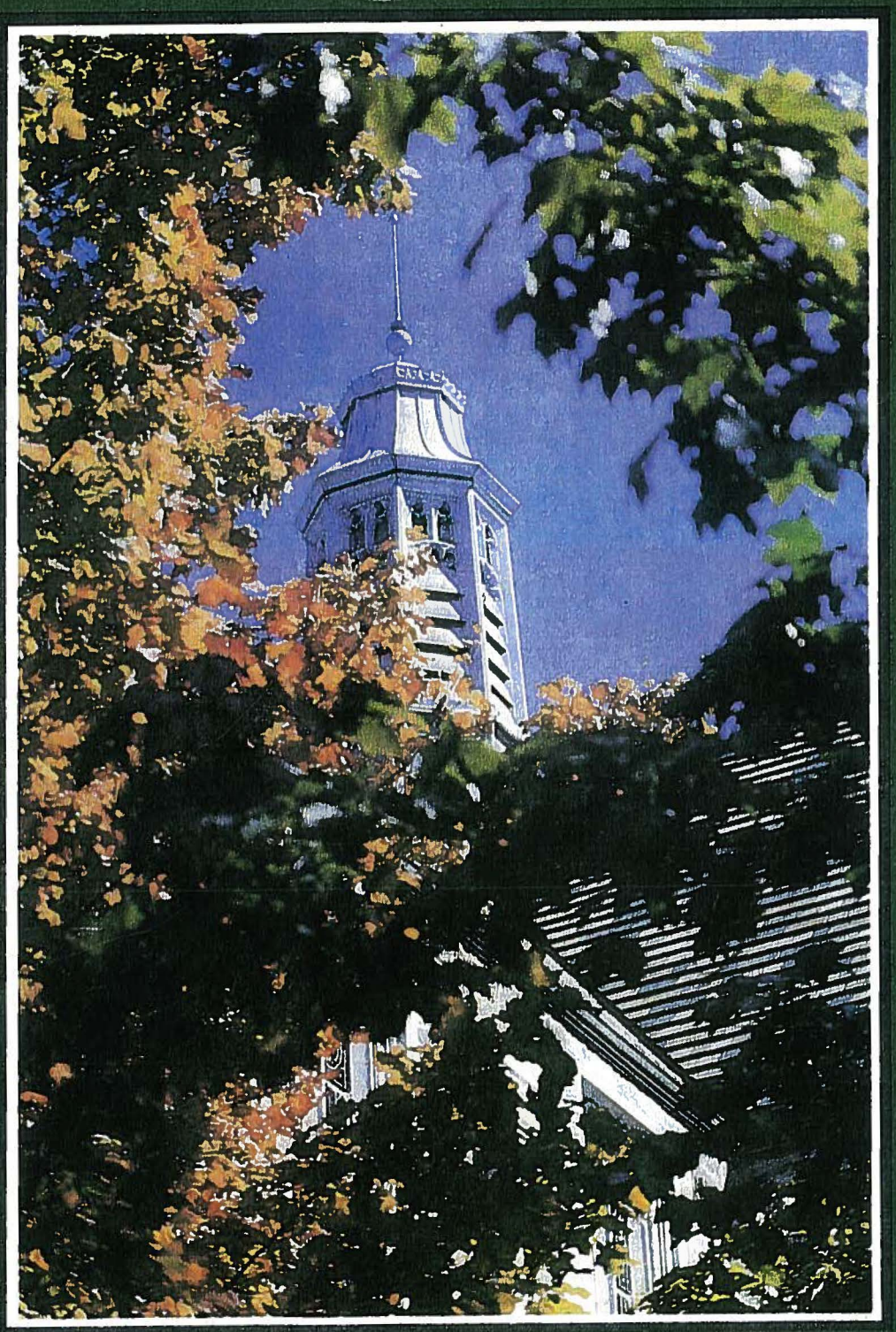
Boston College

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To the organized, go the students

The University operates with an Enrollment Management system that utilizes techniques ranging from 'marketing' to retention studies to insure high quality and numbers of students

by John Maguire

The next decade, most experts tell us, will be one of retrenchment for private higher education. Already there are application and enrollment drops that presage belt-tightening for the prestigious, and huge deficits, sagging faculty and student morale, and possible closings or mergers for many less fortunate colleges and universities.

The ominous signs are all around us. For one thing, the national birth rate has continued to plunge at a precipitate rate, so that there will be about 30 percent fewer 17-year-olds eligible for college in the late 1980s than there have been in recent years. Even more alarming is the perception among a growing number of young people today that, with escalating college costs and diminishing payoffs in terms of guaranteed career opportunities, a post-secondary education simply may not be worth the huge investment.

Boston College, as a private university with almost total dependence on tuition income, is in a particularly vulnerable position. An unanticipated shortfall of little more than two percent of the undergraduate student body would result in an immediate $1 million operating deficit. Six years ago, without warning, an even more serious deficit actually did occur and the reverberations from those bleak days of sharp tuition increases and a subsequent student strike are only now subsiding.

Today, all around the country, at other outstanding institutions such as the Universities of Detroit and San Francisco, as well as a myriad of smaller, weaker colleges, problems of enrollment drops, faculty cutbacks and budget crises are compounding. Within the past few months, one of the most important universities in the country, faced with an unanticipated large deficit, had to scurry for 100 additional freshmen after all notices of acceptance and rejection had long since been mailed to anxious applicants. And not all schools are so fortunate as to be able to offset such losses at the 11th hour.

But what does all this mean for this university in 1976 and beyond, into the next decade? Are we simply at the mercy of runaway economic and cultural forces that doom any optimistic vision of our future? Or can we plan in such a way as to force our fortunes to be decidedly different from others with less foresight?

Boston College takes the position that through conscientious planning and measured decision-making, we can exert significant influence over our destiny. To facilitate this, the University has undertaken during the last three years the most comprehensive long-range academic and fiscal planning in its 113-year history.

One of the major fruits of the effort has been the emergence of the concept of Enrollment Management. Simply stated, Enrollment Management is a process that brings together often disparate functions having to do with recruiting, funding, tracking, retaining and replacing students as they move toward, within and away from the University. Although these various strategies are, to one degree or another, widespread in most colleges and universities, Boston College has recently been on the leading edge of the growing movement to reduce fragmentation by systematizing and integrating these fields into one grand design.

There are five major goals of the University's evolving Enrollment Management program:

Marketing admissions

Boston College must continue to develop an admissions marketing program to attract outstanding students in sufficient numbers during a period of possible national enrollment declines.

Until four or five years ago the mere mention of the word "marketing," in the context of recruiting students, would probably have induced instantaneous dyspepsia in a faculty member or academic administrator. Now, due to a more sophisticated understanding of the marketing concept (and also because at many institutions livelihoods are threatened), colleges and universities are becoming more comfortable with this term.

The word, it must be emphasized, is not to be confused with hucksterism and slick sales techniques. Marketing is a systematic effort to merge institutional strengths with consumer (student) interests. The starting point for Boston College was the development of a long-range academic plan, which brought into sharper focus our institutional goals and objectives, as well as the specific programs that could best meet those goals. The next step becomes the identification of potential students whose interests and abilities best coincide with these offerings.

Although the admissions office is the most visible marketing agent in the University, a successful marketing effort has its foundation in outstanding programs and faculty. The task of a good admissions operation is to communicate these strengths to the student marketplace in a forthright and persuasive fashion.

In the past five years at Boston College, we have witnessed a startling increase in freshman/transfer applications, from 7,000 to 14,000. The reasons for this good fortune are many and certainly should not be attributed exclusively to better marketing. Boston College benefitted and



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learned from the misfortunes and mistakes of other institutions, even as we performed the difficult task of putting our own house in order through long-range fiscal and academic planning. Certainly, the equalization of the female-male population has greatly strengthened our attractiveness. And bold moves such as the acquisition of the Newton Campus and the construction of the magnificent Recreation Complex have contributed as well.

But new techniques in marketing have also played a major role. Perhaps the most significant advancement in this decade has been the addition of more than 1,000 alumni, faculty and student volunteers to the admissions program. Now, in all parts of the country (and even in Europe), B.C. alumni representatives are recruiting and counseling prospective students. Faculty members are giving unstintingly of their time by remaining on call for unscheduled office interviews and by visiting high schools. Students in unprecedented numbers have organized the Boston College Student Volunteer Program to facilitate peer interaction at all levels, from the standard tour to the admissions interview. Through these efforts, the capacity of the admissions staff to personalize service for prospective students and their families has been multiplied by at least a factor of 10.

Annual marketing questionnaires are now sent to all accepted applicants, both those who attend and those who choose to go elsewhere, in an effort to determine who or what first got them interested in Boston College, what factors ultimately influenced their decisions to attend or why they opted to go elsewhere. Through analysis of these surveys, trends can be spotted that sometimes result in adjustments to admissions strategy or even to University academic programs and student services.

Next to academic reputation, for example, our studies indicate that the two strongest reasons why students come to study here are the Boston location and the attractiveness of our campuses. One of the most pervasive "people" influences on prospective students turned out to be parents — far more important than guidance counselors or admissions officers. As a direct result of these discoveries, the city of Boston is now displayed much more prominently in all of our literature, campus photos are featured, the number of tours and on-campus interviews has been greatly increased and parents are encouraged to get involved more directly with the admissions process. These are but a few changes that have resulted from intensive market research.

The "Philadelphia experiment" is another example of the University's innovative marketing. To understand which admissions approaches were most cost-effective and also to determine the feasibility of opening up new recruitment areas, the greater Philadelphia region was singled out for a massive, diversified marketing experiment. Traditional recruitment methods such as high school visits, large receptions and direct mail and magazine advertising campaigns, were undertaken in a controlled fashion. Results to date indicate that the opportunity for market expansion does exist, but at a relatively high cost. Also, there is a carry-over from one year to the next, so that the investment does have a residual effect. Finally, this project has taught us that traditional methods, backed by the help of committed alumni, faculty, and student volunteers, will usually work better than the expensive "gimmicky" techniques.

By adopting a marketing orientation, Boston College now has a much more sharply honed understanding of students' perceptions of our position among our competitors. We can now pinpoint, and better influence, the sequence of decisions that determine the final investment (of four years) and $20,000 in a college education.

Research and information flow

Boston College must improve coordination of institutional research and information flow among University offices and with external agencies.

A fundamental aspect of Enrollment Management at Boston College is the accurate, timely tracking of student flow. At a school such as Harvard, this is a relatively simple matter: 1200 freshmen enter and four years later, with relatively few detours, about 1200 seniors graduate. Likewise at many of the smaller colleges now on open admissions, accounting for students presents few problems; everyone is admitted and most of what happens thereafter, with only one or two important exceptions, is essentially un-



controllable. But at this university, and others in our intermediate category, coordination of student migration can boggle the mind and at times confound the computer.

There are about 20 different ways to move in or out of a school or class at Boston College; entrance as a freshman in September and graduation four years later in May as a senior are but the two simplest possibilities. With the coming of the national "transfer phenomenon," students, often with goals decided well in advance, are freely switching programs and schools. This now happens so often at the national level that more than 50 percent of those graduating from four-year schools began elsewhere as freshmen.

Internal transfers are also multiplying, as are "drop-outs," "stop-outs," and students spending junior year abroad or on exchange programs. Admission and graduation at mid-year are now relatively commonplace, due both to changed high school graduation standards and increased chances for acceleration in college.

To understand and control this complex flow, reliable computerized information systems are essential. Standardized definitions, agreed to by all relevant departments, are necessary components of a useful data base. Most important of all, the coordination of data retrieval, with analysis and timely decision-making based on that data, must be maintained across departments.

It was primarily with this in mind that the University last year centralized the control of undergraduate admissions, financial aid for incoming students, records and registration. This has facilitated the continuous tracking of those students leaving the University as well as the immediate feedback of this information to freshman and transfer admissions, so that more accurate decisions on enrollment quotas (male/female, resident/commuter, the four undergraduate colleges, etc.) can be made.

Market prediction and institutional response

Boston College must develop a capability to anticipate immediate and long-term student interests and methods for improving its ability to provide for these interests.

This is probably the most difficult and most misunderstood of all the objectives of the Enrollment Management program. On the one hand, very little definitive work has been done at the national and state levels in the area of manpower planning and projected student demand; and on the other hand, it is not clear to what extent a university like Boston College, strongly committed to the enduring values of a liberal arts education, can and should adapt its curriculum to the vagaries of the marketplace.

Students today are more interested in career-oriented education than their predecessors were, as jobs in many fields have become more scarce. The pre-professional schools are still being deluged with applications, even though areas such as nursing and law are rapidly reaching saturation. The business school boom continues, especially among women motivated by changing attitudes and by increased opportunities through affirmative action programs.

How can Boston College cope with these trends while being true to ideals and meeting obligations to students seeking direction in a depressed job market? First of all, we should do everything possible to counsel applicants at the entry point and beyond about the realistic odds for achieving educational objectives in fields such as medicine and law. Secondly, we should explore alternatives that will allow them to keep options flexible for as long as possible, in case mid-course changes are called for. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we must be articulate and steadfast in defending those traditions rooted in a liberal arts, value-oriented education that contribute to "making a life and not merely a living."

We can do all this while conducting demand studies through such external agencies as the College Board and through internal processes such as registration and periodic student surveys; and while using this information to adjust, with all deliberate speed, school and departmental quotas and to reallocate resources wherever feasible in response to a changing market. We can use these Enrollment Management techniques while strongly resisting the idea of reacting to momentary fads by wholesale changes in the curriculum that depart from our basic commitment to a liberal arts tradition.

In summary, there is no necessary contradiction between using sophisticated information systems to respond to shifting student needs and maintaining a humanistic vision of what fundamentally constitutes a good education.

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Financial aid strategy

Boston College must implement financial aid strategies that will optimize our ability to attract and retain an appropriate socio-economic mix of students.

The University is justifiably proud that it maintains one of the largest federal financial aid programs in the country, coupled with a generous institutional allotment for scholarships and grants. However, with the soaring cost of private higher education in the 1970s (annual resident student expenses at Boston College are now well in excess of $5,000), these monies do not approach meeting the cumulative need of approximately 40 percent of our student body receiving aid. Given a continued commitment to the principle that only those who demonstrate financial need shall be eligible for aid, how does an institution with limited resources package awards in a fair and efficient way to achieve institutional goals? Among these goals are, most pragmatically, meeting overall enrollment objectives with the most qualified student body possible, and obtaining an appropriate distribution of minorities, women, commuters, low- and middle-income applicants, etc.

This is an enormously complex problem and there are no ready answers, either in the literature or in existing institutional models. Harvard has the endowment to meet the full need of all accepted applicants, while those schools unable to achieve full enrollments often unabashedly lure students with no-need scholarships, tuition discounts, and other even more questionable practices. One enterprising college in the Midwest, for example, randomly released thousands of helium balloons containing cards promising scholarships to (presumably qualified) people who found them.

One of the foremost goals of the Enrollment Management Program here is the development of mathematical models that will, *in the aggregate*, yield the best possible mix of students at a reasonable institutional expense, recognizing that we cannot meet full needs in most cases. The phrase "in the aggregate" is emphasized to underscore our belief that no computerized system can cope with a multitude of individual exceptions and that these should be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Significant progress has already been made in sorting out financial aid options such as: 1) flat across-the-board percentages for all; 2) most- to least-needy aided consecutively until funds are completely expended; 3) underfunding of all by a fixed amount; and 4) highest academic quality aided first. These results will soon be reported in a doctoral thesis at the University. There is already a strong indication that many of the national practices prevalent today in determining financial need and awarding aid will be called into serious question.

Retention — transfer

Boston College must formalize a retention program to identify reasons for attrition and to minimize this to whatever extent possible.

Every year, for a variety of extremely complex reasons, hundreds of undergraduates leave Boston College before



graduating. This past year approximately seven percent (net) departed, in most cases voluntarily by dropping-out, stopping-out, or transferring elsewhere; in some instances involuntarily through academic dismissal. We can take only small consolation in the knowledge that the national average is close to 25 percent.

Many of these students left us for compelling, positive reasons over which we can and should exert little control. As mentioned previously, the national transfer movement is growing, as a more mobile population of college students seeks educational and geographical di-

versity. Some students here redefine their career objectives and move in directions where we can no longer support their individual needs, such as forestry or architecture. In these instances, we have an obligation not only to eliminate serious administrative roadblocks to their departure, but also to provide counseling and other positive assistance to facilitate smooth transition. Concrete steps have already been taken at Boston College to provide both formal administrative channels and a successful peer counseling service.

It must also be acknowledged that there are students who depart, confused and unhappy, for all the wrong reasons. And there are some who never should have come here in the first place, either because they were never properly motivated or because there was a basic mismatch between them and the University community. In these cases, the institution must respond by adjusting aid packages, solving housing problems, increasing the availability of courses, improving the admissions selection process, and in a variety of other ways.

Through surveys and exit and admissions interviews, we must continuously monitor the reasonable criticisms by present students and those on the verge of leaving, to feed this information back into admissions policy and improve other University services whenever there is clear indication that this is necessary.

Several years ago, the University made the wise decision to become a leader in the field of transfer admissions. Now students by the thousands, mostly from other private four-year institutions, are seeking transfer to Boston College. We are in the fortunate position, because of this high demand, of being able to replace those who leave us with a highly qualified group of students who enrich our community with added dimensions of maturity and diversity.

With these opportunities, however, there are also problems that require Enrollment Management solutions. In areas such as course registration, priorities must be established among native students, cross registrants from other schools at the University and potential transfers. We must treat our existing students equitably, while achieving enrollment quotas and making the transition into Boston College as easy as possible for incoming transfers. Difficult decisions must be made about financial aid allocations to transfers as opposed to present students who claim they are leaving for financial reasons. Our obligations and possible strategies are not always readily apparent in matters as complicated as these.

Despite the obvious necessity and even the advantages of a large transfer program, Boston College is committed to identifying and correcting those problems that provoke students to leave us. In the final analysis, this kind of continual self-study and renewal will contribute to the health and stability of the University community and reduce even further the chance that we will ever become a school with revolving doors, unable to achieve enrollment objectives.

Clearly, the five goals of Enrollment Management are fluid and overlapping. All of them relate broadly to the idea of marketing; indeed, in a restricted sense, some would consider Enrollment Management to be a euphemism for marketing. The field is brand new, and as a result there are many more questions than answers, especially in areas such as long-term demand studies, financial aid strategies and retention. The merging of such disparate disciplines into the hybrid called Enrollment Management is, more than anything else, an effort to confront private higher education's uncertain future synergistically, i.e., in a way that will allow our integrated efforts to be greater than the sum of their individual parts. As was said at the outset, this has been done at Boston College with the firm belief that our future, though precarious, is ultimately controllable.



John F. Kennedy, then a U.S. Representative, joined students from Boston College and other Catholic colleges at the convention of the National Federation of Catholic College Students held on campus in the spring of 1951. Pictured are, left to right, Daniel Shea, '51, Kennedy, John McCluskey, '51, and Msgr. Cornelius Sherlock, '22.

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