and procedures. The focus of Chapter 6, penned by MacTaggart, is on public institutions such as the University of Connecticut. MacTaggart makes it clear that for-profit strategies do not work in higher education, and faculty at public universities in particular prefer the status quo. Although failing institutions (and institutions that already have failed) are never identified by name, their stories are outlined with sufficient clarity that the problems that went unaddressed or that were handled poorly can be identified easily.

Chapters 7 and 8, by Kenneth Shaw and MacTaggart, respectively, address the role of new presidents as well as of trustees, donors, and accreditors in an academic turnaround. The book’s practical approach carries into the concluding chapters, with advice for new presidents regarding what to do before taking over; just before the new job begins; and upon entering the office. Sage advice such as “build a climate of trust” is common.

Clearly written for the practitioner, Academic Turnarounds lacks the heavy focus on theory and complex language common to other works on this topic. Well researched and smartly presented, each chapter provides concise yet adequate description useful for making immediate practical application. Further, the book references a number of great resources for further study, including Michael T. Townsley’s The Small College Guide to Financial Health: Beating the Odds (NACUBO 2002); Robert Birnbaum’s Management Fads in Higher Education: Where They Come From; What They Do; Why They Fail (Jossey-Bass 2000); and Richard Morrill’s Strategic Leadership in Academic Affairs: Clarifying the Board’s Responsibilities (Association of Governing Boards 2002). Although the text is intended for presidents and trustees at failing institutions, anyone in a position of influence or who desires to have a greater understanding of how restoration can be achieved will find this book beneficial.

THE SEM IMPERATIVE:
TAKING ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT ONLINE

2007. EDITED BY CRAIG WESTMAN AND PENNY BOUMAN
AACRAO; 187 PP.
Reviewed by Brian A. Vander Schee

The books Millennials Go To College (Strauss and Howe 2003), Generation Me (Twenge 2007), and most recently Millennials Incorporated (Orrell 2007) were written to help identify the characteristics and behaviors of, and suitable institutional responses to, Millennials, the generational cohort currently in college. The benefit for enrollment managers in understanding how young people operate today is clear, but how to implement effective enrollment management strategies is less apparent. In their previous book, AACRAO’s Basic Guide to Enrollment Management (2005), editors Westman and Bouman focus on practical applications of enrollment management theory at one institution. In Gamers Go To College (2006), they describe a subpopulation of Millennials and the student perspective on higher education. Their latest book, The SEM Imperative: Taking Enrollment Management Online (2007), is similar to their first book in that most of the contributors are associated with Ferris State University. But the commentary is broadened by its emphasis on meeting the overall expectations of the Millennial generation.

The book is divided into three sections, with the first concentrating on strategic enrollment management approaches to social networks. The second section reflects on gaming as a form of communication, while the final chapters address communicating across generational lines. The chapters are concise and focused and therefore are easy and enjoyable to read. The focus on practical application and the integration of technology is engaging and useful. The insights and resources cited in the opening chapters in particular are instrumental for the enrollment manager or student recruiter.

The opening chapter, by James Maraviglia of California Polytechnic State University, chronicles the implementation of communication technology in student recruitment practices at his institution. He highlights the VIP page, a customized prospective student portal Web page, in particular. Sufficient implementation and results information is provided to make a compelling argument that becoming an early adopter of enrollment technology is worth the time and effort.
The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) welcomes you to the AACRAO EDGE, a web-based resource for international credentials evaluation. You and your staff will benefit from the knowledge provided by AACRAO’s team of experts on country educational systems. The database is populated by the most current educational information from over 80 countries. EDGE will be expanded until every educational system is included, and continuously updated thereafter. To ensure consistency, educational equivalents will follow the placement recommendations approved by the National Council on the Evaluation of Foreign Educational Credentials (CEC).

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Penny Bouman’s Chapter 2, about user-generated content, is well written and informative. She compares the design of her own institution’s Web site to what students can find online to demonstrate that students may find information about a college or university much more efficiently through other user-intuitive Web sources. Her descriptions of the use of wikis, blogs, videos, and social network sites are also helpful. She follows with Chapter 3, on customer service. Here she discusses the correlation between the customer experience and an organization’s brand. Customer experience management encompasses customer relationship management and citizen marketers. This is a daunting prospect for many institutions of higher education given the lack of control inherent in user-generated content. Bouman’s advice regarding doing a search on YouTube to see what videos are posted about your institution is both frightening and prudent. She asserts that although citizen marketers cannot be controlled per se, colleges and universities can choose to respond by getting engaged in the conversation.

Chapter 4, penned by Nancy Parter of Ball State University, offers practical advice based on her experience incorporating interactive experiences in the admissions process. Her finding that parents of prospective and admitted students read BSU student-generated blogs more frequently than do prospective and admitted students themselves is quite interesting. It also is refreshing to read her candid recollection of what worked well, in addition to what was not as successful.

The instructional approach of the first section of the book, on social networks, becomes more narrative as it transitions to gaming as a form of communication. In Chapter 5, Kristen Salomonson provides an overview of gamers and how they mirror the entire population in terms of diversity. Chapter 6, written by Mike King and Craig Westman, chronicles the history of video games, from the Magnavox Odyssey system introduced in 1971 to the highly popular Nintendo Wii system released last year. Chapters 7 and 8, written by Mike Allington and Jim Lindsey, respectively, describe more practical online applications by describing how LAN parties were conducted at Creighton and at Ferris State Universities.

In Chapter 9, Reinhold Hill challenges institutional administrators to consider the expectations of students and “gamer professors” as a result of their consumer experiences with efficient technologies. This is an interesting proposition: In the not too distant future, Millennial students will be Millennial professors. Therefore, investing in technology upgrades and modifying institutional systems will serve not only to meet the needs of current students but also the needs of future professors and administrators. This approach may carry more weight in campus discussions than arguments based solely on catering to the prospective student market.

Although it could be argued that Chapters 7 and 8 seem somewhat unrelated to the overall theme of the book, Chapter 10 stands out as a questionable fit. Though well written, its content is not germane to enrollment management and online applications. The editors seem to acknowledge this with their note describing Robert Quist’s chapter as “a unique look at the relevance of video games to academics, specifically the humanities, and the potential of adapting literary classics into video game format” (p. 83). Chapter 12 also strays somewhat from the purpose of the text: Don Green discusses the creation and continued development of the Digital Animation and Game Design major at Ferris State.

In Chapter 11, Ward Makielski encourages using classroom instruction that reaches students in a manner similar to what they have been accustomed to in their video game-playing experiences growing up. He suggests, “The gaming generation not only expects to gain their education through an entertaining and engaging format, but their performance (or lack of performance) demands it” (p. 93). Further, his observation that some students find interfacing through a computer to be preferable to communicating face to face is telling and provides reason to consider how technology can be used to better serve students based on their needs. At the same time, one can question whether the advice that educators embrace new technologies because they provide unique and innovative teaching opportunities to students of the gamer generation is sound. Although college students might find that approach more entertaining—or avoiding human contact in person more desirable—accommodating these preferences may not be best for developing critical thinking or effective social skills.

The final section of the book returns to a more instructional approach. In chapter 13, Daniel Burcham and Michael Cairns discuss how Millennials prefer to commu-
nicate. In light of these preferences, they consider staffing issues given that “admissions counselors are increasingly the spokespersons to both internal and external students” (p. 114). Chapters 14 and 15 chronicle the adoption of technology in the Registrar and Business Offices at Ferris State. Authors Joanne Gerst and David Engels include personal reflections that likely will resonate with most Boomer and Gen-Xers working in either setting.

In Chapter 16, Bruce Gilchrist discusses communicating with Millennials. His discussion of text messaging is informative, and his assertion that his university is reluctant to incorporate text messages in its communication strategy until text messaging becomes universally free through cell phone providers makes sense. He further presents an interesting dilemma—that is, when Millennials want “point and click” and their Boomer parents and nontraditional students want paper and pencil. A mixed approach, which considers the preferences of varied audiences, likely is the best option when deciding on communication mechanisms.

Sarah Jennings and Maria Schalk provide personal narratives in Chapter 17 regarding their experiences as professional Millennials working with Millennial students as well as Gen-Xer and Boomer colleagues. Their experiences highlight the need to use the preferred communication method of Millennials to engage them while at the same time finding ways to work effectively with constituents from various generations. In the final chapter, Penny Bouman, Troy Tissue, and Craig Westman assert that multi-channel marketing is essential. They go on to say that people create content about products and services whether companies like it or not. Their discussion provides sound advice on what to do, including being proactive in creating your own material. The return to practical suggestions in this chapter is reminiscent of their successful writings in the past. Appendix C, Text Messaging Abbreviations, is both enlightening and informative, particularly for Boomers and Gen-Xers who do not routinely use the texting feature of cell phones. Most readers likely know that the abbreviation FYI means for your information, but few may recognize FUBAR as meaning fouled [sic] up beyond all recognition.

Although anyone who works with college students will find the SEM Imperative: Taking Enrollment Management Online enjoyable, enrollment managers in particular will find the book informative and entertaining. The insights shared in the first and last sections of the text are especially helpful for those who have yet to adopt many of the technological innovations currently available and the communication mechanisms common to college students today. Doing a search on YouTube to see what is posted about your institution is a good start. To a Boomer just beginning to try to communicate effectively with Millennials, I say MTFBWU (may the force be with you), TSTB (the sooner, the better).

About the Author

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