AACRAO

2024 SUMMARY OF U.S. REGISTRAR SURVEY AACRAO CAREER PROFILE SERIES

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Foreword

Reflecting on this fourth AACRAO Registrar Career Profile report, I'm struck by how far we've come since our first survey in 2015. The evolution of the registrar's role from a primarily administrative function to a strategic cornerstone of institutional success has been remarkable to witness. Data reaffirm what I've long believed–a registrar's role is central to learner success and institutional effectiveness. As keepers of academic records and keystones in academic operations, registrars are uniquely positioned to drive positive change at their institutions.

In conversations with registrars around the United States, I've heard countless stories of adaptation, innovation and resilience. These experiences are captured in survey responses and personal reflections in this report and paint a vivid picture of a profession in the midst of transformation. I am moved by the personal stories and reminded of the passion and dedication that define the profession. More than any statistic, these narratives illustrate the impact registrars have on learner lives and institutional success.

I'm also aware of the work that lies ahead. The persistent lack of diversity in the registrar's position remains a concern, and I'm committed to expanding our efforts to create more inclusive pathways into the profession. Our ASCEND program is a step in the right direction, but we must do more.

As we look to the future, I'm excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. This report serves as a valuable resource for those navigating careers in this dynamic field. It offers insights into the skills, experiences and qualities that define successful registrars today and will help shape the profession as we move forward.

I'm deeply grateful to all who contributed to this report. Your willingness to share your experiences and insights makes this work possible and helps strengthen our professional community.

Melanie Gottlieb
Executive Director
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Summary

Like previous reports in this series (in 2015, 2018 and 2021), this report provides insights into the career paths, responsibilities and job satisfaction of registrars across the United States. It serves as a benchmark for trends in the field and offers guidance to those aspiring to become registrars or seeking to advance their careers in this dynamic profession.

The data in this profile confirms and builds upon previous reports. The profession's turnover rate, coupled with the broad scope of responsibilities, underscores the need for continuous professional development and upskilling. AACRAO's competency-and-proficiency framework is more relevant than ever; AACRAO remains committed to refining and developing resources that address the evolving needs of the profession.

Today's registrar operates at the intersection of academic and administrative policy. With a comprehensive view of the learner journey, registrars are uniquely positioned to help institutions understand themselves and their learners. This report gives insight into how registrars are meeting these challenges and opportunities.

The personal reflections shared highlight the creativity, problem-solving skills and learner-centric approach that define the modern registrar's role.

Special thanks go to the hundreds of registrars who responded to the 2024 survey. Your contributions have allowed AACRAO to offer detailed insights into registrars' evolving roles, career progressions and functions.

The 2024 survey explored various dimensions of the registrar position, including:

- career pathways leading to current registrar roles
- prospective career advancements
- current scope of responsibilities
- key skills and challenges associated with the role
- job-satisfaction levels
- demographic profiles
- advice for aspiring registrars

Core Insights

Survey results depict the registrar's role in higher education in the United States and outline the challenges, responsibilities and aspirations associated with this position. Responses led to several core insights about the role and position of registrars, including the following.

Career Trajectory and Mobility: While 21% of registrars aspire to chief enrollment management positions, only 4% of current chief enrollment officers have a registration/records background. This discrepancy identifies a potential gap in career-progression pathways. The field also appears poised for significant turnover, with 34% of registrars planning to change roles or retire within the next three years. Five percent stated they plan to retire within the next 12 months.

Demographic Shift: Age data from all four reports in this series suggest an emerging trend of younger professionals entering registrar positions. If the trend continues, it could signal changing dynamics in the field and bring new perspectives to leadership roles.

Skill Development and Adaptation: The role of a registrar is evolving, requiring a balance between traditional recordkeeping responsibilities and new technological and administrative demands. An increasing emphasis on skills in data analysis, strategic planning and technology management reflects the changing nature of the profession.

Institutional Positioning: Registrars typically report to high-level administrators within academic affairs or enrollment-management divisions. This positioning underscores the strategic importance of the registrar's role within institutions and a registrar's impact on overall organizational effectiveness.

Work-Life Balance and Job Satisfaction: Work-life balance and fair compensation emerge as top priorities for job satisfaction among registrars. Many work over 40 hours a week; some exceed 50 hours. However, more than 75% of registrars can work remotely, some or all of the time, offering more flexibility than previously recorded in other survey instruments.

Professional-Development Needs: There appears to be a gap between registrars' aspirations for chief-enrollment-management roles and the actual transition rate to these positions. This suggests a need for targeted professional development and clearer career-pathing strategies within the field.

Diversity Considerations: Despite shifts in age demographics, overall diversity in the registrar role remains relatively unchanged. This stagnation indicates a need for initiatives to increase representation in the role and create more inclusive pathways into the profession.

Institutional Knowledge and Experience: Most registrars have extensive experience in their roles, often 20+ years in higher education. This depth of experience emphasizes the value of institutional knowledge in effectively navigating the complexities of the position.

These insights highlight the evolving nature of a registrar's role, the challenges and opportunities in career progression and the importance of strategic positioning and skill development.

Approach to the Survey

Position titles served as the primary selection criterion for identifying AACRAO members at institutions in the United States who serve as institution-wide or college/school registrars. To ensure accuracy, the survey began with a question confirming each participant's role as a registrar.

Response options have been continually refined through the survey series. Insights gleaned from responses in previous surveys have enhanced the clarity and relevance of questions. This

2024 report includes select data from all four surveys and offers a comprehensive view of trends over time.

While some data from multiple years are presented, response percentages may not definitively reflect trends. The lack of definitive trend indication is due to respondent pools and institutional samples varying with each survey iteration. Readers are encouraged to consider the varying sample compositions when interpreting longitudinal data presented in this report.

Note about data. In the interest of brevity, data are presented in the aggregate in this report. If you are interested in seeing institutional characteristics, such as size, type and control, this information is available for examination. Please contact Wendy Kilgore (wendyk@aacrao.org) for further information.

Characteristics of Current Position

This report is based on a sample of 682 U.S. registrars,[1] including 85% who serve as institution-wide registrars. The other 15% serve as college or school registrars within a comprehensive institution. Sixty-four percent of respondents are responsible for undergraduate and graduate/professional learners, followed by undergraduate learners only (25%) and graduate and/or professional learners only (12%).[2] Other characteristics of this sample include the following:

- 6% are part of the institution's executive leadership team
- 68% have a reporting relationship with the faculty senate or equivalent faculty governing body. Among the 68%,
    - 85% have an informal relationship, and 10% of those have a voting right within the faculty senate
    - 15% have a formal reporting relationship, and of those, 49% have a voting right within the faculty senate

On par with previous survey results, 61% of registrar positions in 2024 require a master's degree. Doctorates are necessary for 1% of these roles, while 36% require at least a bachelor's degree. Two percent have no specified minimum-education requirement.

The registrar-position title varies. Below are the top three groupings of titles by common terms, ranked from most to least used in this sample. Appendix A contains the full list.

1. Registrar (n = 453)
    - Registrar
    - College Registrar
    - Campus Registrar

[1] This survey sample is representative of the population of Title IV degree-granting institutions in the United States.

[2] Rounding may result in totals ranging from 99% to 101% throughout the report.

- Law Registrar
- School Registrar
- University Registrar
- Interim University Registrar

2. Assistant/Associate Vice President (n = 39)
    - Assistant Vice President and University Registrar
    - Associate Vice President and University Registrar
    - Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management and University Registrar
    - Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and College Registrar

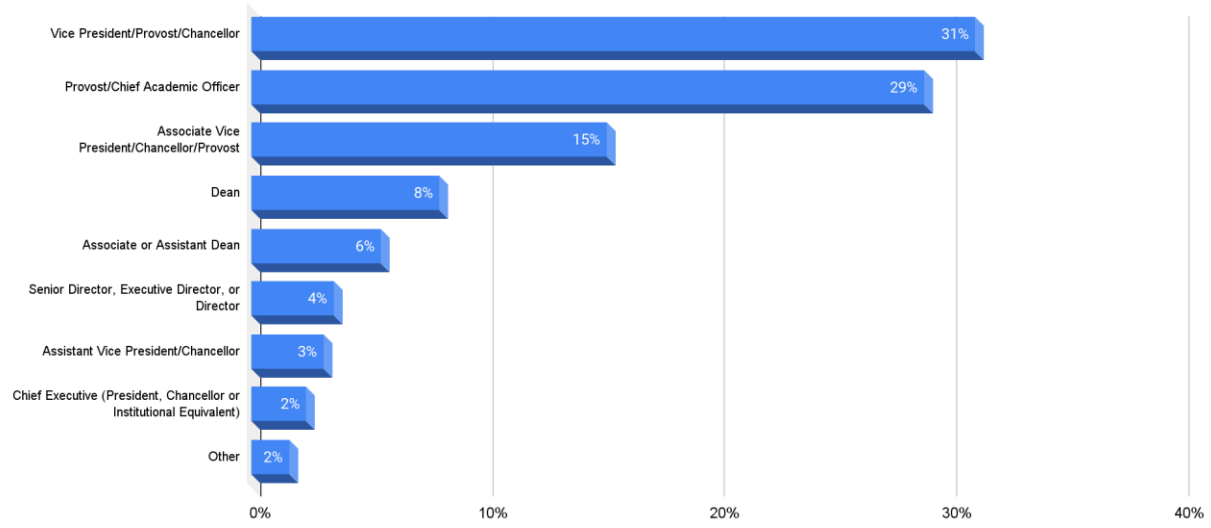
3. Director (n = 26)
    - Director of Academic Records and Registrar
    - Director of Admissions and Registrar
    - Director of Enrollment Services/Registrar

Organizational Structure

This section examines a registrar's organizational placement and role in institutional governance. The survey inquired about a registrar's reporting structure and divisional placement within an institution. Data show consistent reporting structures over time; most registrars are supervised by high-level administrators and positioned within academic affairs or enrollment-management divisions.

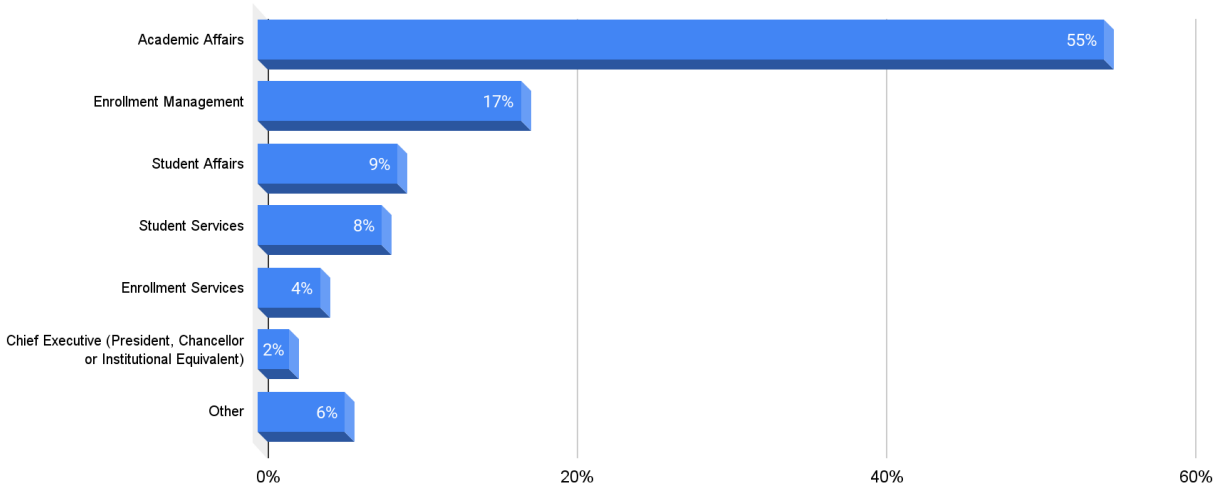
A vice president/provost/chancellor or a provost/chief academic officer supervises more than 50% of the respondents. Figure 1. The distribution of immediate supervisors for the registrar position has not changed meaningfully since 2015.

Figure 1: Immediate supervisor for the registrar position



At more than 50% of the institutions in this sample, the position resides in the academic affairs division, followed by enrollment management. Figure 2.

Figure 2: Institutional Division Housing the Registrar's Position



Institutional Governance and Decision Making

New insights into governance/decision-making models reveal an institutional preference for distributed or consultative decision making. Registrars are actively engaged in this process as part of policy making, particularly in academic and registration processes. However, there are mixed perceptions about how effectively a registrar's role is configured to support engagement in institutional governance, suggesting potential areas for improvement at some institutions.

The survey included three governance/decision-making model definitions. Below are the definitions and the percentages selected by respondents.

- 43% of institutions use a *distributed decision-making* model. Decisions are made by discrete groups responsible for specific issues. Faculty have a right to make decisions in certain areas, and the administration and board have the right to do so in other areas.
- 36% of institutions use a *consultative decision-making* model. A more communicative model in which the faculty's opinion and advice are sought, but authority remains with the senior administration and the board of trustees. Although many individuals and groups are brought into the decision-making process, the model revolves around information sharing and discussion rather than joint decision making.
- 17% of institutions use a *fully collaborative decision-making* model. A traditional approach, sometimes called a *collegial model,* of governance. Faculty and administration make decisions jointly, and consensus is the goal.

The remaining 4% of respondents indicated that none of these models represented their institution.

Ninety-seven percent of registrars are engaged in governance/decision making at their institution. From 13 response choices, respondents were asked to select the top five functions that engage them most frequently in their institution's governance/decision-making process. The top five are:

- 87% academic policy and process
- 86% course-registration policy and process
- 62% academic-program content/degree requirements
- 55% curriculum-management policy
- 45% data analysis and reporting in support of governance/decision making

Responses were mixed when asked about the effectiveness of the registrar's role in institutional governance/decision making. While 44% of respondents believe their role to be accurately or very accurately configured to support effective engagement in these processes, 56% indicated their role was only slightly accurate or not accurate. There may be room for improvement in how some institutions structure the registrar's role to facilitate their involvement in governance and decision making.

Experience

The survey queried registrars about the duration of their careers in higher education. It included questions on:

- their prior positions
- the number of institutions at which they have worked
- whether they have switched institutional types, control or size
- if their current role is their first in higher education

Time in Current Position

Responses suggest registrars have position tenures similar to chief-enrollment-management officers. Nearly half have been in their current position for less than five years. In contrast in 2015, 34% of registrars indicated they had been in their position for less than five years.

Data indicate 2024 respondents have been in their positions as follows:

- 48% for 5 years or less
- 24% for 5 to 10 years
- 13% for 10 to 15 years
- 7% for 15 to 20 years
- 8% for 20 years or more

Time in Higher Education

Seventy-six percent of registrars' professional experience has been entirely in higher education. Some note in their essays (included in Appendix C) that they started as student workers in the

registrar's office and continued from there. Sixteen percent have moved in and out of higher education throughout their career, and 7% report this is their first position in higher education.

The career track varies considerably among the 7% whose current registrar position is their first in higher education. Previous professional experience includes:

- customer-service roles (retail, hospitality, restaurants)
- administrative positions (office manager, clerk, coordinator)
- education sector (K-12 teaching, school administration)
- military service
- private sector/corporate roles (manufacturing, software companies, automotive industry)
- government and nonprofit organizations
- legal and paralegal work
- healthcare-related positions
- management roles in various industries
- technology and data-related jobs (systems analyst, software development)
- financial-sector roles
- social services and mental health

Given the seniority of the registrar role and the tendency for appointees to come from within higher education it is not unexpected that, 81% of respondents have 15 or more years of experience in higher education. The respondents' years of experience in higher education are detailed as follows:

- 35% have 25+ years
- 25% have 20 to 25 years
- 21% have 15 to 20 years
- 12% have 10 to 15 years
- 6% have 5 to 10 years
- 1% have less than 5 years

Career Path Leading to Current Role

The career path to the registrar position is closely tied to previous experience in a registrar's office.

- 53% of registrars were hired into their current role from another position *within the same institution;* of those, 55% of them came from a position within the registrar's office at that institution
- 31% assumed their current registrar role after serving as registrar at another institution
- An additional 16% came *from another* institution but were not the registrar at that institution; of those, 46% came from a position with the registrar's office at another institution
- 1% came from a position outside higher education
- 1% came from a position in a higher-education-related organization

As noted, among those new to the position, the predominant path to the registrar position is from another position in a registrar's office at the same institution or another institution. Those

who have assumed the registrar's role from another role at an institution come from the following functional areas:

- advising
- academic affairs
- admissions and/or recruitment
- student services
- enrollment services
- enrollment management
- financial aid
- student affairs
- institutional research
- faculty
- information technology
- executive leadership support
- strategic operations (strategic initiatives, grant management)
- specialized programs (adult education, athletics administration)
- administrative services (analysis, planning and budget, assessment, institutional research)

Institutional Mobility

Data reveal a trend of moderate mobility among registrars. Twenty-nine percent have worked at just one institution, 22% at two institutions, 20% at three, 15% at four and 14% at five or more institutions. For comparison, 65% of chief-enrollment-management officers have worked at three or more institutions.

To gauge additional facets of career mobility among registrars *who have worked at more than one institution*, three survey questions focused on the differences in institutional characteristics (size, type, control). Results indicate registrars tend to be mobile between institutions of varying characteristics:

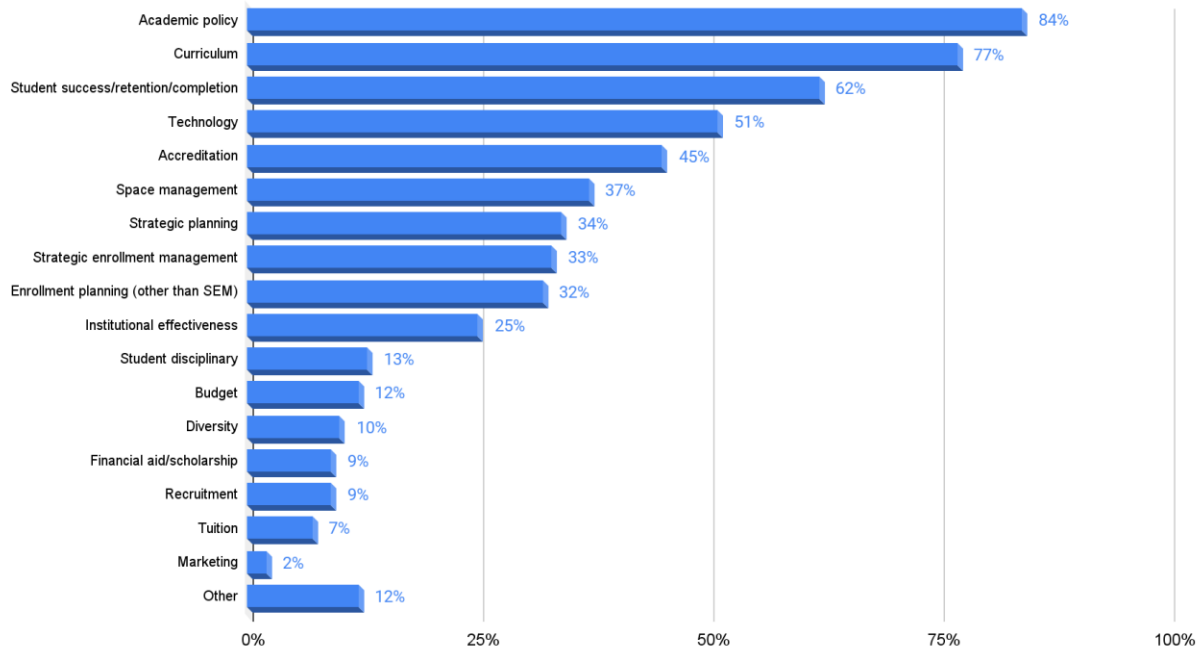
- 89% have worked at an institutional type different than their current institution
- 88% have worked at an institution with a different control than their current institution
- 97% have worked at an institution of a different size than their current institution

Portfolio of Responsibilities

Registrars have diverse and broad responsibilities, encompassing committee work and day-to-day operational duties. Data present an overview of a typical registrar's role, highlighting the breadth of involvement across various institutional functions. Data also reveal the multifaceted nature of the position, ranging from academic-record management and policy implementation to student success initiatives and institutional reporting.

Questions were included about a registrar’s portfolio of responsibilities and committee work. Figure 3 summarizes regular and recurring committee responsibilities.

Figure 3: Regular and recurring committee responsibility



Twelve percent reported having additional recurring committee responsibilities that were not listed as response choices. The full list of other committees is included in Appendix B. Areas of responsibility include:

- academic affairs
- student services and support
- data management and governance
- compliance and risk management
- administrative and operational
- enrollment management
- financial aid
- special programs
- technology and privacy
- assessment and accreditation
- campus life and events
- international education

Table 1 presents a portfolio of responsibilities typical to the registrar position. Each column category was defined as follows.

- **Responsible:** I perform this myself. I do not delegate the activity or responsibility.
- **Supervise:** I have responsibility, but I have delegated the performance of this activity, and I supervise it.
- **Participate:** I neither delegate nor supervise this activity,but influence decisions related to that function.
- **Inform:** I have no authority or responsibility for this activity, but inform others about this function.
- **N/A:** none of the above

Table 1: Portfolio of Responsibilities

	Responsible	Supervise	Participate	Inform	N/A
Academic-calendar development	52%	16%	23%	6%	3%
Academic-records management	49%	49%	1%	0%	0%
Ad-hoc reporting and research	28%	25%	36%	5%	6%
Admissions	2%	5%	17%	34%	42%
Advising	3%	10%	35%	38%	14%
Athletic-eligibility certification	11%	31%	11%	9%	37%
Budget development	40%	5%	22%	14%	18%
Class-schedule development	14%	51%	19%	8%	9%
Classroom scheduling	15%	55%	9%	7%	14%
Commencement/graduation ceremony	26%	28%	32%	9%	6%
Credential-audit and completion processing	28%	57%	7%	4%	5%
Curriculum management	18%	33%	35%	9%	5%
Degree/credential-audit maintenance (coding)	34%	56%	6%	2%	3%
Early academic alert	7%	11%	27%	24%	31%
Enrollment reporting/research	29%	23%	29%	11%	8%
Facilities/activities scheduling	2%	17%	17%	24%	40%
FERPA compliance and training	68%	19%	10%	3%	1%
Institutional accreditation	6%	3%	62%	19%	10%
IPEDS and/or other external reporting	12%	8%	29%	27%	23%
New-student recruitment	0%	3%	16%	28%	54%
Noncredit-classes management	7%	15%	17%	13%	47%

	Responsible	Supervise	Participate	Inform	N/A
Nondegree admission	6%	24%	14%	17%	40%
Program accreditation	3%	2%	48%	29%	19%
Readmit processing	10%	30%	26%	16%	18%
Residency determination	12%	23%	9%	9%	47%
Student-information-system management and development	38%	20%	34%	4%	2%
Student success	8%	11%	56%	17%	8%
Student-learning-outcomes assessment	2%	2%	21%	27%	48%
Transcript processing	14%	76%	4%	2%	3%
Transfer-credit evaluation	14%	64%	9%	6%	8%
Tuition and fees	1%	2%	14%	31%	52%
Veterans'-education certification and reporting	10%	30%	13%	19%	28%

Workload

The registrar role involves significant time commitments and responsibilities across academic operations and personnel management. Key findings on workload include:

- 76% of registrars report working 41 or more hours a week
- 7% report working more than 55 hours a week (the maximum number of hours was 75, with a mean of 59 and a standard deviation of 5)
- 10% travel for work outside professional conferences and other professional development activities
- 51% of them travel 10 business days or less per year

The daily-meeting schedule for registrars is usually more manageable than the schedule of a chief enrollment management officer. The number of daily calendared meetings, not including ad hoc meetings, were reported as follows:

- 21% have one meeting
- 27% have two meetings
- 25% have three
- 16% have four
- 7% have five
- 5% have more than five

Supervisory Responsibilities

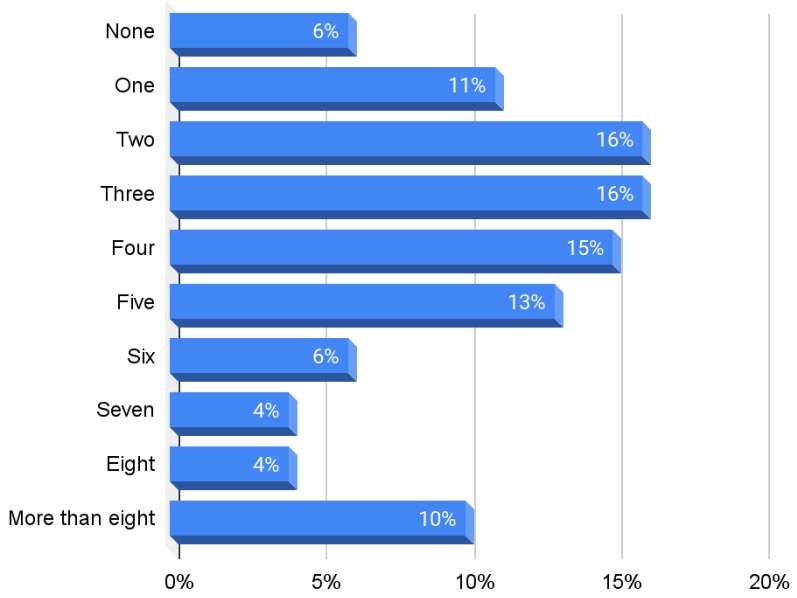
The size of a registrar's team varies significantly and is influenced by institutional size and the registrar's position within the organizational hierarchy. For example, the combined position of a vice president of enrollment management and registrar typically oversees a larger staff than a campus or school registrar. In this sample, the number of staff under a registrar's span of responsibility ranged from a maximum of 220 to an average of 11, with a standard deviation of 14.

Regarding direct reports (employees for whom the registrar is responsible for performance evaluations and who report to no other person), the survey revealed:

- 6% of registrars have no direct reports
- 84% have 1 to 8 direct reports
- 10% supervise more than 8 employees

Among those with more than 8 direct reports, the maximum number reported was 22, with a mean of 9 and a standard deviation of 4. Figure 4.

Figure 4: Number of direct-report employees



Remote Work

A new question in the 2024 survey asked about the ability to work remotely. Responses indicate a wide range of arrangements, from no remote work allowed to fully flexible options. Many registrars report having some degree of flexibility, but the amount varies greatly depending on institutional needs, personal circumstances and the time of year.

Surprisingly, 78% of registrars can work remotely some or all of the time, although the percentage varies.

- 47% work remotely less than 25% of the time
- 24% work remotely 25% to 49% of the time
- 5% work remotely 50% to 74% of the time
- 4% work remotely 75% to 99% of the time
- 4% work remotely 100% of the time
- 16% report the percentage of time they can work remotely varies

Among the 16% who can work remotely for various amounts of time, the main factors influencing the percentage of time a registrar can work remotely include:

- institutional policies and supervisor approval
- time of year (academic year vs. summer/breaks)
- workload and deadlines
- in-person meeting schedules and campus events
- personal preference (some choose to work on-site more often)
- weather conditions or emergencies
- health and family-related needs
- ad hoc or situational flexibility
- office-coverage requirements
- nature of specific tasks (some can't be performed remotely)
- disability accommodations
- construction or facility-related issues
- travel for conferences or other work-related events

Responsibilities, Skills, Challenges and Time Demands

As noted earlier, a registrar's role is complex and essential to institutional operations, balancing traditional recordkeeping responsibilities with evolving technological and administrative demands. Key responsibilities include maintaining academic records, ensuring policy compliance and managing significant academic events. The position requires a diverse skill set, with communication, leadership and problem-solving abilities of greatest importance. Technological proficiency and collaborative decision making are also important. Table 2.

Table 2. Top 5 roles & responsibilities, skills & attributes for a registrar position		
Rank	**Roles & responsibilities**	**Skills & attributes**
First	Recordkeeping and data stewardship	Communication
Second	Monitoring adherence to academic policy	Problem solving
Third	Graduation, commencement and academic events	Leadership and management
Fourth	Effective and efficient student service	Technological knowledge
Fifth	Systems management Curriculum management/delivery (tie)	Collaborative decision making and consensus building

Registrars face significant time-management challenges, particularly in keeping pace with changing policies and regulations. Their most time-consuming tasks revolve around academic policy processes, degree audits and class-registration oversight. Budget constraints and personnel management add to the role's complexity. Managing technology challenges and time-consuming tasks underscores the increasing importance of technological competence. A modern registrar must be a versatile professional adept at balancing administrative duties, technological advancements and interpersonal skills to serve learners and the institution effectively while navigating a rapidly changing educational landscape. Table 3.

Table 3: Top 5 challenges and time-consuming aspects of a registrar position		
Rank	**Challenges**	**Most time-consuming aspects of the position**
First	Time to get things done	Academic policy and process
Second	Keeping up with changing policies and regulations	Degree/credential audit/completion certification
Third	Budget limitations	Class-registration oversight and administration
Fourth	Personnel management	Managing technology
Fifth	Keeping up with technology	Managing people

Job Satisfaction and Factors for Retention

Respondents were asked to react to descriptive statements about their registrar experience. The statements focused on factors for retaining registrars in their positions and other aspects of job satisfaction. These data are summarized by theme below.

Keys to Registrar Retention: Fair compensation is the most important factor in retaining registrars in 2024. This is followed closely by a work-life balance. Appreciation, increased responsibility/enlarged professional portfolio and access to professional-development opportunities are also important.

Overall Job Satisfaction: More than 50% of registrars express satisfaction with their current position. Of all respondents, 57% selected “describes me very well” or “describes me extremely well” when asked their level of agreement with “I am satisfied with my current position.” Thirty percent chose “describes me moderately well,” 10% selected “describes me slightly well” and 3% opted for “does not describe me.”

Recognition of Skills: A majority of registrars believe their professional and personal skills are appreciated at their institution; 78% chose “always” or “most of the time” as their level of agreement with “My professional and personal skills are appreciated at my institution.”

Autonomy in the Role: Eighty-two percent of registrars agree they have considerable freedom in their job.

Support for Professional Development: Eighty-one percent of registrars feel supported in their professional-development activities.

Pressure to Perform: Seventy-two percent of registrars feel constant or frequent pressure.

Career Aspirations, Preparation and Challenges

Respondents were asked about their next career move; 82% have a plan. Among those who have a plan,

- 38% intend to stay in their current position for the foreseeable future
- 23% intend to retire from their current position
- 6% intend to stay at their current institution but seek a different position
- 5% intend to seek a different position at a different institution
- 5% intend to seek another registrar position at a different institution
- 5% intend to seek a different position at a different institution
- 3% intend to seek a position outside of higher education
- 2% intend to seek a position outside of an institution but still in higher education

Of those who seek a position other than that of registrar in higher education as their next career move, 44% intend to pursue a different administrative position. Positions sought fall into the following categories:

- enrollment management, but not the chief-enrollment-management officer
- academic-affairs leadership
- student-services leadership

Among the 44% who intend to pursue a different position, 21% intend to seek a chief-enrollment-management position. However, as noted earlier, only 4% of current chief-enrollment officers report coming from a registration-and-records background. Eight percent will seek the chief academic officer position, 3% will pursue a faculty position, and
24% are undecided.

Of those seeking to change roles or to retire, 29% plan to do so in 1 to 3 years and 5% in less than one year.

Preparation for Next Career Move

Survey responses reveal a diverse range of approaches registrars are taking to prepare for their next career moves, reflecting the varied career paths and aspirations within the profession. Based on responses to "What, if anything, are you doing to prepare for your next career move?" below is an analysis of how current registrars are preparing for their next career move. Responses are organized by common themes.

Continued Education and Professional Development: Many respondents are focusing on furthering their education, such as pursuing doctoral degrees (Ed.D., Ph.D.), completing master's programs or acquiring specific certifications. Some are also engaging in professional-development programs, attending conferences and participating in leadership academies.

Networking and Relationship Building: Many registrars are actively building professional networks and establishing relationships within and outside their current institutions. This includes connecting with colleagues, participating in professional organizations like AACRAO, and seeking a mentor.

Gaining Diverse Experience: Some respondents are broadening their experience by taking on additional responsibilities or projects outside their traditional registrar role, such as involvement in enrollment management, academic affairs or institution-wide initiatives.

Leadership and Strategic Planning: Respondents are focusing on honing leadership skills and strategic-planning abilities. This includes participating in leadership-development programs, taking on more advanced responsibilities and seeking opportunities to lead major initiatives at their institutions.

Technology and Data Skills Enhancement: Several registrars mentioned improving their technological competencies, including learning data analytics, SQL, project management and staying current with new student information systems.

Retirement Preparation: Some respondents indicated their next career move will be retirement. These individuals are focusing on financial planning, succession planning and documenting processes for their successors.

Career Exploration and Job Searching: Some registrars are actively exploring new opportunities by reviewing job postings, updating their resumes and even applying for positions. Others are researching options outside higher education or considering consulting roles.

Skill Diversification: Many are working to expand their skill sets beyond traditional registrar functions, including areas such as enrollment management, financial aid and student-success initiatives.

Personal Branding and Visibility: Some are focusing on increasing their professional visibility through presenting at conferences, publishing articles and building their personal brand within the higher-education community.

Maintaining Current Role Effectiveness: Some registrars emphasized the importance of excelling in their current positions, viewing this as the best preparation for future opportunities.

No Specific Preparation: Others indicated they are not actively preparing for a next move, either due to satisfaction with their current role or recent attainment of their current position.

Challenges to Making Their Next Career Move

In addition to inquiring about career preparation, the survey asked registrars to identify challenges they anticipate in achieving their next career goal, including those planning for retirement. While a few respondents reported no perceived challenges, most who answered this question highlighted one or more specific obstacles they expect to face. Responses provide insight into the complexities registrars navigate as they consider their professional futures.

Career Advancement and Perception: Several registrars noted challenges related to career advancement, including the perception of the registrar role as limited, the need for more diverse experience and difficulties in transitioning to higher leadership positions without faculty experience.

Work-Life Balance and Time Management: A significant number of respondents mentioned struggling to balance current job demands with professional development and personal life, particularly when pursuing further education or new skills.

Financial Constraints: Financial challenges, including the cost of further education, concerns about retirement savings and the need for competitive salaries in future positions, were commonly cited.

Institutional and Industry Challenges: Some respondents highlighted challenges related to institutional politics, budget constraints and the changing landscape of higher education, including the impact of technology and AI.

Age and Experience-Related Concerns: Both younger and older professionals cited age-related challenges. Younger registrars mentioned needing more experience, while older ones expressed concerns about ageism in the job market.

Geographical and Personal Constraints: Several respondents noted geographical limitations or personal/family commitments as barriers to career advancement, particularly when relocation may be necessary.

Transitioning Out of Higher Education: For those considering careers outside higher education, articulating transferable skills and understanding how to market themselves in different sectors was a common challenge.

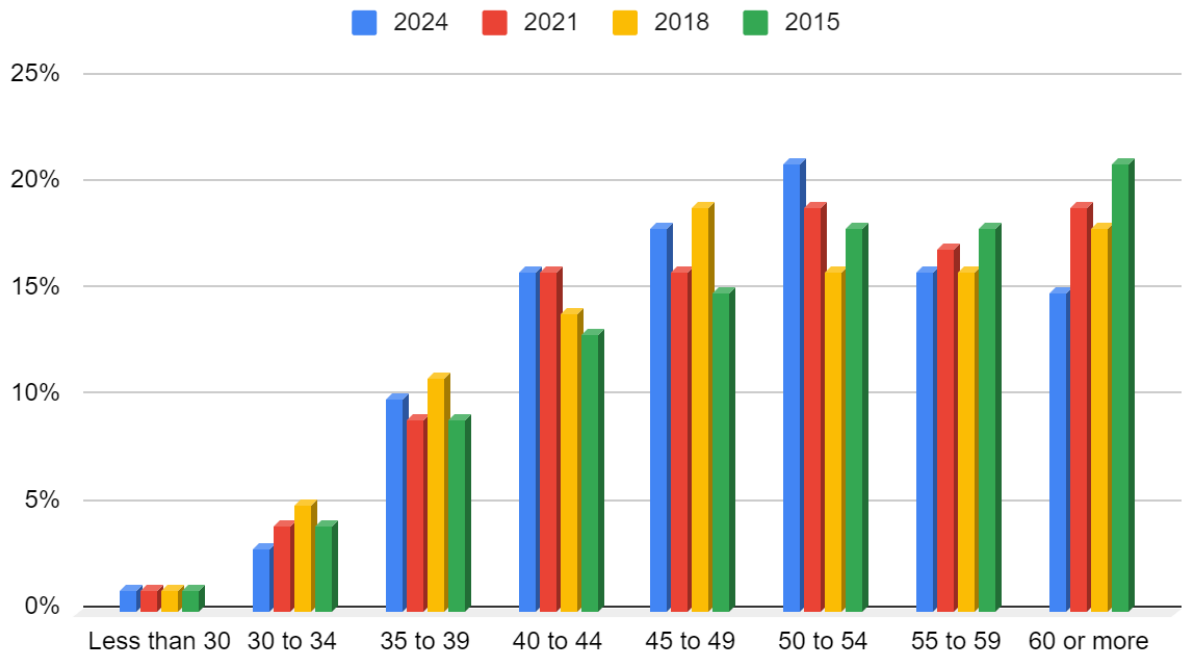
Succession Planning and Institutional Impact: Others, particularly those nearing retirement, expressed concerns about preparing their offices and institutions for their departure, including training successors and documenting processes.

Confidence and Personal Development: Some respondents cited personal challenges, such as building confidence, improving public-speaking skills and overcoming fear of change.

Demographics

Age data since 2015 appears to show a possible emerging trend toward younger people in the registrar's position. Figure 5.

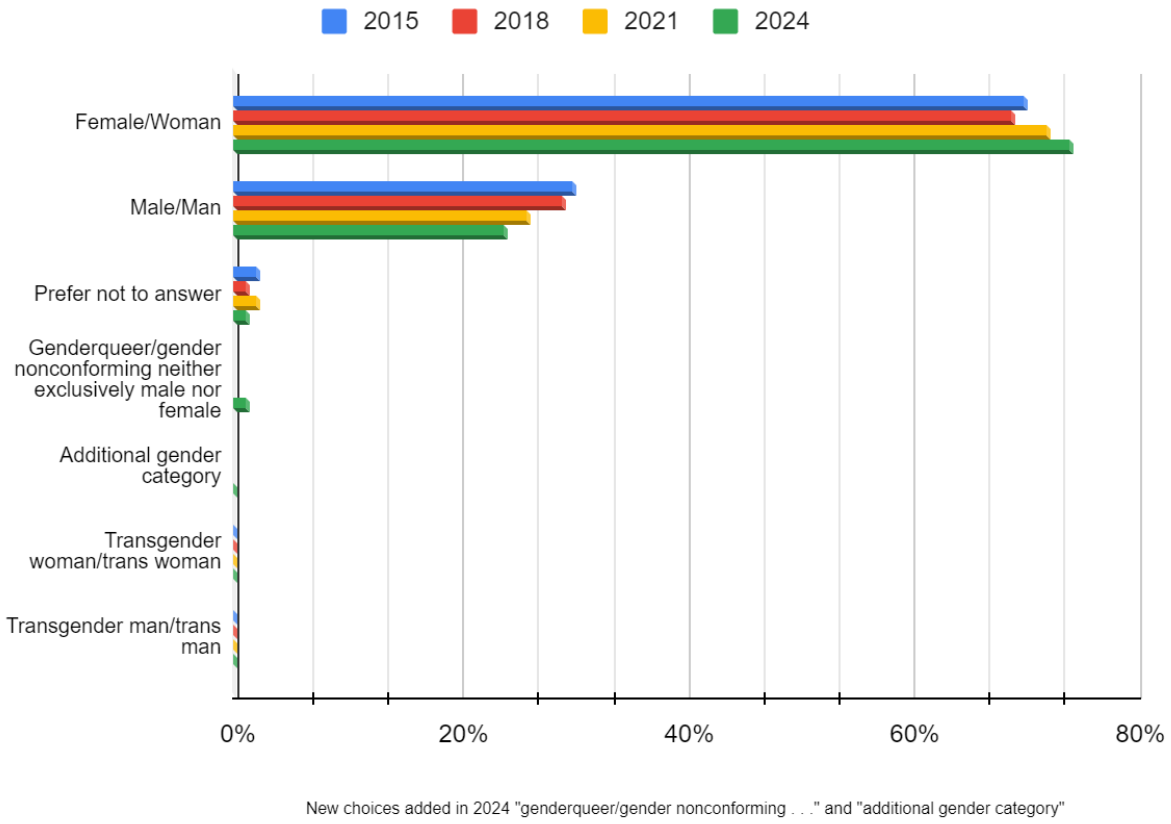
Figure 5: Age of respondents 2015, 2018, 2021 and 2024



When examining diversity in the registrar role, the data reveal no significant changes since 2015 in participation rates based on race, ethnicity or gender, despite the turnover rate in these positions. Gender-identity response choices were updated for the 2024 survey. Figure 6.

Figure 6: Gender identity 2015, 2018, 2021 and 2024

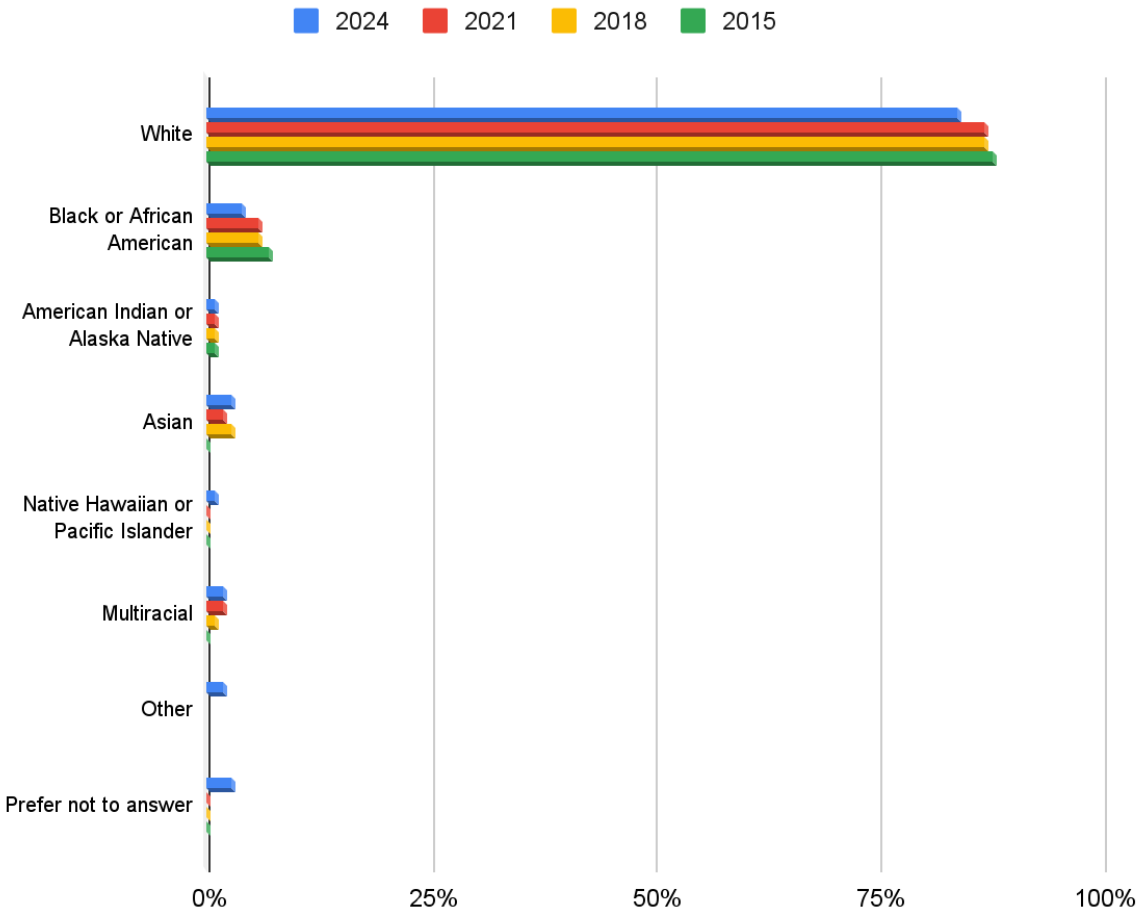
(Response choices are adapted from U.S.CDC guidance for SO/GI survey questions).



New choices added in 2024 "genderqueer/gender nonconforming . . ." and "additional gender category"

Self-reported race data have remained largely consistent across all four cohorts. Figure 7. In the 2024 data, 4% of respondents identify as Hispanic or Latino, consistent with the previous surveys.

Figure 7: Race responses 2015, 2018, 2021, and 2024



Words of Wisdom

Drawing from years of experience, 143 seasoned registrars contributed their words of wisdom, offering a unique window into the profession that benefits current and aspiring practitioners. Analysis of the responses reveals a wealth of practical advice and diverse perspectives on the multifaceted nature of a registrar's role and the array of skills needed for success in this dynamic field.

The areas outlined below highlight key themes and specific guidance that emerged from the words of wisdom.

Professional Growth and Networking

- engage in continuous learning and professional development
- build relationships across campus
- build relationships with other registrars
- participate in professional organizations, such as AACRAO
- seek mentorship
- consider becoming a mentor

Adaptability and Innovation

- embrace change and technological advancements
- be open to new ideas and approaches
- continually seek ways to improve processes and efficiency

Leadership and Management

- develop strong leadership and project-management skills
- empower and support staff
- balance attention to detail with big-picture thinking
- foster a positive office culture

Communication and Collaboration

- build strong relationships across the institution
- develop excellent communication skills
- collaborate with other departments and stakeholders
- be a problem solver
- be solution-oriented

Technical Skills and Knowledge

- master the institution's student-information system
- stay current with technology trends in higher education
- develop data analysis and reporting skills

Learner-Centric Approach

- keep learner success at the forefront of decision making
- maintain a service-oriented mindset
- understand the impact of your work on learners' lives

Policy and Compliance

- develop a deep understanding of academic policies and regulations
- be informed about changing regulations and compliance requirements
- be prepared to interpret and enforce policies fairly

Work-Life Balance and Self-Care

- prioritize personal well-being and work-life balance
- develop resilience and stress-management skills
- take time for yourself and your team

Integrity and Ethics

- maintain high ethical standards
- be transparent and fair in decision making
- uphold the integrity of academic records and processes

Strategic Thinking

- understand the registrar's role in the broader context of the institution
- contribute to strategic planning and decision making
- think long-term
- consider the impact of decisions on all stakeholders

Career Development

- be open to new opportunities and challenges
- consider pathways beyond the registrar's role
- continually develop transferable skills

Institutional Knowledge

- learn about all aspects of the institution
- understand the interconnectedness of various departments
- develop a broad perspective on higher education

Beyond the survey responses, over a dozen registrars contributed personal essays exploring 'A Day in the Life of a Registrar,' 'What I Wish I Knew Before Becoming a Registrar,' and 'My Path to the Registrar.' Found in Appendix C, these detailed accounts complement the quantitative data by showing the daily realities of the role, sharing candid reflections on professional preparation, and describing varied routes into the profession.

Closing

Registrars play a strategic role in higher-education institutions. Their work centers on managing academic operations and records, enforcing policies and supporting student success. However, the job comes with significant demands and responsibilities. The position requires extensive experience, advanced education and personal attributes that enable navigating complex, dynamic environments. Despite the challenges, registrars generally report high job satisfaction. There is also room for improvement regarding demographic diversity in this key leadership role.

The following conclusions can be drawn from these data.

- Most registrars report to high-level administrators, typically within academic affairs or enrollment-management divisions.
- The majority of registrars have over 20 years of experience in higher education.
- Registrars show mobility across institutions, with many having worked at multiple institutions.
- A significant number have dedicated their entire careers to higher education.
- Registrars have broad responsibilities, including academic-records management, policy enforcement and technology oversight.
- They manage demanding schedules, often overseeing teams and attending multiple meetings daily.
- Work exceeds 40 hours a week for many; some report 50+ hours.
- Work-life balance and fair compensation are top priorities for job satisfaction.
- Registrars generally feel appreciated and enjoy autonomy but face challenges in keeping up with changing regulations and managing workloads.
- Many registrars are planning career moves; a significant number are considering retirement or advancement within the next few years.
- There has been no significant shift in the demographic composition of registrars in recent years, indicating a need for increased diversity.
- Data indicate several hundred registrar openings are likely in the United States in the next 3 years.

AACRAO has several resources that can help you prepare for your first registrar position or to plan for your next career move, including the following:

Instructor-led courses

- Reg 101
- Essentials of Project Management
- and others

Webinars

- archived
- forthcoming

On-Demand Learning

- Compliance Corner
- Core Concepts of Strategic Enrollment Management
- FERPA Foundations
- Registrar Foundations
- Transfer Articulation 101
- and many more

Further Your Education

- SEM-Endorsement Program

Publications

- Academic Operations and the Role of the Registrar

- FERPA Quick Guide
- AACRAO Guide to Graduation Ceremonies
- Academic Record and Transcript Guide 2020
- Registrar's Basic Guide
- and many more

Research Reports, which include practice and policy benchmarks related to registrar-related responsibilities.

Higher Ed Policy Central is a database of more than 1,200 catalogs from nearly 1,000 institutions. It is a tool for understanding and comparing academic policies.

Appendix A: Registrar-Position Titles

1. Registrar (n = 453)
    - Registrar
    - College Registrar
    - Campus Registrar
    - Law Registrar
    - School Registrar
    - University Registrar
    - Interim University Registrar

2. Assistant/Associate Vice President (n = 39)
    - Assistant Vice President and University Registrar
    - Associate Vice President and University Registrar
    - Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management and University Registrar
    - Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and College Registrar

3. Director (n = 26)
    - Director of Academic Records and Registrar
    - Director of Admissions and Registrar
    - Director of Enrollment Services/Registrar

4. Assistant/Associate Provost (n = 20)
    - Assistant Provost and University Registrar
    - Associate Provost and University Registrar
    - Assistant Provost for Institutional Effectiveness and Registrar

5. Dean (n = 13)
    - Dean of Academic Services and Registrar
    - Dean of Enrollment Services and Registrar
    - Dean of Academic Records/Registrar

6. Assistant/Associate Dean (n= 11)
    - Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Registrar
    - Associate Dean and Registrar
    - Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Registrar

7. Executive Director (n = 5)
    - Executive Director and Registrar
    - Executive Director for Enrollment Services & University Registrar

8. Vice President (n = 3)
    - Vice President of Enrollment Management/Registrar
    - Vice President, Registrar

9. Vice Provost (n = 2)
    - Vice Provost and University Registrar

10. Other unique titles (n = 10)
    - Bursar/Registrar
    - Interim Registrar

- Education Coordinator I

Appendix B: Other Regular Committee Responsibilities by Category

(note: Aside from category labels, these are respondent-submitted committee names and as such, use the term “student” instead of “learner”)

1. Academic Affairs
    - First-Year Advisors
    - Transfer Advisory Committee
    - Academic Calendar
    - Credit for Prior Learning
    - Freshman/Transfer-Student Orientation Planning
    - Academic Progression Committee
    - Academic Review
    - Academic Policies/Rules
    - Graduate Council
    - General Education Committee
    - Committee on Courses (Academic Senate)
    - Undergraduate Policy Committee
    - Curriculum Committee
    - Academic Standards
    - Study Abroad
    - Academic Leadership

2. Learner Services and Support
    - Appeals (various types)
    - Behavior Intervention Team (BIT) and CARE Team
    - Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)
    - Students at Financial Risk
    - Committee for Student Engagement
    - Student-Teacher Retention
    - Student Success
    - Military-Connected Students
    - Onboarding Students

3. Data Management and Governance
    - Data Stewards
    - Data Governance
    - Data Standards
    - Institutional Research

4. Compliance and Risk Management
    - Compliance
    - Risk Management
    - Athletic Compliance/Eligibility
    - Title IX
    - Federal Policy (NC-SARA, Professional Licensure; FVT-GE)

5. Administrative and Operational

- Tuition Appeals
- Commencement
- Scheduling
- President's Cabinet
- Dean's Council
- Institutional Operations
- Emergency Management/Incident Response
- Systems-Operations Team
- Administrative Policy
- Enterprise-Management Resources

6. Enrollment Management
    - Residency
    - Status Change: Enrollment
    - Retention and Graduation
    - Admissions Committee

7. Financial Aid
    - Financial Aid and Business Office Planning and Scheduling

8. Special Programs
    - Athletics Committee
    - Committee for Lectures and Cultural Engagement
    - Summer Sessions

9. Technology and Privacy
    - Technology Governance
    - Privacy Committee
    - Data Privacy Incident Response Team

10. Assessment and Accreditation
    - Assessment Committee
    - Assessment for Improvement
    - Accreditation

11. Campus Life and Events
    - Campus and Community Events
    - Building-Safety-and-Security Committee
    - Weather-Incident Management Team

12. International Education
    - International Students

Appendix C: Personal Stories

These stories have been lightly edited for grammar. They are presented here in no particular order.

Wow, I Wish I Knew That Before Becoming a Registrar

Whitney A. Merinar
Registrar
Hampden-Sydney College

I was five months pregnant with my youngest child when I applied for my first registrar job. My husband found the job in the classified ads in the local newspaper. He knew I was miserable in my current position and told me he thought I would fit the role. Working in higher education for almost 12 years, I had a little idea of what the job entailed. Throughout the interview process, I felt comfortable with everything the various committees threw at me during my first all-day interview.

I started my role as registrar when my youngest was 4 months old. Thinking back to those formative years of being a registrar, there are some things I wish I had known before signing on the dotted line! Understanding these nuances could have significantly eased my transition and enhanced my effectiveness from the beginning.

1. The Navigation of Institutional Politics: Politics and bureaucracy run deep in academia. The college registrar often must balance competing interests and negotiate between various departments. You must learn how to navigate this quickly, or you will fail. Some faculty will eat you alive and do not give grace (although most are willing to work with you)! Foster positive relationships early, and it will take you far.

2. The Impact of Institutional Policies: Be sure you understand the broad institutional policies and how they intertwine with the registrar's office. Inevitably, every office and department will have an "idea" to make things better. Often, this will impact the registrar's office. Be ready to think on your feet and be able to think holistically. You need to deeply understand how these will impact your office.

3. The Multitude of Responsibilities: This is one area that surprised me the most during the first years of being a registrar. The job goes beyond just managing student records and overseeing the registration process. You will find yourself involved with curriculum development, project management, institutional policy making, compliance with accreditation standards, advising, advocacy, translator, counselor, mom; the list goes on. The registrar's office is a central hub of the institution. I like to call it the air-traffic controller of the institution. If the air-traffic controller isn't working correctly, the planes won't land. When the registrar's office isn't working correctly, the institution can't run. Attention to detail is crucial, with each decision possibly having far-reaching implications.

4. The Balance Between Policy and Flexibility: Many people of my generation remember the inflexible registrar of the past, who could have had a big "NO!" buzzer/button on their desk. In today's higher-education environment, registrars face the challenge of balancing strict

adherence to institutional policies with the need for flexibility. There are times exceptions to strict policies need to be considered to accommodate individual circumstances or changing needs. This is one area I still struggle with because I know what the rules are; however, I know I also need to be flexible.

5. The Impact of Technological Advancements: I knew technology played a part in higher education, and I knew about student-information systems. However, I was completely unaware at how rapidly the technology evolves and how registrars need to stay abreast of technological advancements. It is important to have a good understanding of the technological landscape and its implications from the start.

6. Budget: I always thought being a registrar was prestigious. Maybe to some it is, but I have found in most cases, it is the first office to experience budget cuts, etc. Be mindful of your budget; watch it closely. Be prepared to fight for every dollar. Have data to bring to the table when you fight to keep a position or want a new one. Be ready to fix minor things on your own using YouTube (I fixed the office coffee maker once because we all need coffee).

7. The Emotional Toll: The emotional toll of the job was a complete surprise to me. No one ever told me I would drive home crying after sitting all day in suspension meetings and hearing about the difficult times students are going through. A student came to college with one suitcase and no bedding, food, etc. I rallied to get her everything she needed to feel like a college student, only to lose her anyway. The job can be emotionally taxing, as it requires a high level of empathy and emotional resilience. I wish I had been better prepared in this area.

8. The Value of Professional Development: Higher education is dynamic, with constant changes in regulations, technologies and best practices. Sign up for listservs, go to conferences and tune in to webinars. I found great value in connecting with local, and regional registrars. Do what you can to make connections and network, and continue to engage in learning.

My journey over the last 13 years as a registrar has been challenging and fulfilling. I definitely had some growing pains in the first few years; overall, it has been a rewarding experience, especially seeing students graduate. Jumping directly into a registrar role, without any prior experience in a registrar's office (other than being a director of student services), knowing some of these aspects beforehand would have made my transition into the role smoother. Nonetheless, each lesson I learned along the way, both good and bad, contributed to my professional growth and effectiveness in the academic community.

A Day in the Life

Tara J. Arneson, MSL
Registrar
Champlain College

I can gratefully say my days are nothing like the movie *Groundhog Day*. If you've ever seen the movie, you know that Bill Murray is caught in a loop of redundancy. Being a registrar is quite the opposite.

As an early riser, most days start before 5 am (it depends on what keeps me up at night!). After juggling the needs of my household, figuring out who needs a ride to what sport in the afternoon and packing my lunch, I'm out the door and in the office by 7 am. The time before meetings start or before anyone else gets into the office is precious; it allows me to respond to emails well before anyone else is on email for the day. Some days, this is the only time I have to be on email.

Any given day offers a variety of meetings, unique situations, exception requests, maneuvering through our systems and problem solving. Throw in the occasional crisis, and you have the jist of a day in the life of a registrar. I'm sure you're dying to hear more.

Can I tell you? Wednesday is my least favorite day of the week. Every Wednesday, we have back-to-back meetings from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. Wednesday is a light class day for our students and faculty, plus we have a block of time in the afternoon dedicated to institutional meetings. I can only blame myself, given that my office is the keeper and creator of the class schedule.

Today started with our data-governance council meeting. I love this group and our conversations. We are having the most involved discussions about fields in our SIS, how the fields impact different departments and what it means to make a change in a process. From there, I immediately jumped into a meeting with one of our study-abroad partners, then a department meeting. I find I have 30 minutes in my calendar to eat lunch, but I'm interrupted several times with questions about double majors and internships.
More meetings after lunch revolve around course withdrawals, financial aid regulations and the question of initiating a withdrawal request. We're also talking about best practices for term set-up and how to start converting 8-week classes into 7-week classes. Did I mention there's always something going on with advising, retention, curriculum, and transfer credit?

So, as if my day job as a registrar wasn't busy enough, I'm also the president-elect for a regional AACRAO. Additionally, I'm the vice chair for my local school board, which means some days extend well into the night.

Days often feel like a 500-piece jigsaw puzzle, which is exactly why I love this job. I never get bored (there's no time!). Yes, some days are harder than others, and there's always a new problem to solve, but nothing is redundant. Sure, my inbox may never be empty, but at least I got my kid to hockey practice on time.

A Day in the Life of a Registrar

Michelle Rable, MBA
University Registrar
Bowling Green State University

At the heart of every successful university lies a well-oiled machine–the registrar's office. While often behind the scenes, it orchestrates the academic journeys of thousands of students, ensuring every step is seamless and impactful. I often share that I believe the registrar's office is the institution's heart. If we are not working well, the institution will feel it, and it shows.

The registrar's office is the connecting point for all things involving students. It begins with supporting admission's recruitment efforts, including transfer evaluation, registration and course scheduling, just to name a few touch points. We work with and support advising, faculty, deans, student activities, athletics, bursar, financial aid, marketing, career services, residence life, campus operations, and the alumni office!

"**A Day in the Life of a Registrar**" involves managing a complex network of responsibilities. The day is often filled with meetings across various departments, managing emails, overseeing projects, and coordinating team efforts. A significant part of the job revolves around addressing questions from various areas. These inquiries span academic policy, curriculum, information systems, staff management, registration, course scheduling, reports, transfer processes, VA benefits, FERPA, and federal compliance. Questions arise about graduation, and sometimes even unexpected ones, like, "How do we get toilet paper in the library?" Much of the work centers around answering "how" questions: *How do we...? Can we...?* The Registrar's role is to provide clarity and guidance in navigating these diverse challenges. My typical day involves juggling four to five meetings while balancing an influx of emails and requests coming in as early as 6 a.m. Whether it's addressing policy questions, facilitating course scheduling or troubleshooting unexpected issues, like a toilet paper shortage in the library (yes, that happens!), no two days are alike.

I get into the office at 7:30 am to prepare for meetings at 8 am. For example, today, my first meeting was with the dean's council, which started at 8 am. I had about a half hour to review and answer any urgent questions from staff or email, then I had a grid-classroom meeting. I again review emails, connect with my team and answer questions or just simply check in to see how life is going for them. On to the next meeting, a 1:1 with one of my senior-leadership team members. We review their projects, the good, the bad and the ugly; we both ask questions, then we move on with the new tasks or research we need to do.

Lunch is up next; I try to encourage my team to take this time to step away. Sometimes, it is not possible, but we must make sure that does not always happen!

The afternoon starts, and I have a meeting with a vendor to discuss issues and upgrades (how exciting!!). After this call, a quick call to my team members impacted by these upgrades and issues with the vendor product. We need to plot our next moves. More emails and conversations with my team and/or vice president. A quick follow-up call with the bursar to clarify any miscommunications from our earlier email exchange.

I wrap up my day with the tuition-appeals committee to review any appeals submitted. We discuss the situation and make our decisions. A quick email to a team member regarding our decisions. It is now 5 pm; it is time to wrap up and head home!

I periodically check emails throughout the evening. If anything is urgent outside 8 a.m.- 5 p.m., text is the way we all connect. We do this for our students to ensure we do our best for them and make their experience with our office as useful and beneficial as possible.

While the role of registrar may not come with the glamor of more public-facing positions, it is the backbone of a university's operations. It requires deep knowledge, swift problem-solving and a genuine commitment to student success. Knowing that each decision we make, no matter how small, plays a role in shaping students' futures is what makes this job rewarding.

My Path to the Registrar Position

Christina Reeves
Assistant Provost and University Provost
University of Austin

I feel like I did everything a little backward in my life, but my career has progressed "correctly" and in good time.

After high school, I entered the workforce, taking secretarial jobs at various companies. I got married and started my family at a young age, which became my main focus. In 1999, I found myself unemployed and desperately searching for a job. The unemployment agency in New Jersey informed me about a program that sends qualified unemployed individuals to college to gain skills while receiving unemployment benefits. I jumped at the chance to better myself and enrolled immediately.

After 2 years, I graduated with an associate of applied science degree in office administration from Cumberland County College (CCC). I had always dreamed of being an elementary-school secretary, so I geared up to see how I could get into the local school system. However, because elementary-school-secretary positions are seldom open, I decided to be a substitute teacher instead.

When I went to CCC to obtain my official transcript, I had a brief conversation with the executive director of enrollment services. She mentioned a job opening in her department and encouraged me to apply. I did, and within 3 days, I was interviewed and hired as the enrollment-services secretary. This role familiarized me with the inner workings of administration in a community-college setting.

During my time at CCC, I pursued an online bachelor of science degree in business administration through a consortium agreement with Franklin University. By 2006, I had earned my degree and returned to CCC to earn two additional associate degrees in accounting and business management.

Later that year, my family decided to move to North Carolina. I was able to join Caldwell Community College in Hudson, North Carolina, working in the continuing-education department. The following year, I took a position in Hickory, North Carolina at Lenoir-Rhyne University, Hickory, NC as assistant to the registrar. The person serving as registrar provided me with opportunities to learn about the office, its various roles and academic records. In addition, I attended CACRAO and Ellucian (SunGard) conferences for professional development and to help build my network.

After about a year, a student-system conversion allowed me to learn everything I could about our new SIS and apply my love for technology. A few months later, I was promoted to assistant registrar. Around that time, I felt the urge to go back to school and enrolled in the master's program at Lenoir-Rhyne. In May 2012, I graduated with a master of arts degree in liberal studies.

By the summer of 2012, I was eager to advance my career and was encouraged by my supervisor to start looking for a registrar role. In November 2012, I became the new university registrar and director of enrollment information systems at Georgian Court University (GCU) in New Jersey. Although it was not my goal to return to the state, this opportunity was too good to pass up.

During my time at GCU, I transformed a previously unmotivated registrar's office–resulting from layoffs the previous year–into a well-oiled machine. My staff was amazing and contributed significantly to our students' success. I became involved in MSACROA and attended and presented at Ellucian Live. I also took the AACRAO-SEM course to enhance my credentials. However, my desire for new initiatives and challenges eventually left me at a crossroads at GCU. I wanted to grow further, but opportunities were limited.

Additionally, my husband and I became empty-nesters and wished to return to the South. In 2018, I accepted the position of university registrar at the University of North Carolina Pembroke. Soon after, I added the title of director of Brave Central, our enrollment one-stop center. This role allowed me to initiate programs for student success while also fulfilling my responsibilities as registrar. In 2019, I attended my first AACRAO conference in 2019 and built a strong network of fellow registrars through AACRAO and the UNC registrar's group. I was happy!

In the following years, leadership changes left me without supervisory support. I was the only director remaining under the enrollment umbrella, and the environment became "challenging." My passion for my job diminished, and I questioned whether I wanted to stay in higher education. Although my staff was wonderful, they also felt the pressure, and I struggled to remain positive for them.

After several interviews for new positions, I found other colleges did not offer a better environment than the one I was in. I needed my motivation back and my love for my career restored. I saw a job advertisement for a registrar role in Austin, Texas. I never considered moving to Texas, especially for a new school that was not yet accredited. Out of curiosity, I applied.

I was amazed by the people I met during the interview process. They were passionate about building a new university and were committed to doing it right. I was offered the position, and my husband and I made the 18-hour drive from North Carolina to Texas, where I became the first registrar for the University of Austin. I had the unique opportunity to choose our SIS, design the first academic catalog and develop the inaugural academic calendar. I collaborated with the provost and deans to create and map out the curriculum without adhering to "how things have always been done."

By my second year, I was promoted to assistant provost and university registrar, undertaking both registrar duties and working toward our accreditation. We welcomed our first class of students this year, and they are truly amazing. I am in a great place, and my love for my job, my colleagues and our students motivates me every day.

Reflecting on my journey, I've learned embracing change and pursuing continuous growth can lead to unexpected opportunities and fulfillment. As I embark on my next adventure, pursuing a doctorate in organizational leadership at Franklin University, I am excited about what the future holds. In 3 years, I will have my degree. I will have achieved all the educational and career goals I once thought were out of reach.

Put Me In Coach: My Path to Registrar

Liesl A. Fowler
College Registrar
Augustana College

"I want to be a registrar when I grow up," said no one ever.

That's okay. It is a point of pride for many of us within the profession. We are accustomed to the glazed looks of mild boredom we receive from those outside higher education when we try to answer the question, "Oh, a registrar, what does that mean?" Most of us have a pat answer that includes some vague language about "registration" or "student records" and even a bit of flair about "engaged leadership and informing the strategic direction of the institution" in an attempt to keep the interest of our audience.

When I returned from AACRAO last spring, my absence from a community event during that time came up in a conversation with an acquaintance. When I told her I had been in Columbus for a registrar's conference, she laughed and said, "Oh, that sounds horrible! Do you guys just sit around and talk about transcripts all day?" I just shrugged. I didn't really know how to try to tell her the truth.

I am endlessly fascinated by the stories from registrar colleagues about how they landed in this world. They vary widely from faculty members who agree to "just fill in for a bit," to student workers who stay in higher education because they find meaning in the work they do. One colleague told me he was a clerk in a courthouse before a juror mentioned to him his organizational skills would be well-suited for work at the local community college as an associate registrar. This work just finds us.

My own career path included a plan to be a teacher; I taught middle-school language arts for 2 years following my undergraduate studies. As a college athlete, I also imagined coaching someday, so I helped with a junior-high volleyball team. When my college track coach asked me to help out part-time, I jumped at the chance. That led to the new volleyball coach at my alma mater asking me to help her out as an assistant coach as well. As I embarked on my career as a middle school teacher, I had no desire to work in higher education beyond this part-time coaching, and I hadn't given much thought to how people ended up in careers at colleges.

Then life intervened. As a cost-saving measure, my school district pink-slipped all teachers who had been in the district less than 3 years. They planned to use the tactic as leverage in collective bargaining with our union. In August of my second year of teaching, I was newly married, the ink was barely dry on my diploma, I had student-loan

payments and I was facing being let go from my first job. I was terrified. Then, well, more life.

The head volleyball coach, for whom I was working, abruptly resigned to take a job across the country and left me to coach our collegiate program at age 23. I thought losing my job was the most terrifying thing that could happen to me, but facing a court full of college players, many of whom had been my teammate 2 years before, was the scariest thing I had ever done.

Over the next 13 years, I would come to appreciate that fear takes many forms and is often just a way that challenge and opportunity manifest themselves. I would eventually become the full-time head volleyball coach, the full-time assistant track coach, the women's athletic director, the NCAA compliance officer and chair the health and physical education department. I also found work on our campus in the reading-and-writing center and leaned into opportunities to help the campus in other ways, including working as the campus-speaker-series coordinator. I loved every minute of it, but I was exhausted. Eventually, I wanted a break from late nights hosting soccer matches, spending all weekend standing on humid pool decks and traveling every week away from my growing family. When I was pregnant with my third child, a pair of wonderful female colleagues saw in me something I didn't and encouraged me to apply for the registrar role I now have.

That was 20 years ago, and so much has changed for me personally and professionally but so has the landscape of higher education. I'm no less exhausted, but I'm very rewarded in my work. Each opportunity I have had came with a strong dose of imposter syndrome. I have been fortunate to have received immense encouragement and support from many colleagues who mentored and believed in me. As registrars, we all found our way to a career that is uniquely matched for our gifts, skills and talents.

Registrars take pride in being the most organized people on our side of campus. We geek-out on conversations about grade-repeat policies and student-information-coding syntax. We are eager to find common ground and improve systemic challenges within our institutions and our profession. In many ways, I still feel like a coach, and not just because I'm still involved in youth sports.

I still identify as a teacher, and I believe our profession naturally lends itself to the best tenets of coaching in many ways. We help students negotiate the intricate landscape and translate the often confusing jargon of higher education. We mentor our colleagues in the nuanced ways of communicating to students and providing a clear and hopeful path forward. We collaborate, communicate and facilitate change within an institutional framework in which every player plays an important role in realizing team success. We fundamentally understand that building for a better result each time we do things takes determination, inclusivity and practice.

I have been embraced and uplifted by everyone I meet in this profession, from every size and type of institution. In some ways, I feel I stole everything I know from others and learned so much through participation. I have spent many years serving as PAC chair and on user's group conference committees, presenting at dozens of national and

regional conferences, and through so many individual, meaningful interactions with colleagues in person and online. I'm not sure what is next for me in higher education, but I know I feel a strong urge to give back and pay it forward to a profession that has opened the door to me again and again for 20 years.

My path has taught me the same thing probably hundreds of others have learned–we rely heavily on kindness and the faith our colleagues have in us to help us find this work. These wise and generous souls seem to identify in each of us our gifts, which include a high attention to detail, a passion for collaborative problem solving and a deep love of working with students.

Experience has taught me I no longer need others to help me know the work we do is important. I know the collective work of registrars embraces a common mission to help half a million students reach the finish line of credential completion every year. Those mentors showed us to the path, and we found our meaning and embraced the journey.

So the next time you are asked about your work or are met with the question whether all you do is "sit around and talk about student records?" I suggest we own it proudly say, "You bet we do!"

My Path to the Registrar Position

Suzan J. Francis, M.A.
Registrar
Good Samaritan College of Nursing and Health Science

I found my way into the registrar world quite by accident. I don't think I'm unique. I believe a lot of us never planned to be a registrar. It's not like registrars were represented at our career fairs in high school. And I never saw it on a list of possible undergraduate majors for college. But the job requires a degree. So how did we get here?

I had been attending a community college off and on for 5 (yes, 5) years because I couldn't decide on a major. During some early business classes, I did a cooperative-education program and was placed as an inventory-control clerk at a warehouse/distribution center. After the co-op placement ended, they hired me full-time. I enjoyed the work but decided I did not want to sit at a desk all day. Yes, yes, I know. So I started looking for other jobs.

Back then we were still hunting for jobs in the "Help Wanted" section in the classifieds. I found an ad for a records assistant. I didn't know what a records assistant was, but I was about to find out. I applied.

Three months later, after I had given up hope, I was called for an interview. After another month, I left for vacation. There were no cell phones in our pockets then; answering machines were all the rage. I came home from vacation to find three messages offering me the job. The last message was something along the lines of, "If you are still interested in this position, please call." I called.

I worked in that office for several years, through several title changes, and also finished my associate of arts degree. I loved the work and the people. But I knew I would not get promoted without a bachelor's degree. With a heavy heart, I left that job.

I transferred my credits to a large, 4-year institution and moved into the residence hall. I was 31 years old. What an experience! I finished my bachelor of science in communication degree in 1 year, four full-time quarter terms.

I wasn't looking to return to my previous employer; I was looking at the possibility of moving south. I landed in Florida but not at a college. I worked in the office of a temporary-employment agency, placing people into temporary jobs. I really liked it, but I missed higher education.

After some time there, I got back into a registrar's office! I was there for several years, then they downsized. But their campus in Milwaukee was hiring, and I was ready for a change! I was always in the registrar's office but never the registrar.

Eventually, I moved back to Appalachia. But again, I landed outside of higher education. I was hired at a local phone company as a lead in customer care, specifically handling complaints. I really enjoyed helping the frustrated customers, but it wasn't "home." I needed to get back to what I knew: transcripts, schedules, academic calendars, people asking if I enjoyed my summer off, and so much more! For 9 years, I was the associate registrar at a small, private college in Eastern Kentucky. When my husband's teaching contract was not renewed, we found ourselves considering a big move.

He found a teaching position closer to our children in another state, and we pounced. Well, he pounced. I stayed at home until I could find a job. By now, job hunting was done electronically. And we all have cell phones. I found a position as a registrar of a very small, private nursing and health science school through an online platform. I applied and was called for an interview. I left my interview at around 11 am and started the long drive back home. At 1:30 pm, before I made it home, I received a call on my cell phone offering me the position.

Now, here I sit at a desk all day, as a registrar.

How I Got Here: Reflecting on Registrar Leadership

Sofia Almeda
University Registrar
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

I can hear my M.Ed. program professor still saying **"heart beforehand.**" I was just beginning my higher-ed career and taking classes in hopes of obtaining some knowledge to help me connect the dots in and outside of the registrar world. I learned later that semester that his words–heart beforehand–were a succinct way of saying *be a compassionate human above all else*. If you are, and you mean it, many other things can and will fall into place.

Being in the registrar profession is a challenging task. You have to have tough skin but treat people with sensitivity. You have to work faster than anyone but tolerate waiting on others. You have to be mindful of enrollment and balance that with student success. You have to identify problems and, no matter whose they are, find solutions! You have to portray positivity, even when your experiences tell you pessimism and skepticism make more sense.

You often have to get a lot done with a great deal working against you. Policy changes. Evolving regulations. Backpedaling on regulations. Internal audits. State audits. Federal audits. Reviews. Promoting positive work environments and engaging partners in meaningful conversation to effect change. The list goes on, doesn't it?

The truth is these challenges and continuous efforts to strike just the right balance between positivity and pragmatism can thwart progress. While you may have good intentions and good reasons for implementing a change (you may even be operating from a frame of we-don't-have-a-choice-it's-a-matter-of-*compliance*), faculty and staff may balk at the sound of change. Those associating your office with rule implementing and naysaying may write you off before your idea or proposed solution can escape your mouth. Successfully selling change is like trying to catch a fish with your hands tied behind your back, whether you initiated it or not. It's probably not gonna happen.

So, how do you get it done? **Heart before hand.**

I was very blessed with a maternal grandmother who could have rivaled Mother Teresa and a father who, quite literally, took the shirt off his back for others more than once. I got to observe how, as my grandmother would say, "Más moscas se atrapan con miel que con vinagre." (*You catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar.*) I also saw the joy my father's compassion for his fellow man brought to his fellow man *and* to himself. I'm grateful they had such big impacts on my family.

Those relationships, observations and experiences led me to understand in my work that we have to see our campus partners and constituents as *people* first. This has prompted me to embrace opportunities to build relationships with others, even when those people seem unlikely to be allies.

This hyperfocus on relationships and communication before all else has afforded me many successful, and truly heartfelt, relationships with others. Knowing and caring about a staff member's kiddos or parents, or the condition of a colleague's pet, or the outcome of a community play they participated in, effectively communicates their value as a person matters. Their voice matters, regardless of the outcome of some eventual work-related conversation.

In an era of acute (and stressful) accountability spurred in part by limited funding, mental-health challenges and political polarization that has found some presence on nearly all our campuses, it's key that we not lose sight of what we all have in common. We're human.

We're humans who are, at a minimum, responsible for sustaining ourselves and often others, be they parents, spouses, children, foster kids or fur babies. If we can keep that concept in mind, we may more easily find common ground and agree to compromises or understandings that rest somewhere in the middle.

Heart before hand. That's how we can get it done.

My Road to the Registrar Office

Cindy Lambert, Ed.D.
University Registrar
Rocky Vista University

If I had listened to my college counselor in high school, I wouldn't be where I am today. I remember so clearly walking into the counselor's office and asking for a college application to my dream school. Imagine my devastation when I was told applications for that school were reserved for the top students and I should consider going to a trade school. Perhaps I should become a hairstylist or secretary (not that there is anything wrong with those fields). This unsolicited advice was given before I had a chance to tell her I wanted to be a social worker.

Not to be dissuaded, I did my own research and obtained applications and admission to my first, second and third-choice schools. Four years later, I graduated from my dream school, and I started my career in higher education as an admission counselor–at the same university the counselor told me I couldn't get into! College admissions was my pathway into a career in higher education, which led me to the registrar's office.

During my time working in admissions, I had the opportunity to work at a variety of colleges and universities. I worked at a very large state university, an elite private university, an upper-division state school, a nursing college and a traditional liberal-arts school. In each position, I learned new skills, but more important, I interacted with different offices outside of admissions. Working with other administrative and student-service offices helped me understand how a university functioned and how policies and curricula were created and implemented.

While working at the nursing college as the director of admission, one day I was summoned to the president's office. She asked me if I would serve as the registrar. I was stunned. The first words out of my mouth were, "I've never been a registrar, but sure I'll figure it out." I had heard of AACRAO but because I worked in admissions, I was involved with NACAC and our state chapter and was not an AACRAO member. I took to Google and looked up AACRAO and found a Registrar 101 class–sign me up!

Taking that Registrar 101 class introduced me to the registrar world and to AACRAO. The AACRAO membership form asks if you would be interested in joining any committees, so I checked the box for the Latino/a Caucus. The first year I became a registrar, I also attended my first AACRAO conference. Not knowing anything about the caucus, I went to their session at the conference, and soon after I became the chair of the Latino/a Caucus. Over the years, I served twice as chair of the Latino/a Caucus and made many wonderful friends along the way.

Looking back on my path to becoming a registrar, I didn't know exactly what I would be getting myself into that day I was called into the president's office. I'm grateful I started my journey in admissions. Working in admissions gave me exposure to all areas of the university from administrative to student-service functions. However, I quickly learned working in the registrar's office and being the university registrar is so much more than maintaining academic records.

Being a registrar also means one must understand business systems and processes and how to incorporate technology into the daily workflow, maintain student privacy and data security. It means communicating with creative faculty on the interpretation of policies they create and staying updated with state and federal policies to keep your institution in compliance. Being the registrar also means you're responsible for data integrity and providing all kinds of reports internally and externally. This is only a sample of the types of things for which a registrar is responsible. Looking back, I'm so glad I accepted the challenge.

My Path to the Registrar Position

Jonathan D. Jump, Ph.D.
Associate Dean of the College and Registrar
Associated Faculty with the rank of Associate Professor
Wabash College

College registrar has always seemed like a profession with as many paths as it has people. It's not usually a destination anyone focuses on from an early age. Kids don't grow up playing "registrar" with each other. I've met a lot of people in this profession, and very few of them actually set out to do this kind of work. It's more often someplace they landed than it is someplace they sought. In my case, it's a little of both.

My mother worked at the small private college I had attended and was (still is) a good friend of the registrar there at the time. I was not a good student for most of my time at this college, and at one point I had to leave school to try to redeem myself elsewhere before I could return. I gained admission as a transfer student to "THE" large state university in my area (if you know, you know), intending to return to my original college but not sure if I could pull it off. This would take more foresight and planning than I had so far shown any capacity to do.

I wandered into the registrar's office at my former college with the academic catalog from my new college, hoping the registrar would help me pick some classes that were likely to transfer back. My mom said he was a nice guy, but I still half-expected to be told to take a hike because I was no longer enrolled there and had done so poorly when I was. I remember how relieved I felt when his response to my feeble request was "Sure! Come in and sit down. This is what I love to do."

For the next hour, he sat with me, reviewed my embarrassing transcript and helped me select a year's worth of courses that had the greatest potential for transfer back to my original school, should I choose to return. And it worked. I took those courses, they transferred, and I returned after a year. The memory of his kindness at a time I really needed it is still a happy one. I didn't leave there that day with the idea of becoming a registrar, but I knew I wanted to find a job that I could love as much as he loved his.

After college and (miraculously) grad school, I bounced around in a few random jobs in the late 90's, the last of which was at a computer-education company where I supervised in the registration-and-scheduling center. This was comparable to the work of the registrar in some basic ways. I liked that job, but it came to an end when the company closed that part of its

operation (though no fault of mine, as far as I know). I was almost 30 years old, newly married and about to be out of work. I recall the world was anxious about Y2K during that time, but this was the least of my worries. I might have actually welcomed the global financial apocalypse so many people feared.

Somehow, I crossed paths with my registrar friend again at this time. He was interested to hear the direction my life had taken, what my career was like, etc. I didn't think of myself as even having a career; I'd just had jobs. But the last one was ending, and I needed to figure some things out. I mentioned how our meeting years before had been pivotal for me. With his help, at a time when I was failing at everything, I had planned something important to me, actually executed it and built some modest successes upon it. I could tell he was pleased. "Stories like this are why I have loved this career," he said. This time, his enthusiasm got me thinking.

About 3 months later, I landed my first job as a higher-education registrar after answering an ad in the newspaper. That alone stands out as an example of how much the industry has changed in 25 years. Back then, newspaper ads were still a common way of finding jobs.

I worked at a tiny graduate theological seminary with about 200 students. The registrar's office was a one-person office, just like almost every other office there. In many ways, it was an ideal setting to learn a profession. I had to do all the office functions myself, which was demanding but highly enlightening. And my colleagues and the students were as decent and generous as I could have ever asked for. I made lifelong friends there and still look back on that time as one of the best parts of my life. And as it turned out, I was good at the job. I liked helping people in the ways I'd been helped before. I'm now at a slightly larger, traditional baccalaureate institution. I like to think I still have the heart to help struggling students as I once did.

At the time we met, I don't think the registrar at my college could have anticipated his impact. He was just doing what he loved to do. Sometimes, just being who you were meant to be is influential enough to help change the trajectory of someone's life. I try to keep this in mind. We all should.

If I Had To Do It All Over Again

Kristen Smith
Registrar
Swarthmore College

If I had to do it over again, I might become a doctor, an AI expert or a software analyst. Maybe a veterinarian, except I'm afraid of practically every animal except cats(ish).

My friends and I would sometimes sit around after a hard day, lamenting.
"I should have studied more."
"If only I'd listened to my mother."
"You know how much so and so makes?"
"Nobody knows how much we . . ."
And on and on.

It's true. It is not uncommon to come across colleagues who do not know what a registrar's office does. In fact, the community often thinks we register students, and that's it. Maybe collect a grade or two. Something to do with graduation. #If only.

A registrar's job is a blessing and a curse. After 20 years, a part of my job I have come to appreciate and, dare I say love, is that it is never the same. It is rarely boring. It is often challenging. On any given day, I encounter ethical dilemmas, issues of equity and fairness, the opportunity to practice patience and grace, the good fortune to help someone and make their day better, and the chance to learn something new and grow myself.

On any given day, the value of my office might be questioned, my request for resources denied, the deadline that was originally given moved up a week, and the software errors out again.

I would be more compassionate toward myself if I had to do it over again. It's a tough job (like so many jobs). I might fortify myself with more technical training and a project-management certification, maybe a leadership badge or two. I would think more about the institution's organizational structure I choose to join. I would ask myself, "Is this environment going to be good enough for me?" "Will I thrive here?" Early in my career, I might have asked, "Who can help me identify my skills and make sure my strengths and contributions are visible to the right people?"

I might have been a little more strategic in my career path. I tended to take opportunities once I saw them or once they were presented to me. But I saw others *make* opportunities. If I had to do it over again I would spend some time learning how to make opportunities. I would come to understand earlier that every challenge, difficulty or so-called failure is an opportunity to grow, to make myself a more skilled registrar, a better supervisor, a more compassionate leader. I would remind myself that difficult person, the one who makes me crazy, the one who drives me up the wall, makes me want to pound nails, is a gift because I am going to challenge myself to figure out how to deal with them, how to succeed in *any way*. And during that frustrating, humbling and sometimes painful process, I will expand my skills, become wiser and more resourceful, more valuable in my role and maybe even earn a raise or promotion.

If I had to do it over, I might even take the same road and be a registrar. It has been a satisfying, challenging, frustrating, humbling, never-a-dull-moment career where I've had the chance to influence a complex system, help people daily, earn a good living and be part of an organization whose actual purpose for existing is to create a community of learners who contribute to the betterment of our world.

My Story So Far

Scott Spiegelberg
University Registrar
DePauw University

I never expected to be a registrar. I was vaguely aware of what a registrar was when I was a student in college but didn't really know what the head of the office was responsible for. I stayed in this state of obliviousness through grad school and my first three full-time academic jobs. I was focused on finishing my degrees and getting hired for the next job because those first three jobs were 1-year positions. My goal was to get a tenured professorship. I trained first as a trumpet performer, then as a music theorist; I hoped to become a tenured professor in one of those subjects.

While I was in grad school, I thought I wanted to teach at an R1 university because that was the type of institution I was attending and saw represented at national conferences. But as I did my term jobs at a midsized regional public college, a tiny public college and a large public R1 university, I started considering what type of career I really wanted. I valued the rigor of professional music schools but also wanted to develop close relationships with my students. I wanted to focus most of my efforts on teaching rather than research.

I didn't think about administration, despite working with both the associate dean for graduate studies and the dean of the Eastman School of Music while I was a student. I knew what management was like and how a person could transition from a specialty into a management role. My father has a Ph.D. in paper chemistry and first worked as a research scientist before being promoted into the management track, eventually retiring as an executive vice president. I assumed most administrators at universities started as professors who shifted over to administration. But I didn't ask myself if that is what I wanted to do.

It wasn't until I started my first, and only, tenure-track job at DePauw University, a small liberal arts college in Indiana, that I met and observed the university registrar doing her tasks. Because I was now on a tenure track, I was required to serve on committees and attend monthly faculty meetings. In those situations, I learned some of the things for which the registrar is responsible. I watched her explain academic policies and how they interact, especially when faculty proposed changes to some of those policies. I also saw her act as a liaison between the faculty and staff within her office and within academic affairs as a division.

I still didn't think of the registrar's office as a potential goal, but I did start thinking more about administration. After I earned tenure as a music theorist, the deans and president at my institution started asking me to lead projects shaping academic policy, degree requirements or hiring new administrators. I liked thinking about the big picture, seeing how my leadership could impact many more students than my teaching could.

I eventually applied for and was hired as the dean of academic programs, policy and assessment in 2019. I was tasked with restarting our academic program reviews and creating an assessment plan for an institution that had never had one. Our regional accreditor had noted the lack of assessment, and I was hired to fix the problem.

While working on this exciting, yet daunting, task, I also found myself tapped to be the academic representative for our COVID mitigation team. I worked closely with administrators from student affairs and the president's office to ensure our decisions on ways to respond to COVID would maintain the rigor of our academic programs while protecting our students and employees.

The dean position was originally intended to be a 3-year term, but I was asked to stay an additional year leading up to our interim accreditation review. I really enjoyed working in administration and was sad my time would be ending in 2023. But in January 2023, our university registrar announced she was retiring. The VPAA encouraged me to apply for the position, knowing I was interested in staying in administration.

While I had worked closely with the registrar on assessment and accreditation efforts, I didn't know what her day-to-day workload was like. I asked her if I could talk to her about the position, especially how it works at DePauw. She was very open about the benefits and challenges of being a university registrar at DePauw and how assistant registrars shared the workload. I discovered much of her time was spent advising students about graduation requirements and faculty about academic policies, two things I was already doing in my dean position. I did more research about registrars, including reading some very helpful articles from AACRAO.

Armed with this information, I applied for the position and was hired to start on May 1, although I started meeting with the commencement committee earlier than that. I also was still finishing my deanship, which ended on June 30. Fortunately, my first commencement went well, thanks both to the excellent team of assistant registrars I had inherited and to a staff member from the president's office who chaired the commencement committee while I was being hired and finishing up my dean position. But the 2 days leading up to graduation was a version of registrar bootcamp for me, learning about checking and rechecking, stacking and sorting and the last-minute decisions and judgments to be made.

My learning continued with AACRAO's Registrar 101 online course that summer of 2023, which was immensely helpful. I felt confident about the policy and recordkeeping aspect of the job. What I still worried about was being a manager. In my dean position, I did not have anyone reporting to me. Now I had two assistant registrars and a registrar specialist who directly reported to me.

Later that summer, I did a training for new supervisors with the director of HR, and I talked about management techniques with the VPAA during our regular meetings. Based on advice I received, I scheduled weekly team meetings to talk about upcoming deadlines or tasks, professional-development topics and individual concerns. I also have an open-door policy, encouraging all three staff members to stop in any time they have a concern. I encourage them always to ask me if they don't know how to handle a situation.

I now have over a year of experience as a manager, including hiring a new staff member and proposing a new budget from scratch. While I know I still have much to learn, I feel confident in my ability to recognize when I need help figuring something out. My next great challenge is leading our transition from a homegrown SIS to Workday Student, which will go live in fall of 2026. I look forward to seeing what I will learn from this experience and how I will be able to help DePauw continue to achieve its mission of transforming students into the leaders the world needs.

My Path to the Registrar Position

Roslyn Perry
Registrar & Associate Dean of Records
Allegheny College

My path to the registrar position was not a straight one. I graduated with a degree in individual & family studies, which was a slightly curved path to social work. I was going to save the world; however, when your parents come to a commencement ceremony and think you graduated but you know you still have one more course to take, you take any job you can get at that point because you have to cover your final semester of tuition!

I was thrilled that Cleveland State University hired me as a part-time clerical specialist in their bursar's office. But I always told my co-workers my job was a stepping stone until I completed my degree, so I would not be there long. Fast forward 11 years. I was a supervisor of 30+ cashiers/front-line staff in the office, but life happened. I found myself a single mom with the sweetest premature wee one you could imagine. That also meant I needed to spread my wings and begin to set examples for him. I knew spreading my wings meant leaving the bursar world for something new. I never imagined that would be the beginning of my registrar career.

Have you ever looked at a department at your institution and said to yourself, "I would/will never work there"? Well, that was the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law for me. I was happy in the bursar's office, but I knew it was time for me to advance, and there was a director of student records position available. I reluctantly applied for the position, and they hired me! Fast forward 5 years. It was time for me to find my way again because I realized I couldn't grow in the position, so I began applying for registrar-related positions at institutions within Ohio. Ohio University took a chance on me, and I was hired as an assistant registrar for academic records. Wow, my first registrar-related title and position where I supervised staff, served on a registrar's office leadership team *and* was introduced to AACRAO. The rest is history!

My path was curvy, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I've held several associate and registrar positions in my career and feel very fortunate and blessed to have served in public, private, 2-year, 4-year, specialized, small, midsized and supersized institutions. Each one has provided me with wonderful leadership, mentorship, growth, and lessons learned.

I love being the one who works to draft policy for the institution while also being afforded opportunities to serve students in other capacities. I know what I do as a registrar, as well as an administrator, provides a student, or students, support, helping to lead them to reach their academic goals and accomplishments.

My Path to the Registrar Position

Eric Sandoval
Registrar
Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine

The journey to my role as a higher-education registrar is shaped by diverse experiences, beginning with marketing and evolving through a passion of education. As a second-generation American with Hispanic roots, I was raised with a strong work ethic and a commitment to learning, values that have guided my career to operationalizing the registrar position.

My initial foray into the professional world was through marketing. I started in marketing with a degree in business administration, specializing in strategic communication and data analysis. My early career was humbly spent as a research associate, where I was tasked with completing polls both in-person and through telecommunications. While I found success in this field, my true passion emerged through coaching youth baseball and volunteering in public education, where I assisted students with college applications and transcript reviews. This experience fueled my transition to academia, where I became a high-school registrar, further engaging with students and families in navigating academic pathways.

Many hours were spent learning analytics and reporting tendencies with the New Mexico Public Education Department. I also volunteered at dual-credit registration events and “Prep for College” sessions hosted by school counselors and administrators to support students navigating the college application process.

Later, I joined the Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine as registrar, managing student records and contributing to the institution's academic integrity. My background in data analysis and stakeholder communication has equipped me to ensure accuracy and efficiency while maintaining a student-centered approach to the position of registrar. I continually seek to improve our services and implement innovative solutions to enhance the academic journey for our students.

A registrar creates an environment of accuracy and empathy. My marketing experience has honed my analytical and communication skills, which are invaluable in managing academic records and supporting student success. My unique career path has prepared me for the complexities of academic administration, blending my skills in data, communication and empathy.

I look forward to advancing my expertise and making meaningful contributions to the higher education community. Although my journey began in a different field, it has led me to a role where I can apply my skills in impactful ways.

My Path to the Registrar Position

By Chris Huang
Associate Vice Chancellor and Registrar
Purdue University - Fort Wayne

I began my career in higher education as an admissions officer at my alma mater. After serving in admissions for 3 years, I looked for positions outside higher education to "see what else was out there." I spent the next 3 years working in manufacturing and not-for-profits, though like the U2 song, "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." During this career hopping, my wife encouraged me to think about a position in higher education because I had had a good experience in admissions.

I saw a registrar position at a sister-institution and applied. I initially thought the interview would be an hour or two and was informed it would be an all-day interview, including dinner! After the marathon interview, I was not offered the position. The institution hired the registrar from my alma mater. Additionally, I had not earned my master's degree.

Fast-forward 15 months; out of the blue, I received a call from the provost that the registrar position was open again. They were wondering if I'd be interested in reapplying. I was and had finished my master's a few months before. I reapplied, interviewed and was offered the position. Before accepting, the provost arranged for me to shadow a registrar at a peer institution so I would better understand the role and responsibilities of the position.

There are many paths to becoming a registrar. In talking with registrar colleagues over the years, the feedback I usually receive is one of surprise when they learn I was hired as the registrar, with only 3 years of admissions experience. As a result, I look for ways to share my experiences and the lessons I have learned with other registrars.

My Path to the Registrar Position

Stephanie Caldwell
University Registrar
Drew University

It is not like people wake up one day and say “I am going to be a registrar” or are able to major in registrar-ing. Most students at a large school do not even know what the registrar’s office does or that it exists. My first contact with the registrar's office as a student was my senior-year check and to submit my application to graduate.

When I was in high school, I was asked to assist in running a day camp for younger kids, organizing their health forms and other required forms. I showed up with folders color-coded by age, a list of students organized by age and last name, and a checklist of who had already submitted what. Based on the looks on the faces of the adults, it was the first time I realized that not everyone organized or prepared like I did.

This happened in my next few jobs as well–creating processes in the data-research mailroom to streamline sending and receiving mail, writing standard-operating-procedure manuals in facilities to understand each person’s role in the office and creating an access database of contacts for a nonprofit so their information was all in one place and searchable.

I did not go into these positions with any experience, and these were not direct requests made of me. It just made sense there should be organization, process and documentation, which led to efficiency and reliable data.

I answered a job posting to work in the registrar’s office to clear students for graduation. I had no idea what I was in for or if I could even do the job, based on the description.

Looking back, I had definitely built the skill set needed to be a registrar. When records were computerized, I no longer needed physical folders and labels, but I still maintained the desire to organize and standardize. Learning how to build and run reports allowed me to find bad data to clean and find patterns and recommend change, based on how data was used around the school.

Having access and the ability to understand how data goes into a system, who uses it and how it is used, aids me today in decision making or change management when working with cabinet, faculty and other university offices. You cannot be myopic in the registrar's office. You must understand how your decisions affect other offices, downstream decisions or how things may be done in the future, or you will always be playing catch up and changing how things are done.

Now that I am a registrar and hire for positions in my office, I look for certain traits and skills instead of experience. It is more important to me that someone has the attributes I want than experience with a student information system. Databases can be taught, but if you do not have a desire to learn how things work, an affinity for puzzles/logic, organization or clear communication (written and verbal), the registrar's office is not the right fit.

My path to a registrar position included much self-reflection and observation. This has allowed me to hone the traits that aid the office and the school, creating consistency, collaboration and reliable data.

My Path to the Registrar's Office

Karen Beckett
Associate Provost, Academic Support Services & University Registrar
University of Miami

When I was in college, let's just say a few years ago, I helped my friends plan out their courses each semester, using their degree planner. Yes, these were on paper and had handwritten updates on them. I enjoyed checking off the boxes and looking for ways to make schedules work around other college activities. Registration was another story–we all convened in the lobby of the registrar's office, keeping an eye on the person updating the big mobile chalkboard as they listed classes that were closed. Then we stood there frantically looking at our backup selections, hoping they did not close before our turn to register.

Little did I know a few years later, I would work in a registrar's office and be the person informing students a class was closed, hoping they did not start panicking in front of me.

For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a teacher, so I earned a secondary-education degree in English and began teaching reading and language arts in a middle school. It was not what I expected; before long, I left teaching to go back to a university in Texas as a residence hall director.

I had been a resident assistant then head resident during my undergraduate years. I was still in touch with my previous bosses who invited me to attend a national conference for housing and student personnel. I did that for several years before recognizing I would need an advanced degree to stay on this career path. I had been in my housing role long enough to know student affairs was not the right fit for me. If you know me, a degree in counseling & student personnel does not fit my personal and professional strengths. So I decided to apply to a fairly new academic program in enrollment management at the University of Miami.

Less than a year into the program, I was hired as an assistant registrar to create FERPA training and work on office assessment and reorganization that focused on process improvement. I also worked on the university's transition to web-based registration. After the first year, I realized this was the perfect fit for me–I was working in education and helping students but in a way that used my talents and interests. I also found the variety of services and the interaction with faculty, staff, students and parents kept my days from being monotonous.

Circumstances changed over the years. I worked my way from an assistant registrar to an associate registrar, followed by interim, then university registrar during a reorganization when we converted from the University's homegrown SIS to PeopleSoft. Through the years, my focus has remained on service and process improvement. I feel fortunate to have been able to vet and implement new systems and services to improve our faculty and students' experiences at the university.

When I started in the registrar's office, the belief across our institution and many others was that our role was limited to recordkeeping. To my benefit and our university community's benefit, I had a boss who believed we were more than an administrative office. The registrar's office was moved under the provost office and allowed to become an academic-focused administrative office that could directly impact processes, policies and systems to improve services for faculty and students.

Today, as an associate provost for academic support services, I have the opportunity to focus on student and faculty academic administration and push for continued review and improvement where needed. While there is always an element of luck or circumstance in our life, I have found focusing on improvement keeps everything moving forward. It also requires occasionally going out on a limb and pushing ideas not everyone is going to support, at least initially. I do believe you make your own luck or opportunities, so I continue to focus on what is new and next. This allows me to see what is coming and prepare for it to the best of my ability.