

FORUM | Research in Brief

AACRAO Research: A Year in Review 2016

By Wendy Kilgore

2016 was again a productive year for AACRAO Research thanks to the active and ongoing participation of our membership. We completed eleven research projects this year, including eight 60-Second surveys and three comprehensive projects. The intent of the 60-Second surveys remains the same since its inception. They are intended to capture benchmarking practice snapshots of interest to our members and sometimes our sister organizations as well as occasionally measure members' interest in proposed AACRAO professional development opportunities or support of AACRAO's publications. Beginning May 2016, the frequency with which we deploy 60-Second surveys was reduced to every two months. The comprehensive projects seek to provide career profile information for key enrollment related positions as well as to provide an opportunity to take a deeper dive into topics. The topics are most often drawn from member inquiries or hot topics in higher education news (*e.g.*, "early" FAFSA). Below is the complete list of 2016 projects in chronological order.

- ◆ FERPA Training Practices—January 60-Second Survey
- ◆ Curriculum Management Practices—February 60-Second Survey
- ◆ Class Start Times and Lengths—March 60-Second Survey
- ◆ The Impact of Electronic Content Management (ECM) System Ownership on Student Records Management Practice—March 60-Second Survey

- ◆ New Student Registration and Orientation Practice—April 60-Second Survey
- ◆ Competency Based Education—May 60-Second Survey
- ◆ 2017–2018 FAFSA: Impact on Practice—July 60-Second Survey (U.S. only)
- ◆ Class Scheduling (aka Timetabling) Practices and Technology—September 60-Second Survey
- ◆ Dual Enrollment in the Context of Strategic Enrollment Management—November (U.S. only)
- ◆ Miscellany (practices)—November 60-Second Survey
- ◆ U.S. Chief Admissions Officer Career Profile Report—December (U.S. only)

These initiatives were designed to help meet our research goals:

- ◆ Contribute to a better understanding of the factors and conditions that impact higher education academic/enrollment services and ultimately student success
- ◆ Use the Research Advisory Board to engage the membership in determining the focus of the research.
- ◆ Develop new insights and information for our members to help them successfully lead their institutions in a continually evolving environment
- ◆ Maintain current partnerships and develop new partnerships with other organizations and associations who share common interests with AACRAO.

- ◆ Disseminating relevant, up-to-date research on student success to practitioners and institutional decision makers.

Our members continue to be highly engaged in our research efforts. On average, 745 institutions responded to our surveys last year. When we remove the U.S.-only surveys from the average, it increases to 846. These averages represent a one-response-per-institution or per practice. That is, some comprehensive institutions report both undergraduate and graduate practices when they differ, and as such, those institutions are counted twice in the average. In addition, we retained more than one response per institution when it was known that the respondents represented different academic departments within the institution with different practices. We also, more often than not, captured a representative¹ sample of degree granting U.S. post-secondary institutions based on 2014–2015 NCES data (n=4,627)².

As was noted in the 2015 research review, we regularly received more than one response per institution for the 60-Second surveys, and those responses almost never match. Although this is an imperfect methodology, when this occurred we chose the response that was the most complete and/or represented the response from the position most likely to be responsible for the topic in the survey. This determination was made based on the position title.

Included here is a summary of the key findings for the year for each project. All can be found in their entirety on the AACRAO research page: aacrao.org/resources/research.

FERPA Training Practices

The January 2016 AACRAO 60 Second Survey focused on institutional FERPA training practices and measuring the level of interest in an AACRAO-developed online FERPA training module.

Key Findings

- ◆ Almost three-quarters (72%) require FERPA training for all new hires who work with student records.

¹ Confidence level 95%, Margin of Error 5%

² See <nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_317.10.asp> "Degree-granting institutions grant associate or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs."

- ◆ Among those who do not require the training, many noted that the training is offered but not required. Others stated that those who work with student records are required to sign a form saying they understand FERPA but are not required to complete training.
- ◆ Faculty and others with access to student records are among those listed as not being required to complete FERPA training.
- ◆ One-third require FERPA refresher training on a regular and recurring basis.
- ◆ In-person training is the most common format.
- ◆ Twenty-six percent provide FERPA training to parents, and most of that training is offered in person.
- ◆ The registrar is, most often, the position primarily responsible for FERPA training.
- ◆ Almost all (95%) see value in a short online training course on FERPA, and half are interested in one developed by AACRAO.

FERPA Training Resources

AACRAO regularly updates its *AACRAO FERPA Quick Guide*, which is available to members and non-members through the AACRAO bookstore as well as other FERPA publications. Members also have access to sample FERPA brochures and training materials through the AACRAO portal, which can be accessed through our FERPA resources page (aacrao.org/resources/ferpa).

Curriculum Management Practices

The February 2016 AACRAO 60-Second Survey focused on undergraduate and graduate curriculum management practices. The results of this survey served to support the narrative in our AACRAO book "*Curriculum Management and the Role of the Registrar*."³

Key Findings

- ◆ Less than 10 percent have a "stand-alone" curriculum office (*i.e.*, an office that is a separate unit as compared to a function that is contained within another office or spread across multiple offices), and these offices typically employ 1–3 full-time-equivalent employees.

³ Available at <www4.aacrao.org/publications/catalog.php?item=0145>.

- ◆ For most of those who do not have a stand-alone curriculum office, Academic Affairs has primary responsibility for the function.
- ◆ About one-third reported offering between 25–74 different academic programs (majors, minors, certificates, specializations, graduate programs).
- ◆ Almost three-quarters use some type of technology to support the academic catalog.
- ◆ Most only allow program/degree changes to be made effective once per calendar year; less than half apply the same limitation to course changes.

- ◆ Just 12 percent offer classes that start between 7:00 a.m. and 7:59 a.m. and 2 percent before 7:00 a.m.
- ◆ Three-quarters have classes that start between 6:00 p.m. and 6:59 p.m., and 8 percent offer classes that start at 9:00 p.m. or later.
- ◆ At the graduate level, Saturday course offerings are more predominant than Sunday.

Class Start Times and Lengths

In response to the recent *Inside Higher Education* article⁴ about one institution's decision not to offer 8:00 a.m. courses, we developed this survey to capture a snapshot of in-person class start times and lengths at the undergraduate and graduate level and by calendar system (Appendix A). We were curious about the predominance, or lack thereof, of early morning, late night and weekend courses as well as institutional reasons for not offering early morning courses. Comprehensive institutions were able to submit one response for undergraduate practices and another for graduate practices if the practices differed.

Key Findings Undergraduate

- ◆ The vast majority (91%) still offer classes that start between 8:00 a.m. and 8:59 a.m.
- ◆ Almost one-quarter offer classes that start between 7:00 a.m. and 7:59 a.m., and 4 percent have classes that start before 7:00 a.m.
- ◆ More than three-quarters have classes that start between 6:00 p.m. and 6:59 p.m., and 12 percent offer classes that start at 9:00 p.m. or later.
- ◆ Some institutions offer the very early and very late classes on Saturdays and Sundays as well as weekdays.
- ◆ Fewer than one-in-five (17%) offer six-hour courses.

Key Findings Graduate

- ◆ Fewer than three-quarters (68%) offer classes that start between 8:00 a.m. and 8:59 a.m.

New Student Registration and Orientation

One of the well-attended sessions at the 2016 annual conference in Phoenix was entitled *All Aboard: Registration Models for First Semester Students*. The survey focused on two different practices: 1) self-registration and orientation practices for first-time, domestic, new and transfer undergraduate and graduate students, and 2) registration by the institution on behalf of first-time, domestic, new and transfer undergraduate and graduate students and the orientation practices for this population.

Key Findings Self-Registration

- ◆ There is a wide variety in self-registration and orientation practices.
- ◆ In the aggregate, slightly more than half let freshmen partially or completely self-register, and almost two-thirds allow new graduate students to do the same.
- ◆ Lower-division-only institutions are more likely to allow freshmen to self-register than other types of institutions.
- ◆ On the whole, almost three out of four require freshmen to meet with an advisor before registering.
- ◆ Slightly more than half require new graduate students to meet with an advisor before registering.
- ◆ In-person orientation is still required for more than half of the self-registering freshmen. This practice is slightly less common for lower-division-only institutions.

Key Findings Registration on Behalf of the Student

- ◆ On the whole, 12 percent of institutions saw an increase in yield by providing either complete or partial registration on behalf of the student prac-

⁴ See <www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/02/17/university-decides-eliminate-8-am-classes>.

tices instead of self-registration. The majority saw no change in yield (87%).

- ◆ Six out of ten either partially or completely register freshmen on behalf of the student. This is much less common for the undergraduate transfer population and slightly less common for graduate students.
- ◆ Almost three-quarters required in-person orientation for freshman who have been registered in-part or in-whole by the institution.
- ◆ Registrar staff and advisors are more likely than other areas to be responsible for completing the registration on behalf of the student.

Competency Based Education

AACRAO and NASPA recently completed a project funded by Lumina Foundation on comprehensive student records.⁵ As one part of that project, we sought to understand the landscape of competency-based education (CBE) and its relationship to credit hours (or Carnegie units). This has a direct impact on how student learning and achievement is represented on a student's record. This survey was designed to help us gain information on the frequency of CBE, generally, and how the paradigm of credit hours/Carnegie units limits or does not limit innovation in this area.

What is Competency-Based Education?

For the purpose of this survey, we used the following definition of CBE. "Competency-based education (CBE) is a flexible way for students to get credit for what they know, build on their knowledge and skills by learning more at their own pace, and earn high quality degrees, certificates, and other credentials that help them in their lives and careers. Students in these programs show what they know and how well they know it through multiple ways of evaluating learning."⁶

Key Findings

- ◆ A quarter offer CBE instruction.
- ◆ Of the three-quarters who do not offer CBE, 10 percent are planning to offer CBE in the next twelve months.

- ◆ Of those who do offer CBE, nine out of ten offer it at the undergraduate level for credit.
- ◆ Most who offer CBE convert CBE to credit hours for at least one purpose and the most reported reason is "institutional choice".

The 2017–2018 FAFSA: Impact on Practice

In 2016, incoming and current college students were able to file their FAFSA earlier than in years past, on October 1, 2016. In the past, students had to wait until January 1 to do so. In addition, applicants no longer need to estimate income and tax information and will be able to retrieve their data directly from the IRS, right from the first day the FAFSA is available. The purpose of this survey was to gather a snapshot of if and/or how this change will impact admissions processes and calendars and to gain a sense of any concerns institutions have around this change.

Although there are some international institutions who participate in the Federal Student Loan programs,⁷ most institutions that participate in the various Federal Student Aid programs, including loans, are in the United States. As such, we opted to send this survey only to AACRAO member institutions in the United States.

Key Findings

- ◆ Most (91%) who responded were aware of the change, and most (94%) also view the change as "good for students".
- ◆ Nearly seven out of ten (68%) indicate that the change will not impact the undergraduate admissions calendar.
- ◆ Almost all (94%) say that the change will not impact the graduate admissions calendar.
- ◆ For those who will make a change to their admissions calendar, most will move student outreach activities to an earlier date.
- ◆ Among those who had concerns regarding implementation, about three out of four were concerned about there being a lack of definitive Federal and/or State funding information available at the earlier date.

⁵ See <www.aacrao.org/resources/record>.

⁶ See <www.cbenetwork.org/competency-based-education/>.

⁷ See <studentaid.ed.gov/sa/prepare-for-college/choosing-schools/types/international#participating-schools>.

- ◆ Just slightly less than three out of four were concerned about their ability to package aid earlier and notify students earlier.

Class Scheduling (aka Timetabling) Practices and Technology

The September 2016 AACRAO 60-Second Survey focused on undergraduate and graduate class scheduling practices. Topics included staffing level; primary responsibility for data entry; importance of various factors in the scheduling process; process timeline; availability of year-long registration; enrollment thresholds; the use of technology for class scheduling and student schedule planning; and the expected return on investment associated with the technology.

One prevailing conclusion that can be gleaned from the results of this survey is that class scheduling practices vary: some scheduling services are centralized while others are not; half use assistive technology while half do not; and some have generous staff resources while others do not. The practice comments further elucidates the dissimilarities in practice. For example, one respondent described their practices as “medieval,” while another described them as “...pretty much just rolls over from year to year....”

Key Findings for Undergraduate and Graduate Class Scheduling Practices

- ◆ More than half of all respondents reported that the registrar’s office has primary responsibility for entering the class data into the student information system regardless of student level.
- ◆ At the undergraduate level, nine in ten regard faculty availability as an “important” or “very important” factor in the undergraduate class scheduling process, followed by time block popularity and the class schedule from the previous year.
- ◆ At the graduate and/or professional level, nine in ten also regard faculty availability as an “important” or “very important” factor in the class scheduling process, followed by student request/need and faculty preferences.
- ◆ While 40 percent report scheduling classes an academic term in advance, about a fifth schedule a full academic year in advance, and a further fifth report scheduling “less than one academic term in advance.”

- ◆ Just 6 percent of institutions in this sample let students register for a full academic year at once. An additional 18 percent allow students to view the full academic year schedule but not register.
- ◆ Half do not own a classroom/class scheduling solution.
- ◆ Almost two-thirds of institutions set a minimum class size threshold for a course to “run” compared to 8 percent who guarantee all courses will run regardless of enrollment.

Key Findings for Student Scheduling/Planning Technology

- ◆ There appears to be confusion in the field about the difference in technology used by a student to plan which courses he will take in future terms, compared to a degree audit system, and further differentiated from a student scheduling/planning solution. The latter was defined in this survey as the following: “Schedule planning solutions are used by students to create optimal class schedules by identifying preferred classes and blocking off unavailable time. The software instantly informs the student of all possible conflict-free schedule combinations available for immediate registration.”
- ◆ Twenty-eight percent of respondents reported their institution offers an online schedule planning tool for their students.
- ◆ About one-third of those who do not have a solution indicated that they seek to acquire one in the next twelve months.
- ◆ When asked about the expected return on investment for current owners, 90 percent of respondents hoped the schedule planning tool would improve the student experience, followed by improving timely student registration (68 percent) and improved time to degree (62 percent).
- ◆ While one-third of solution owners do not know the percentage of students using the product almost one-quarter report a very high usage rate (80% or above).

Miscellany

The November 2016 AACRAO 60-Second Survey consisted of a collection of mostly unrelated but important practice and/or policy questions assembled from member inquiries and other sources over the course over

several months. Topics included questions related to financial aid, admissions, curriculum and the registrar.

Key Findings

- ◆ More than half withhold official transcripts when a current or former student owes less than \$25.
- ◆ A third do not drop a student from a course (or courses) for non-payment.
- ◆ About a third allow a student to request separate transcripts by course level.
- ◆ The use of a “shadow first term” for undergraduate students is a rare practice; just 1 percent report using it.
- ◆ Less than 20 percent of undergraduate financial aid recipients are required to take a financial literacy class and less than 10 percent of graduate students have the same requirement.
- ◆ Almost three-quarters of undergraduate students are required to meet with an academic advisor at least once a year as compared to less than half of graduate students.
- ◆ Standardized test scores are the most commonly used course placement method for undergraduate students.
- ◆ Almost one in five institutions report that an undergraduate student must submit a request for his or her submitted transcript to be evaluated for course equivalencies, and a third of graduate students face the same requirement⁸.
- ◆ Less than half (40%) automatically re-evaluate an undergraduate student’s transfer credit when he/she changes majors, and less than a third do the same for graduate students.
- ◆ Among title IV granting institutions, 42 percent ask instructors to submit the last day of attendance (LDOA), and staff must follow-up manually with faculty until the date is submitted. Others have a process that forces the submission of the LDOA within the final grading process.
- ◆ Just 13 percent of institutions serving undergraduates post degrees automatically, and 11 percent do the same for graduate students.
- ◆ More than half do not charge a fee for graduation, and another third charge \$50 or more.
- ◆ In the aggregate, just one in five ask a student if he or she intends to re-enroll for the following term.

⁸ See Figure 7 for information about the limitations of the generalizability of this data.

When a student indicates he or she does not intend to re-enroll, 81 percent ask the student why he or she does not intend to re-enroll.

- ◆ Just 4 percent of undergraduate serving institutions reported assessing the computer literacy of incoming students.
- ◆ Almost one in five undergraduate serving institutions have a general education “information” or “digital literacy” requirement separate from the “critical thinking” requirement.
- ◆ Half capture final enrollment after drop-add.
- ◆ Almost 40 percent report the drop/add period for full-term courses is “through the end of the first full week of full-term courses”

ECM Ownership and Student Records Management Practices

Due to the composition of our membership, we chose to focus on the application of ECM (technology and practice) within the student services domain. For this comprehensive project, we sought to gain an understanding of how, and to what degree, the use of an ECM application impacts student records management practice efficiency.

Key Findings

- ◆ Most (71%) of institutions in this sample use at least one ECM; acquisition, implementation and operation cost is the biggest deterrent for those who do not have one.
- ◆ The majority view their processes as more efficient with the application of an ECM, and records management is easier.
- ◆ Fewer than one-in-five believe their ECM technology is being used to its full capacity, with the greatest roadblock to doing so being not having the time to learn and implement.
- ◆ Since most institutions do not use all of the advanced functionality offered in most ECMs, much of the available process efficiency improvement is untapped.
- ◆ In the student services arena, a vast majority of registration and records departments (90%) make use of an ECM (90%).
- ◆ Two-thirds feel “moderately successful” (as compared with “very successful” or “not successful”)

in their ECM use overall, regardless of how long the ECM had been in use.

- ◆ Most (73%) institutions have a records management policy and believe it to be up-to-date, easy to understand, and clear on which records should be retained permanently.
- ◆ Among those institutions that have a clearly identified official source for the student record (*e.g.*, paper, student information system [SIS], ECM), less than half identify the institution's SIS as the source of the official record.
- ◆ Some institutions appear either not to understand the importance of managing the entire student records lifecycle from creation to *final disposition* or to accept the cost and security implications associated with keeping *all* records permanently.

- ◆ is between 35 and 49 years old
- ◆ has held current position fewer than five years
- ◆ spent most of her career in higher education
- ◆ has a master's degree
- ◆ has more than 20 years of experience in higher education
- ◆ reports to the Vice President of Enrollment Management
- ◆ has five or more direct reports
- ◆ is generally satisfied in her position
- ◆ has worked at more than one institution
- ◆ views skill in communication and enrollment management as most important for the position
- ◆ spends the most work time on enrollment management
- ◆ believes that finding time to get things done is the most challenging aspect of the position

2016 U.S. Admissions Director Career Profile

This report on the career profile of chief admissions officers completed the AACRAO career profile series. The purpose of the report was to build a foundation of understanding of the career profile and position responsibilities for chief admissions officers in the United States. The National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC) partnered with AACRAO on this project, and this partnership roughly doubled the number of respondents.

In addition to responding to closed-ended questions, more than 100 also voluntarily provided “words of wisdom” (first-hand comments, observations, opinions and advice) based on their experience in the position. From those words of wisdom, it is clear that the chief admissions officer position is complex, requires a keen understanding of data, exists in an ever-changing environment, is often personally rewarding, requires the ability to maintain positive working relationships throughout the institution, and has its challenges in today's competitive enrollment environment. Also of note, for some institutions, the position of chief admissions officer and chief enrollment management officer are one in the same.

From the participants, we have concluded that a chief admissions officer in the United States likely:

- ◆ is slightly more likely to identify as female than male
- ◆ identifies as white

Dual Enrollment in the Context of Strategic Enrollment Management: An Insight Into Practice at U.S. Institutions

When we learned that there were no plans to repeat the 2013 Institute for Education Sciences (IES) “First Look” report on dual enrollment options at postsecondary institutions in the United States, we decided to repeat most of the content in that study. We elected to build our study based on the IES survey because we want to understand if and how the dual enrollment landscape has changed in the United States over the last several years.

Different institutions have different names for DE, such as “dual credit,” “concurrent enrollment,” or “joint enrollment.” For the purpose of this project, DE referred to the following:

- ◆ Any course or program offered for high school students to earn college credit through a postsecondary institution.
- ◆ Credit for courses or the program may be earned at both the high school and college level simultaneously or only at the college level.
- ◆ Credit may be earned immediately upon completion of individual courses, upon completion of the program, or upon enrollment at your institution after high school graduation.

- ◆ Courses and programs may be taught on a college campus, on a high school campus, at some other location, or through distance education.
- ◆ International Baccalaureate (IB) program and Advanced Placement (AP) courses are considered to be part of the DE portfolio for some institutions, because it is another avenue for high school students to earn college credit, so we included a few questions about these options.

Key Findings

- ◆ Dual enrollment is widely available and accepted at higher education institutions in the United States. During the 2015–16 academic year, most (78%) institutions in this sample offered dual enrollment options.
- ◆ Eighty-six percent accept dual enrollment credit in transfer.
- ◆ Lower division only, and/or large and/or public institutions are more likely to offer dual enrollment programs and courses than institutions with other characteristics.
- ◆ Private institutions are less likely than public institutions to accept dual enrollment credit in transfer.
- ◆ Dual enrollment serves multiple purposes for many institutions. For more than seventy-five percent of the respondents, dual enrollment serves as a recruiting tool. Slightly less than three-quarters selected “helping meet the mission of the institution,” and/or as a “community service mechanism.”
- ◆ Fifty-nine percent have incorporated dual enrollment as a strategic enrollment initiative.
- ◆ Nine out of ten “agree” or “strongly agree” that dual enrollment courses improve access to college courses.
- ◆ The percentage of institutions awarding certificates and associate’s degrees to high school students has increased since the IES study.
- ◆ One-quarter of participating institutions awarded at least one associate’s degree to high school students during the 2015–16 academic year.
- ◆ Fifty-eight percent discounted tuition for dual enrollment, and two-thirds of those do so by more than 50 percent.
- ◆ Among those that do not offer dual enrollment, institutional culture is the most cited reason for not doing so.
- ◆ Nearly all (93%) accept AP and/or IB credits.

About the Author

Wendy Kilgore is Director of Research at AACRAO with more than 20 years of experience as a higher education administrator and consultant in the United States and Canada. She brings expertise in recruitment, admissions, financial aid, academic advisement, curriculum support, registration, records management, veterans’ education services, technology, organizational restructuring, student-centric business practice development, policy development and managing comprehensive collaboration to support enrollment efforts. Prior to joining AACRAO full-time in 2009, Dr. Kilgore served as state dean of enrollment services for the Colorado Community College system, and the director of admissions and registrar for the Pima County Community College district. Her professional and consulting experience spans a wide array of institutions, including large public universities, small private colleges, small private faith based colleges, private for-profit institutions, technical colleges, a large two-year multi-campus community college district, and a state community college system.

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