



ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT HAS BECOME AN IMPORTANT LEADERSHIP FUNCTION ON MANY COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES. IT IS ALSO ATTRACTING CRITICAL ATTENTION HERE AND ABROAD AMONG OBSERVERS

# Enrollment Management

## **MANAGING ENROLLMENT**

OF OUR SYSTEM OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION. WITH THIS ESSAY, WE BEGIN A SERIES THAT WILL EXAMINE POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT ARE CENTRAL TO CAMPUS-BASED EFFORTS TO MANAGE ENROLLMENTS AND ACHIEVE ENROLLMENT GOALS, THEREBY CLARIFYING AN “ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE” ON ISSUES RANGING FROM ADMISSIONS MARKETING, TO RANKINGS, FINANCIAL AID, AND STUDENT SUCCESS. THE GOAL OF THESE ESSAYS, WHICH WILL BE A REGULAR FEATURE OF FUTURE ISSUES OF *COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY*, IS TO EXTEND OUR UNDERSTANDING OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT, EXAMINE THE UNDERPINNINGS OF THIS EMERGING PROFESSION, AND PROMOTE PROFESSIONAL DIALOGUE



## Setting the Context for Dialogue

In the early 1980s, The College Board and Loyola University of Chicago sponsored the first national conferences on enrollment management.

These early conferences drew a sparse attendance but served nevertheless to engage a number of early adopters in defining this emerging concept. The term “enrollment management” was still new; having been coined in the mid-1970s at Boston College, no one was quite sure what it entailed. Yet even at these earliest conferences, several core principles were crystallizing: enrollment management involves a marketing orientation toward student recruitment and admissions; student retention is as important a part of enrollment efforts as student recruitment; financial aid can be used in a systematic fashion to achieve enrollment goals. Early advocates of enrollment management incorporated the use of strategic planning models to achieve enrollment goals, using research and analysis to guide planning and strategy. Since it first arrived on the higher education scene, enrollment management has been seen as a process of bringing discipline, integration, and intentionality to the process of achieving an institution’s enrollment goals.

In addition to defining some core principles of enrollment management, early practitioners also had an interest in optimal organization structures. The structural question has always been twofold: (1) to be most effective, what

functions or units should be organized together as part of an enrollment management effort, and (2) how should the enrollment management effort itself be structured within the broader college or university organizational context? The first question asks if offices such as registration and records, orientation, career planning, academic advising, and marketing should be included with admissions and financial aid as part of the enrollment management effort. The second asks whether these enrollment management units should be aligned with traditional structures such as student or academic affairs or whether they should constitute an entirely separate structure with its own senior campus leader (such as a vice president or associate provost for enrollment management).

Since those early beginnings of enrollment management, much has happened to shape the administrative practices of our field, to refine its core principles, and to explore structural alternatives. The AACRAO-sponsored Annual Meeting for Strategic Enrollment Management—which will mark its 18th year in 2008—has become a major annual conference attracting more than 1,000 professionals from the United States, Canada, and several other countries. References to enrollment management now are common throughout both scholarly and professional publications in the field of higher education. Graduate courses and degrees in enrollment management are found in higher education curricula. College and university officers with enrollment management in their title and responsibilities are commonplace, as are enrollment management consultants. Even if its core principles and optimal structures have evolved over the past 30 years and its scope and purposes still evade simple definition, there is no question that enrollment management is now and will continue to be a fixture in higher education administration.

There also is no question that the practice of enrollment management increasingly has been criticized, often sharply, by thoughtful observers of higher education. In the last five years, numerous magazine articles and editorials have critiqued enrollment management as an example of what's wrong with American higher education. Critics have described enrollment management as part of the "winner-takes-all" orientation that has a negative influence on access and equity and that thereby diminishes the underlying values of a postsecondary education. Critics have equated enrollment management with a range of specific strategies designed to deliberately shape enrollment outcomes such as increasing selectivity, optimizing net revenue, and improving student academic profile—all in ways that work against broad educational values and the social good. Critics have identified enrollment management strategies as causal factors in the pervasive pursuit of prestige—the 'arms race'—in American higher education.

It is indeed true that enrollment management tools, techniques, and tactics can be used in ways that constrain certain outcomes even as they pursue other outcomes. Enrollment management strategies can and do constrain some equity outcomes for students from low-income and first-generation backgrounds as the strategies simultaneously strive to enhance net revenue outcomes and prestige; in short, enrollment management does attempt to balance and manage tradeoffs between access and other institutional goals. Enrollment management strategies can and do bring a calculated, empirical perspective on and market orientation toward the real costs and the consequences of espoused values such as increasing diversity and access. It is that perspective that attracts so much of the criticism.

But in the spirit of *playfulness*, we would ask this: If enrollment management has such a negative impact on students and institutions and the social good, what is the alternative? Should institutions not attempt to plan for and manage their enrollments? Should colleges and universities just let their enrollments happen? Many critics hint at bygone days when institutional enrollment practices exhibited greater integrity and reflected some "higher order values" than they do today. Scholars who have examined the history of American higher education have found scant evidence to suggest that there was ever a time in the history of American colleges and universities when institutions' leaders were not attempting to exert influence, directly or indirectly, on the numbers and types and mix of students enrolled in order to achieve the institution's mission and goals.

We suggest that few presidents or boards of trustees or faculty would be willing to take a *laissez-faire* attitude with student enrollment, to be nonchalant about the dominant source of institutional revenue, to be undisciplined and unintentional and uninformed in the functions and processes that have such a powerful impact on the mission, health, and vitality of an institution. The stakes are too high, the consequences too great to not be as deliberate, as knowledgeable, as intentional, and as effective as possible in the pursuit of an institution's desired strategic enrollment goals. But if managing enrollments is a natural and necessary process with no viable or sustainable alternatives, then why is the practice of enrollment management perceived as so problematic?

Considering that question prompts us to reflect on how to locate the concepts and practices of enrollment management in the institutional context. In this essay, we attempt to situate both the practice of enrollment management and the tensions associated with managing enrollments as campuses strive to achieve important societal and institutional goals.

## **ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT REVISITED**

Enrollment management strategies enable institutions to pursue their strategic goals in more informed, intentional, and integrated ways. At its core, enrollment management uses a wide range of applied social science research methods and models of strategic planning and analysis to achieve enrollment goals. This includes research that measures an institution's competitive market position relative to other institutions; that assesses how a campus is perceived by prospective students; that explores why students do or do not matriculate; and that seeks to understand why and how students progress to graduation, drop out, or transfer. Enrollment management strategies employ financial and econometric modeling to understand the influence of price and financial aid on students' decisions to enroll and to persist and to explore how changes in price and aid can shape a wide range of enrollment outcomes, including increasing net tuition revenue, enhancing the academic profile, and achieving diversity and access. Enrollment management uses marketing research methods to identify opportunities for expanded outreach and market position as well as for assessing an institution's brand image. It uses business modeling to understand enrollment capacities or the costs and benefits of enrollment growth in specific programs. Findings from these kinds of applied studies are then used to enable colleges and universities to deliberately segment student markets and to execute ap-

(ORIGINAL ADVERTISEMENT REMOVED)

propriate marketing, recruitment, and retention activities in order to enroll and graduate the desired number, profile, and mix of students.

There is nothing inherently pernicious or even inappropriate in these activities. The key question for institutions of higher education is not whether to apply enrollment management strategies and techniques but to what end? The key questions include: What are the institution's goals and aspirations that guide the enrollment management practice? How are those goals established and evaluated and prioritized? How adequately do relevant research, analysis, and modeling guide the planning process? How are institutional goals and aspirations translated into enrollment management programs, and how does enrollment management, in turn, inform institutional goal setting? And what is the institution willing and able to invest and to do to achieve those goals and aspirations? In addition, we submit that senior campus policy makers at least in the nonprofit sector (which receives direct subsidies if they are public institutions or indirect subsidies because they are tax exempt) also should examine how their decisions about student enrollments help to achieve broader societal goals. Answering these questions constitutes one important step in locating enrollment management in the institutional context.

The enrollment goals of senior campus administrators are almost always multifaceted and complex; they also are almost always in conflict with one another. Likewise, the relative priority given to multiple enrollment goals tends to vary between campus constituencies in predictable ways: the goals of faculty often vary from those of financial officers, for example. These multiple goals can range from attracting more students to under-enrolled majors to increasing the numbers of national merit scholars; they can include increasing six-year graduation rates and increasing enrollment of students from out of state. In this (and succeeding) essays, however, we focus on six primary and overarching goals found at most campuses: improving market position and market demand; enhancing the academic profile of the student body; ensuring the economic diversity of the student body; ensuring racial/ethnic diversity; improving persistence and graduation rates; and increasing net tuition revenue.

The pursuit of each of these goals requires different patterns of marketing investments and expenditures, alternative staffing patterns, varied approaches to admissions and recruitment, different pricing and financial aid strategies, and a range of programmatic initiatives. Each goal thus is in competition with the others for money, staff time, and

institutional attention. Of course, that's always the case in institutions of higher education: Multiple and varied goals vie for position and priority in the allocation of scarce resources. But at the crux of the strategic nature of enrollment management goals is the fact that the simultaneous pursuit of *all* of these goals requires a difficult balancing act not only of resources but also of competing *outcomes*; it requires the management of multiple tradeoffs since in many ways these enrollment goals are in conflict and often are mutually incompatible. We suggest that it is in the process of helping senior campus administrators and boards of trustees to understand, define, prioritize, and balance these institutional goals that we locate the heart and soul of any enrollment management strategy.

Several examples are illustrative. Increasingly, institutions seek to increase the enrollment of low-income and/or first-generation students in order to fulfill missions of access and educational opportunity. This typically requires special recruitment and student support programs along with new staff and services; it also likely requires more campus-funded need-based aid. Simultaneously, improving the academic profile of the student body—a persistent goal and aspiration at most institutions—may require new targeted marketing efforts, perhaps new academic programs such as Honors Colleges, and, at many campuses, increases in campus-funded merit-based aid. Finally, budgetary requirements to increase net tuition revenue not only drive annual tuition pricing increments but also often require campuses to provide scholarships to students not otherwise eligible for either need-based or merit-based aid; these students can afford to pay most or all of the costs of attendance but may be unwilling to do so without some grant or scholarship (an outcome of the analytic process referred to as *financial aid leveraging*). Most institutions seek to improve their performance in all three of these areas; in short, they want it all. Ultimately, however, these goals compete both in the allocation and reallocation of required budgeted resources as well as in the balancing of the conflicting outcomes (*e.g.*, more merit scholarships to improve the academic profile reduces net tuition revenue; increasing access of low-income students often adversely affects some traditional measures of the class academic profile). The responsibility for setting these priorities does not rest solely with the enrollment management leadership but rather with the entirety of an institution's executive leadership, with the board of trustees, and with the prevailing governance and strategic planning processes, as well.

As another example, except for a small number of very wealthy colleges and universities with large endowments,

annual net tuition revenues (NTR) determine the health and quality of the educational experience that a college or university can offer its students and faculty. Deliberately pursuing increased NTR is not necessarily a reflection of institutional greed or some perverse inversion of institutional values and priorities. Rather, it is an essential element of educational improvement, especially at the vast majority of American colleges and universities that rely upon student tuition for a substantial share of institutional revenue. One of the notable successes of the evolution of enrollment management practices and principles is an improved understanding of the complex interplay of any given institution's market position, student profile, tuition price, and financial aid strategy in producing, sustaining, and increasing its NTR. Perhaps as a result of the increasing prevalence, precision, and effectiveness of the analytic tools and financial models now used to achieve NTR goals and balance those goals with competing values of access, diversity, and academic profile, it is one of the practices in the crosshairs of the critics of enrollment management. Indeed, practices associated with the use of merit aid are at the center of much of the current criticism of enrollment management. (We address this important topic in a subsequent essay.) As we seek to locate enrollment management, it's essential not to confuse means with ends, not to equate tools and techniques with goals and priorities. Annually budgeted goals for net tuition revenue are established in institutional budget processes that typically involve senior administrative and academic leadership, faculty governance, and board approval.

As a third example, many campus policy makers find themselves in complex trade-offs when they attempt simultaneously to improve graduation rates and to pursue goals of socioeconomic and ethnic diversity. Research clearly demonstrates that for many reasons, low-income, first-generation, African-American, and/or Latino students are at greater risk of dropping out. Comparative data are almost painfully compelling in demonstrating the correlations between institutions' diversity and graduation rates. A public policy environment where graduation rates are used increasingly (and too simplistically) as an institutional accountability measure creates powerful disincentives to enroll larger numbers of students who in all likelihood will depress overall graduation rates. This is not to suggest that campuses can do nothing to improve these students' success; in fact, the range of retention programs and strategies on most campuses continues to expand. These strategies require substantial investments in student support programs because disproportionately more of

these students lack adequate academic preparation, previous positive experiences in educational environments, and financial resources to sustain academic progress toward degree completion. While colleges and universities can help students overcome their disadvantages, experience and evidence suggest that they cannot be completely overcome—thus creating yet another difficult trade-off in institutional priorities and goals.

These simple examples illustrate the scope and complexity of the enrollment management agenda at many institutions. More important, these dynamic complexities and realities demonstrate the difficult institutional decisions the leadership of most colleges and universities confronts. While these choices constitute the foundation of any enrollment management strategy, they are not solely enrollment management issues; ultimately, they are issues of institutional mission, campus aspirations, and the extent to which policy makers choose to emphasize their public service roles.

### **HOW THEN SHOULD ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS BE STRUCTURED?**

Regardless of the challenge we have in describing the purposes and responding to critics of enrollment management, there continues to be a great deal of interest in how to structure enrollment management organizations and in what functions should be part of these units. These interesting and important questions are difficult to answer for several reasons. First, the structural question presupposes that we can answer the more basic question, *What works best?* To date, there is no singular, definitive answer. No empirical evidence exists to attest whether the structure and composition of enrollment units influences their effectiveness. Ample examples of successful enrollment management efforts achieved with radically different organizational models and structures can be found. We believe that if enrollment management is to fully reflect the way by which an institution realizes its mission and its academic and business goals, then structure should follow strategy and so should reflect the particular, idiosyncratic institutional culture, climate, and character.

In lieu of evidence that leads to a prescriptive overview of organizational structure, we offer the following thoughts on the structure and composition of enrollment management organizations:

- Campuses benefit from having a senior administrator who, as a knowledgeable enrollment officer, can sit at the table with other senior policy makers and bring an enrollment management perspective to policy decisions

related to student enrollment and to academic and financial planning.

- To whom the enrollment officer reports is not as important as ensuring that the president, the chief academic and financial officers, and the governing boards and bodies develop and share a deep, abiding, and informed understanding of student enrollment issues, strategies, outcomes, challenges, and opportunities. The enrollment management officer must report to someone who will devote attention to keeping enrollment matters at the forefront of institutional planning and policy. When existing vice presidents cannot or will not do this, institutions benefit by creating a vice president or vice provost for enrollment management who reports directly to the president and provost. One thing is certain: When colleges and universities create a vice president or vice provost for enrollment management, that officer will know very clearly that her responsibility is to place enrollment goals and issues at the forefront of institutional planning.
- Broad organizational alignments matter. Structure and strategy exist and evolve in a continuous, mutually reinforcing process. Therefore, when enrollment management functions are integrated organizationally or structurally with student affairs, they have different orientations, approaches, and priorities than those that are integrated with, for example, academic affairs. Enrollment management organizations aligned with institutional marketing manifest different perspectives and priorities than those aligned with operations and administrative services. Pros and cons of such alignments are many, but what matters is the particular institutional context and idiosyncratic character that dictate how such alignments function and evolve. There is not one perfect solution independent of institutional context, but these alignments do in fact matter, and they do have consequences.
- There are many variations on the types of units and functions that comprise enrollment management organizations, and there is no one model that would serve as an appropriate prescriptive template for every college or university. Typically, admissions and financial aid offices are brought together into enrollment management units; offices managing records and registration, orientation and course placement, student accounts and financial services, advising and student support units, and career services more and more frequently are integrated into enrollment management functions. But what is perhaps more important than the particular units that comprise an organizational cluster called *enrollment management* are the overarching capacities the enrollment manage-

ment organization needs to have in order to guide institutional and enrollment planning and to execute enrollment strategies. We offer several examples:

- ▶ Enrollment management is fueled by a comprehensive research agenda and a need for on-going action research that often is not adequately met by traditional institutional research units; an effective enrollment management organization needs the capacity to conduct ongoing studies and analysis of the admissions process, of the effects of financial aid on matriculation, of student retention, etc. One of the defining characteristics of enrollment management is that it is a data-driven, research-dependent process.
- ▶ The enrollment management organization needs the capacity both to drive and to support institutional marketing strategy and tactics. As marketing evolves to include brand marketing, one-to-one relationship marketing, or word-of-mouth marketing, and as institutional visibility, recognition, brand identity, and competitive market position play an increasingly prevalent role in realizing enrollment goals, the institutional marketing strategy needs to be fully integrated with its core enrollment strategy, and vice versa.
- ▶ Enrollment management is increasingly dependent on information systems and technologies; it is very much a technology-intensive process and enterprise. The enrollment management organization therefore must have the capacity to partner with campus IT divisions in developing, implementing, and managing integrated data systems and web-based strategies and services—and in prioritizing the many competing demands for systems development.
- ▶ Perhaps even more than organizational structures and capacities, effective enrollment management requires an institutional culture and climate characterized as an *open systems environment*. The factors that influence student enrollment outcomes are too complex for one administrative unit to control and manage, regardless of its scope and composition; it is a truism that all offices and individuals can and do influence student enrollments, from the activities of campus marketing and branding efforts, to the range of academic offerings, to the quality of student life. Open systems environments encourage the broad sharing of information and decision making and discourage the creation of organizational silos that operate independently of one another. Enrollment management organizations require the capacity to build and to manage processes by which academic and student service

units can explore enrollment opportunities and clarify and define enrollment capacities and constraints. For example, enrollment management officers need to partner with faculty and academic deans in planning the development of new curricula and new academic programs that respond to market realities. The mix of curricular offerings at an institution shapes enrollment outcomes in many ways. Yet developing new academic programs and revising current programs is a process that on many campuses is so exclusively controlled by faculty that essential enrollment management perspectives either are excluded or are addressed too late in the process—either by design or by default—to have any impact. In contexts characterized by more open systems, enrollment management can and does provide information about market demand, trends in student interests, and competitive market position that can inform decisions about the curriculum. An open systems approach that invites an enrollment management perspective into the planning process and encourages the use of enrollment and market data in decision making is essential to successful enrollment management.

## CONCLUSION

Enrollment management is a set of strategies, practices, and perspectives that can help an institution more effectively achieve its mission and goals. These strategies, practices, and perspectives can be used to increase socioeconomic diversity or to enhance institutional prestige, to optimize enrollment capacity or to elevate academic profile. Enrollment management is about managing the pursuit of the institution's enrollment goals and outcomes. Ultimately, it falls to the board of trustees, executive administrators, and governance structures to set appropriate priorities to ensure that both short- and long-term institutional and societal goals are kept in balance. However, senior enrollment management leaders can and must play an important role in helping senior policy makers understand the tensions and trade-offs embedded in many of the decisions they make. Having a disciplined and intentional process and an organizational structure for managing the pursuit of possibly competing enrollment goals is something in which no one would find fault. It is in that institutional process of framing an informed view of enrollment challenges and opportunities that we believe we locate the core of enrollment management.

In this first essay we have attempted to provide some prefatory context for how we can define and locate the

strategies and practices of enrollment management within the administrative and planning structures of colleges and universities. We have attempted to set this context for an ongoing discussion of the rapidly evolving policies and practices and perspectives associated with enrollment management. In future issues of *College and University*, we will reflect upon what insights an enrollment management perspective brings to such topics as the concept of market position, the role of technology, student retention, the effects of public policy on enrollment practices, the potential impact of demographic trends, the impact of college rankings and accountability movements, and the use of financial aid in enrollment management.

## About the Authors

**DON HOSSLER, PH.D.**, is a Professor of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies and Director of the Project on Academic Success. He is also the Coordinator of the Higher Education and Student Affairs graduate programs. Hossler has served as the Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Services for Indiana University Bloomington, and the Associate Vice President for Enrollment Services for the seven campuses of the Indiana University system, the Executive Associate Dean for the School of Education, and Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies. His areas of specialization include: college choice, student persistence, student financial aid policy, and enrollment management.

Hossler has consulted with more than 45 colleges, universities, and related educational organizations including: The College Board, Educational Testing Services, the University of Cincinnati, Inter-American University of Puerto Rico, the Pew Charitable Trust, the University of Missouri, Colorado State University, the University of Alabama, and the General Accounting Office of the United States Government. He has presented more than 130 scholarly papers and invited lectures, and is the author, or co-author, of twelve books and monographs and more than 65 articles and book chapters. Hossler is currently directing funded projects of The College Board, the Lumina Foundation for Education, and the Spencer Foundation focusing on student success and persistence. He has received national awards for his research and scholarship from the American College Personnel Association and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

**DAVID H. KALSBECK, PH.D.**, serves as Senior Vice President for Enrollment Management and Marketing at DePaul University in Chicago. In that capacity, he leads the marketing and enrollment development strategies for the nation's largest Catholic university enrolling 23,000 students in nine colleges and six campuses throughout the greater Chicago region. His responsibilities at DePaul encompass enrollment management, career services and employer relations, university and media relations, marketing communications, and institutional planning and research. A leader in enrollment management in American higher education for more than 20 years, the innovative models he has developed at DePaul have been highlighted by CASE, by The Association of Governing Boards, by The American Marketing Association, by AACRAO, and by other professional associations as examples of best practices in the field of enrollment management and marketing. He has given over 110 professional presentations, authored eighteen publications including chapters in seven books on higher education administration, and consulted with more than 40 institutions and associations.

Prior to joining DePaul in 1997, Dr. Kalsbeck served as the senior enrollment management administrator at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, and before that, at Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri. Dr. Kalsbeck holds a Ph.D. in Public Policy Analysis from Saint Louis University.

*This article originally appeared in College & University (Volume 83, No. 4 [2008]), and is being reproduced/distributed with the permission of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. © Copyright 2008.*