



DURING THE YEARS WHEN ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT WAS EMERGING AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL CONSTRUCT, IT PRIMARILY FOCUSED ON RECRUITING NEW STUDENTS, AND MARKETING WAS A CENTRAL EMPHASIS OF ITS EARLIEST APPROACHES. EVEN TODAY, AACRAO'S ANNUAL STRATEGIC

# Enrollment Management

ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT (SEM) CONFERENCE REMAINS EXTENSIVELY POPULATED WITH SESSIONS ON RECRUITMENT-ORIENTED MARKETING. BUT TO THE MEDIA AND TO MANY CRITICS OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, A MARKETING ORIENTATION IS OFTEN THE FOCAL POINT OF CRITICISMS OF CONTEMPORARY INSTITUTIONAL ENROLLMENT PRACTICES. ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS EDUCATION CONSERVANCY AND NACAC CRITICIZE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES FOR INTENSIFYING THE COMPETITIVENESS FOR ADMISSION AND FOR USING MARKETING TACTICS THAT DO NOT PROMOTE THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION. NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES (SEE FOR EXAMPLE *ATLANTIC MONTHLY*, NOVEMBER, 2005) HAVE CRITICIZED THE 'WINNER TAKE ALL' APPROACH EMPLOYED BY MANY COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES TO ATTRACT AND ENROLL STUDENTS AND FOR THE ENCROACHMENT OF A MARKETING MINDSET INTO THE ACADEMY.



BY DAVID H. KALSBEK AND DONALD HOSSLER

## A Market-Centered Perspective

At a recent conference sponsored by the Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice at the University of Southern California, Gary Rhodes (formerly a Professor of Higher Education at the University of Arizona and now General Secretary of the AAUP) suggested that colleges and universities do indeed seem to be characterized more by their *strategic imitation* rather than *strategic imagination* as their singular pursuit of prestige is shaping to an extreme degree the strategic agenda of colleges and universities. Clearly the emergence of the rankings industry has further intensified the notion that there is a hierarchy of colleges and universities wherein institutions all adhere to common definitions of quality, with the top of an ordinal ranking being the highest quality and wherein all institutions seek desperately to move up a notch. Too often, both the advocates and the critics of recruitment marketing seem to assume that American colleges and universities are a highly homogenous group, marching lockstep toward identical objectives and in pursuit of identical outcomes, only varying in the degree to which they've successfully attained a uniformly shared set of goals and quality outcomes.

All enrollment management officers are aware of the stark differences between institutions that occupy different places on the so-called 'food chain' or 'pecking order' of the higher education marketplace. Unfortunately, *U.S. News* and the rankings industry have taken these institutional attributes and assigned a quality judgment, with good, better and best comparisons, elevating these alleged differences in quality by catering to the American penchant for ordinal rankings and lists of 'the best of.' But regardless of how rankings have taken natural differences between institutions and created a beauty contest among them, we've long been aware of the fact that there is symmetry and stratification to this marketplace, that every institution occupies a fairly distinct position relative to each other institution.

Like many aspects of enrollment management, however, the reality is more variegated and complex than many critics acknowledge. Not one of the many assertions or criticisms about EM and marketing can be interpreted or even understood absent an appreciation for the systemic, stratified nature of the marketplace that defines American higher education. The reality is that every college and

university does occupy a distinct place on a continuum of institutions, and that there are clear and discrete institutional attributes that define a college's position in a structured marketplace. But that position is not just some qualitative value reflected in an easily measured or computed ordinal ranking; the institutional market is neither that simple nor simplistic. Scholarly observers of higher education such as Bill Becker and David Round as well as Bob Zemsky have argued that there is not one single market for colleges and universities; rather the marketplace is comprised of multiple markets. These *markets* of America's colleges and universities are defined by sets of institutional attributes that interact to define various market niches and segments of institutional types.

Too often, members of the media and critics of higher education tend to look at one segment of institutions or at the kinds of students enrolling in one segment of the marketplace and then generalize from that subset to the whole; it is not unlike visiting the Hamptons and generalizing to the American housing market at large. Even those within the higher education community commit similar offense; our industry newspapers often focus on institutions representing a narrow band of the market, especially when writing about admissions and enrollment management. Even more disturbing, commentators on the wide-ranging issues of the day in American higher education (*e.g.*, the use of standardized testing in college admissions, the escalating tuition price, the prevalence of merit-based aid and increasing tuition discount, the use of graduation rates as measures of institutional accountability) seem generally oblivious to the realities and complexities of the marketplace for higher education that underlie and frame all of these issues.

Enrollment Management, we've suggested in earlier essays, is a deliberate process of achieving an institution's preferred enrollment profile, starting by identifying the strategic purposes and mission of the institution, and then orchestrating the marketing, recruitment, admissions, pricing and aid, retention programs, academic support services and program development required to achieve those outcomes. What is too often overlooked or perhaps not made explicit is that those aspirations and those preferred strategic futures can not be framed independent of the market context within which the institution exists. Enrollment management must begin by assessing the dynamics that create the competitive market context which

in real and measureable ways prescribes and circumscribes the range of strategic futures an institution in all likelihood has to choose among. Understanding that marketplace is the prerequisite to all strategic enrollment planning; exploring that further is the purpose of this essay.

## MARKETING, MARKETS AND MARKET POSITION

From its initial emergence as a practice in American higher education, enrollment management has been tied to *marketing*. Some of the seminal texts that framed EM's earliest perspectives included "Applying Market Research to College Admissions" published by the College Board in 1983. Tom Huddleston and Bill Ihlandfeldt were two early advocates of integrating enrollment management and institutional marketing. Now after several decades, the inseparability of marketing and enrollment management is reflected in the fact that two of the preeminent annual national conferences on enrollment management and marketing (AACRAO's SEM and the American Marketing Association's Symposium on the Marketing of Higher Education) have a program that is often virtually indistinguishable. Marketing as a process and as a discipline has become inextricably intertwined with the practice of EM and the language of marketing is a natural part of the EM lexicon.

Marketing strategies employed in enrollment management presume that there are *markets* to be served through higher education programs. Markets can be defined by the diverse set of prospective students seeking postsecondary education; markets can be defined as employers or industries with workforce needs met by graduates of colleges and universities; markets can be regions served through education offerings. Markets can be defined by a combination of these factors. A disciplined approach to enrollment management requires a keen appreciation of the nature of markets to be served by an institution.

But it is neither the practice of *marketing* nor this notion of student *markets* that is the focus of this essay. What is not so commonly discussed is how the structure, stratification and segmentation of the marketplace of higher education institutions creates the context that frames enrollment planning and enrollment outcomes at every college or university. Whether explicitly considered or not in enrollment management strategy, the higher education market and an institution's relative position in that marketplace prescribes to a significant degree the strate-

gic challenges and opportunities facing every college and university. Indeed, we would argue that a failure to understand an institution's relative market position will result either in the failure of enrollment and marketing strategies or at the very least an inefficient use of institutional resources to achieve desired enrollment goals.

## MEASURING MARKET POSITION

Most senior enrollment management officers know the value of thoughtfully assessing and evaluating their institution's enrollment in comparative and competitive contexts through a regular and rigorous program of enrollment research. Such research efforts take many forms, including these examples from several hypothetical colleges:

- Using publicly available data, Alpha College determines how its enrollment levels compare to the other private colleges in the state. In addition to tracking its own enrollment gains and losses, Alpha calculates what proportion (*i.e.* what market share) it has captured of the entire state's enrollment in undergraduate and graduate nursing curricula, for example; by tracking which institutions are gaining or losing share as well as gaining or losing enrollment, Alpha gauges how its gains or losses parallel that of all institutions in the state and only then can fully appreciate its own trends. Plotting Alpha's relative market share is one way of determining its market position.
- Using a variation of an Admitted Student Survey that has been widely in use for over 20 years in colleges and universities, Beta College routinely asks its applicants to evaluate Beta as well as the other colleges to which they applied. Across dozens of attributes including academic reputation, campus facilities and student diversity, applicants' perceptions of Beta relative to its competitors can be measured, compared and mapped. Beta's comparative market position in the minds of its applicants, its strengths and weaknesses among many important attributes, can thereby be assessed and tracked relative to key competitors.
- Sigma College routinely studies the ACT profile of all students sending scores to their school, identifying not only which other schools they overlap with, but how that overlap group differs between those in the highest test score range and those prospective students in the lowest test score range, or how those rates of overlap

vary by prospective students' intended area of study or by demographic attributes. Using these ACT data to define the market of college-bound students, Sigma can determine what share of Hispanic students in their state are aware of and interested in Sigma, how that compares to the share of African-American students who are interested, for example, and what Sigma's market position is relative to other institutions in terms of visibility and attractiveness to segments of their prospective student population.

- Using FAFSA data, Kappa College routinely identifies all the institutions to which its aid applicants also file for financial aid, providing a clear picture of the comparative arena within which its aid applicants are making their college selection. Tracking changes over time in the mix and the rank of institutions included on the FAFSA helps define Kappa's market position. Moreover, as Kappa has invested in developing an aid leveraging analysis to allocate and optimize its aid budgets, that analysis also shows the price responsiveness by various segments of Kappa's applicant pool and thereby defines and measures its market position.
- Using National Student Clearinghouse data, Zeta College identifies the colleges at which its non-enrolling admitted students actually did enroll. With such readily available data, Zeta can describe with great precision its competitive niche. Knowing that its most academically high profile applicants had a very low yield and those not enrolling disproportionately enrolled at Zeta's competitor Omega University helps map Zeta's relative market attractiveness as well as help evaluate the adequacy of its scholarship program.

All of these are examples of assessments that help place a college in a competitive and comparative context with clear metrics and empirical discipline; in effect, they help define a college's market position relative to other institutions and enable an evaluation of its market performance relative to peers or competitors. Understanding an institution's market position, and measuring and mapping that position in a market context is one of the fundamental building blocks of any EM effort. Only within such a comparative context can enrollment goals and objectives realistically be established, strategies appropriately evaluated and outcomes meaningfully interpreted.

## BENCHMARKING AS MARKET MAPPING

Higher education institutions have available to them rich resources of data about other institutions' student, financial and institutional profiles. Data from IPEDS are often used by institutional researchers to compare institutional attributes such as number of student applications, SAT or ACT test scores, the ethnic composition of the student body, and information about campus-based financial aid awarded by different institutions. They also allow a set of competitors or aspirational peers or institutions with common institutional identities (*e.g.* Catholic universities, urban publics) to be selected and then compared across an extraordinary range of institutional attributes. They also help institutional planners identify institutions with similar attributes that thereby constitute statistical peers. Services such as John Minter's and organizations such as Education Trust now take such data to create tools and resources that improve the accessibility and usability of these data. And organizations such as Peterson's and Princeton Review take such data to provide services for prospective students to identify institutions with certain attributes and to compare and contrast institutions they are considering attending.

A common use of such datasets is to demonstrate how an institution's performance on various measures compares to other institutions in a process called *benchmarking*. For example, the enrollment planning team at Theta College regularly produces tables of IPEDS data showing how they compare to their 30 top competitors and peer institutions on academic profile, enrollment diversity, tuition price, net tuition per FTE, instructional expenses, endowment assets per FTE and so on. Establishing ranges and thresholds for institutional performance measures that are characteristic of this comparative group allows Theta to quantify how they compare on each measure relative to specific competitors or relative to the median level of performance of the comparative group, for example.

While these kinds of benchmarking activities are common, what is not so common is a planning process that explores the highly intercorrelated nature of this wide array of public domain data in order to describe the systemic relationships and the many symmetries that characterize the marketplace of American higher education institutions. There are extraordinary intercorrelations between institutional attributes as varied as average SAT, residential capac-

ity, percent full-time students, percent full-time faculty, net assets per FTE, instructional expenditure per FTE, percent of financial aid filers filing as independent students, percent of undergraduates entering as transfer students, and so on. The statistical relationships between and among them are strong, and there are deeply-seated interdependencies of institutional attributes such as selectivity, retention, diversity, price, financial assets, and the perceived prestige of individual institutions. This is more than a statistical exercise for exploring an institution's performance. Since all of these attributes are so highly correlated, taken together they define a continuum of institutions that constitutes the playing field upon which all marketing and enrollment strategy is designed and executed. These institutional dynamics, taken together, paint a picture of the structure, symmetry and systemic patterns defining the higher education marketplace in general as well as each institution's relative position within that market.

## LESSONS FROM THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Senior enrollment officers are often deeply involved in the process by which credit rating agencies review colleges and universities in preparing to issue bonds or refinance debt. Whether it's Moody's, Fitch, or Standard and Poors, these firms are in the business of evaluating the credit worthiness of institutions of higher education as they issue their credit ratings. What criteria do they consider most critical in assessing an institution's financial viability and vitality?

It's all about "market position," especially for private institutions. Moody's, for example, maintains public ratings on 255 private colleges and universities and their ratings cover more than 75 percent of the debt outstanding among private institutions of higher education. Moody's also rates about 170 public colleges, universities and education systems and maintains ratings on over 90 percent of the public sector debt through its ratings. Moody's bond rating methodology for private colleges and universities is based on five broad credit factors, one of which is 'market position.' In fact, in their own language, "Moody's review of an institution's *market and competitive position* is typically the most extensive part of our analysis because we believe it is a key driver of long-run financial health" [italics added]. They therefore review demographic trends, competitive overlap, affordability, net revenue management; they review the institution's success in actively managing

its mix of program offerings and in reacting to market factors to assure a consistent stream of tuition revenue despite shifts in student demand for particular majors or programs. Key metrics of an institution's market position for the review of these agencies include: selectivity ratios, matriculation or yield rates, cross application ratios with key competitors, net revenue per student, discount rates, and so on. The ratings for public institutions focus more on demographic trends and levels of support from public appropriations—but their ratings still include data on selectivity, net tuition, and discount as well.

All of these measures are not viewed as the goals or the accomplishments of the institution's EM efforts; they are measures by which an institution's market position is defined and evaluated. The metrics that typically are at the heart of any EM plan are perhaps not goals per se but rather are indicators, albeit flawed and incomplete ones, of a deeper construct, namely 'market position,' which is considered reflective of an institution's health by those assessing its worthiness for financial investment.

### THE MARKETPLACE VIS-À-VIS ZEMSKY

In 1983, Robert Zemsky at University of Pennsylvania, published with his colleagues an intriguing text entitled "The Structure of College Choice," an empirical exploration of the structure of the market and of institutional competition in the higher education marketplace. By looking at the nature of admissions demand and prices charged by different colleges and universities, Zemsky and his colleagues suggested that one could define and describe American higher education as a market and that a given college's enrollment profile is in large part a function of its market position. His book showed how the admissions profession could benefit from a macro view of the nation's collegiate enrollment market and a micro view of each single institution's visibility, presence and position in that market.

In 1997, Zemsky again brought us a reminder of the provocative power of this perspective on the college and university market in an article in *Change* magazine entitled "In Search of Strategic Perspective: A Tool for Mapping the Market in Post Secondary Education." In this essay (and in a subsequent one focused on two-year institutions), Zemsky and his colleagues offered a scheme for sorting and classifying the market for postsecondary education

based upon student choice. They argued that traditional categories for classifying colleges and universities (e.g. Carnegie classifications as research or comprehensive or liberal arts colleges; classifications by type of control, such as Catholic colleges; or even *U.S. News* rankings) are not adequate to explain or account for differences in student outcomes observed in many national studies, outcomes such as graduation rates or career and learning outcomes. Their research purports to show to what extent institutional or educational outcomes are related to the nature and structure of the market for postsecondary education. They explore to what extent an underlying market taxonomy that effectively classifies and clusters students and institutions can explain things like price and selectivity and graduation rates; it can perhaps also help in understanding differences in student outcomes. Zemsky's work eventually led to two books elaborating on these themes: *Higher Education as Competitive Enterprise: When Markets Matter* and *Remaking the American University*.

Zemsky's well-known diagram of the higher education market presented in his essay is shown here (see Figure 1).

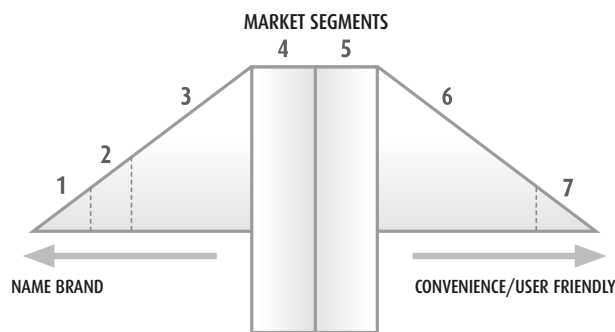


FIGURE 1. The Shape of the Postsecondary Market

It demarcates seven market segments that structure the wide variety of institutions of higher learning. In their essay, Zemsky and his colleagues offered a worksheet to enable any institution to calculate where on this continuum it falls, but the heuristic value of this framework is so immediately apparent that detailed calculations aren't necessary in order to appreciate its implications. What Zemsky deliberately seeks to avoid is a hierarchical ranking of institutions in his continuum and making judgments of better and best, mapping them instead on empirical measures

across a horizontal array in a figurative diagram referred to as the ‘paper airplane’ model of the shape of the higher education market.

To the left on this continuum in segments 1 and 2 are the institutions with high demand and high selectivity, high list price and net price, high residential capacity, mostly full-time degree seeking students, high academic profile, wide geographic draw, broad brand recognition, high percentage of full-time faculty, higher faculty salaries, greater expenditures on student instruction, and high graduation rates. These are brand name institutions that have garnered a high level of prestige.

The right wing, segments 6 and 7, represent what he calls the *convenience/user-friendly* part of the market, served by colleges and universities that teach large numbers of part-time, adult and intermittently enrolled students who may or may not be seeking a degree; they have less demand and therefore are less selective, charge a lower price, have low residential capacity, spend less on instruction, engage more part-time and adjunct faculty, and have lower graduation rates. These institutions cater to a convenience market and put a premium on offering flexibility and affordability.

The fuselage of this airplane depiction represents the core of the market consisting of the majority of institutions and the bulk of the student market. These middle market institutions reflect a balance of these two extremes; they are often in pursuit of greater name recognition, higher academic profile, higher price point, and wider geographic draw yet need to cater to the part-time, adult, commuter, convenience market for mission purposes and financial reasons. Their students seek both a name brand reputation of the institutions to the left and the convenience, accessibility and value of those to the right. It is a market space that is hotly competed and where institutions are often deeply conflicted in balancing market dynamics and institutional mission.

We find in Zemsky’s perspective the foundation for a strategic approach to enrollment management, one differentiated from more traditional, tactical or instrumental approaches. A strategic focus for enrollment management starts with the structure of the market—for example, the market for baccalaureate education—and then proceeds to map an institution’s place within its distinct and identifiable market segment. These market dynamics are grounded in what our research shows, what our experi-

ence affirms, and what common sense would suggest: that colleges and universities compete with other institutions that exist within their market segment and that students compare, consider and choose among institutions within a fairly narrow segment.

Zemsky’s work outlines how this market segmentation is grounded in the intercorrelations of the measures for which senior enrollment managers are accountable, including: admissions demand and selectivity, academic profile of the student body, the tuition charged, the net tuition realized per FTE, the diversity of the student body, and degree completion rates. Understanding the causal relationships and intercorrelations is central to the thesis of our discussion of markets. If college and university leaders assume that many of their institutional and student outcomes are products of their educational efforts rather than the result of their institution’s market position then policy makers will often err both in their marketing decisions as well as their academic program decisions. Such attributional errors can have consequences in every domain of institutional decision-making. Bringing such market insight to institutional decision-makers is an imperative for the enrollment management leader. Indeed, one of the errors many senior campus policy makers and enrollment managers make is to set goals that are simply not realistic given the institution’s market position. As we have already noted, unrealistic goals lead to poor decision and inevitably to the sub-optimal allocation of an institution’s most important resources—money and time.

It was Michael Dolence who first pointed out the importance of focusing enrollment management plans and efforts on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and he pushed the professional practice toward greater empirical discipline as a result. But if one revisits any institution’s list of KPI’s that define their EM strategy, how many of those are really measures of market position? How many in fact are what *define* an institution’s market position? Those measures would include: the demand for admission and the resulting selectivity and academic profile; the tuition price charged and both the ability and willingness of applicants to pay that price; the resulting tuition discount and net revenue per student; the diversity of enrollment—both racial and socioeconomic; student expectations and aspirations and their resulting levels of satisfaction and engagement; retention rates and gradua-

tion rates. These are all outcomes which EM leaders purport to shape through their efforts, outcomes which in fact have become how the purposes and focus of EM are in fact defined. But we would suggest that these measures are not just indicators of institutional performance but indicators of institutional position, indices of a school's place in the competitive market. An EM perspective must first and foremost start with clarifying the market conditions and structures that prescribe clear parameters on these outcomes—what they are, what they should be, and what they can ever reasonably hope to be.

At this point in this essay, we seek to make an important, but subtle and potentially confusing point. On one hand we are arguing that many of the enrollment outcomes for which enrollment managers and senior campus administrators want to take credit for are primarily a product of market position and not “jugular vein decisions” emanating from bold actions on the part of senior policy makers. However, to stop here misses our central thesis. We posit that the surest path to institutional success is to understand an institution's market niche, embrace it, try to optimize this position, and by doing so in a comprehensive manner begin to solidify or change these indicators in desirable directions. Only subsequent to such an empirical understanding of market position can EM officers make deliberate choices about the educational and enrollment strategies they will pursue and do so in light of their institution's identity, an identity not embedded in *mission statements* but in a *market structure*. Indeed, what a strategic EM perspective brings to campus planning is this realization that many academic decisions about curricular offerings and new academic initiatives, and many student life initiatives should be and typically are influenced more by an institution's market position than its mission statement.

### **EMBRACING MARKET POSITION: IMPLICATIONS FOR ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT**

There are several specific strategic and policy domains where enrollment management goals and outcomes are especially indistinguishable from and dictated by institutional market position. Embracing an empirical understanding of market position is a valuable first step in strategic enrollment planning, as briefly illustrated below.

● **Academic Profile:** The academic profile (*e.g.* average ACT score) for enrolling students is one of the measures

by which enrollment management strategies are typically evaluated; improving that profile is an outcome of the highest priority in many institutions' enrollment strategy. Yet there may be no more fundamental indicator of an institution's market position than its undergraduate academic profile. Array America's colleges and universities on a continuum of each institution's freshman academic profile and virtually every other comparative metric is similarly arrayed, showing clear correlations between academic measures and metrics such as diversity, price, financial assets per fte, graduation rates, and so on. A strategic EM perspective embraces the academic profile not as an independent variable to be improved directly through recruitment, admission and scholarship tactics but rather as a reflection of the institution's market position; as such, strategically improving that profile requires a concerted and comprehensive effort to shift an institution's position and thereby improve its attractiveness to academically better prepared students. Absent the development of a comprehensive set of strategies, institutions typically employ a merit scholarship strategy to induce students to enroll who otherwise would not. This is an expensive and easily copied practice (we describe this as a practice because it is so easily replicated that it cannot be considered a *strategic decision*). Moreover, we argue that the level of discount through non-need-based merit scholarship required to support or sustain a certain academic profile is in itself a measure of an institution's market position.

● **Price and Aid:** Perhaps the policy arena where relative market position is most frequently presented, analyzed and compared is the institutional discussion of tuition pricing. The tuition price that can be charged and the corresponding discount rate that determines an institution's net revenue is a clear reflection of an institution's market position relative to its peers and its competitors. Tuition rates are so statistically correlated with other measures of an institution's market position (*e.g.* net assets per FTE, diversity, selectivity, academic profile) that they too can be predicted with considerable accuracy from other measures of market position; evaluating an institution's price elasticity and students' price response are analytic exercises that enhance an institution's appreciation for its competitive market position. Setting an

optimal tuition price that in conjunction with a financial aid strategy effectively achieves the desired number, quality, and mix of students as well as desired net revenue is and should be viewed as an exercise in assessing and establishing an institution's market position.

■ **Retention:** Countless colleges and universities have established task forces to focus on increasing institutional retention and graduate rates. Few pause to assess the degree to which the retention and graduation rates of their institution (as well as of comparable or peer institutions) are correlated with many other institutional attributes such as the student academic profile, the student socioeconomic mix, campus residential capacity, even net assets per FTE. If they did so, they would see that graduation rates are highly predictable given that student and institutional profile, that they are as much attributes as they are achievements, that they are a reflection of what the institution is as much as what it does. They are, in other words, a measure of and function of market position. In fact, in Zemsky's analysis of all of the factors that describe and differentiate the strata and segmentation of the higher education market, graduation rates are considered the most critical. Retention and graduation rates can be improved somewhat with intentional effort and can erode with institutional negligence; but we submit that the range of graduation rates which an institution is ever likely to achieve is more narrowly prescribed by its market position than many institutional leaders are aware. Just as improving academic profile starts with a focus on market position, improving graduation rates to any significant degree requires a comprehensive institutional approach which, from an enrollment management and marketing perspective, also begins with the institution's market profile and position.

In each of these areas, the higher education market and an institution's relative position in that market frames in significant ways the goals and outcomes which enrollment officers are called to achieve. Real strategy in enrollment management lies in understanding an institution's market position, understanding the extent to which many recruitment and retention outcomes are a product of market position, and acknowledging that market position is determined by institutional attributes that are not easily

manipulated by simplistic marketing solutions. Market position defines the interpretative context within which any enrollment goals for academic profile, pricing or retention can be meaningfully understood. Embracing that fact shifts enrollment management and planning from traditional, internal, tactical and structural concerns to external, strategic realities and opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

EM is all about defining, developing and leading an institution's understanding of its special and distinctive place and position in an increasingly competitive marketplace and helping an institution's leadership understand, appreciate and embrace the complex interactivity of market factors that dictate enrollment success, in all of its increasingly complex manifestations and metrics. In the closing keynote address in 2003 at AACRAO's annual SEM conference, Kalsbeek offered this market-centered definition of EM for the profession's consideration:

*The focus of Strategic Enrollment Management is the systematic evaluation of an institution's competitive market position across multiple academic programs and market segments, the development of a research-based definition of the desired or preferred strategic market position relative to key competitors, and then marshalling and managing institutional plans, priorities, processes and resources to either strategically strengthen or shift that market position in pursuit of the institution's mission and its optimal enrollment, academic, and financial profile.*

What this definition affirms is the importance of focusing strategic enrollment management on market position since all other outcomes emanate from that. There certainly are other ways to define EM and to frame its basic orientation; many academic leaders and institutional cultures would find this market-centered definition a bit off-putting, preferring approaches centered more on student success or student services, for example. A market-centered orientation is just that, one of any number of frameworks that bring clarity and focus to EM; in this case, it focuses on the market structures and dynamics that shape EM's practice and outcomes. Understanding the structure of the marketplace and an institution's place therein, however, is an essential component of any strategic approach to enrollment management.

Perhaps more urgently, as the tone and tenor of the dialogue about access, affordability and accountability in higher education intensifies, it would be prudent to remain cognizant of the fact that the landscape of American higher education is a richly variegated collection of colleges and universities that cannot be painted monochromatically. The diversity of institutions and of the markets they serve seems overlooked in many of today's broad-based criticisms and commentaries on American higher education. It's also important to acknowledge that higher education has always been inextricably tied to market dynamics and market realities; any careful study of the history of higher education clearly shows this to be true. Though competition has intensified and contemporary marketing tactics are perhaps disconcerting, the fundamental market structures and forces shaping higher education are hardly new. A deeper appreciation for the abiding structure, symmetry and segmentation of the marketplace of America's colleges and universities would contribute meaningfully to a more informed and balanced dialogue and debate in our professional communities and with our various publics.

## About the Authors

---

**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. Kalsbeek 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. Kalsbeek holds a Ph.D. in Public Policy Analysis from Saint Louis University.

**DON HOSSLER, PH.D.**, 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.

---