

Interview with Dr. David H. Kalsbeek

- David H. Kalsbeek currently is vice president for enrollment management at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. In that capacity he leads the marketing and enrollment development strategies for the nation's largest and fastest-growing Catholic university, enrolling 23,000 students in eight colleges and six campuses throughout the greater Chicago region. His broad responsibilities at DePaul encompass admissions and financial aid, student information systems, university marketing and communications, marketing and enrollment research, public and media relations, TRIO programs, career center and employer relations, and university internship programs.

Known as one of the pioneering thinkers in enrollment management and marketing in higher education, the innovative approaches and models he has developed have been showcased as "best practices" nationally and internationally by numerous professional associations including the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), and the American Marketing Association.

Dr. Kalsbeek is a frequent speaker at conferences in the U.S. and abroad. He has been a consultant to dozens of colleges, universities, consortia and associations on issues related to strategic enrollment management and marketing, and has authored chapters in six different texts on higher education administration.

by David M. Sauter

Chronologically, you are at mid-career. Please describe your professional journey, beginning with your graduate work and culminating with your current vice presidency position at DePaul University.

I entered higher education administration right after my undergraduate studies because in the most general sense I was just naturally drawn to life in an academic setting. As a philosophy major, I had become intrigued with what happens to young adults as a result of the college experience—especially in how people develop in levels of moral reasoning and critical thinking—and I was interested in how colleges could be more intentional about shaping that experience and thereby improving student learning and development.

I began as a researcher inquiring about students, their experiences, their backgrounds, attitudes, opinions, enrollment patterns, and developmental changes during college. As I was completing my masters program in Higher Education Administration at The Ohio State University, I published results of some research I had completed there on the impact of residential communities on student developmental outcomes. That research brought me in touch with Dr. Charles Schroeder, who was then the chief student affairs officer at Mercer University, and was engaged in similar research. Charles, more than any colleague I've ever known, was a leader with a real passion for data. He was driven to use information, data analysis and research in improving the quality of campus life, student programs, student learning outcomes, enrollment profiles, and the entire institutional experience.

As a result of our common interests and inclinations, I joined his team—first at Mercer and then at Saint Louis University—to develop an institutional research function focused solely on students: student development, student programs, student characteristics and experiences, enrollment patterns, and so on. In the early 1980s, he and I built a comprehensive and innovative research program recognized nationally as a best practice model of student-centered assessment and analytic inquiry in a student affairs organization.

As my research agenda grew and my own interests broadened, I began doing market research, admissions validity studies, geo-demographic analysis, retention research, and financial aid leverage analysis—all the kinds of things now considered fundamental parts of enrollment management, but which in the mid-1980s were far from common. We were doing this innovative analytic work before there was much discussion at all about enrollment management in higher education.

It was also at this time, while working at Saint Louis University not only in leading that research function but also co-leading the implementation of campus-wide student information systems, that I also completed my doctoral work in public policy analysis, studying particularly with Drs. Jim Gilsinan and Brian Nedwek. My doctoral studies helped to both broaden and to undergird my understandings in two areas that have shaped all of my subsequent work. First, my studies addressed how social, economic, political, demographic, and market realities create a context within which complex organizations—including colleges and universities—exist, survive, and thrive. Second, my studies and my dissertation focused

on how information is used in policy and decision processes in complex organizations, and how information can be used to lead organizational change. I think anyone who has worked with me or heard my conference presentations can easily see the continuing influence of those graduate studies in how I approach the enrollment management challenges of the campuses where I work and where I consult.

In the late 1980s, Fr. Larry Biondi became the president of Saint Louis University. President Biondi was interested in a more aggressive enrollment plan as part of his vision for the University. So he turned to Dr. Schroeder (who was vice president for student affairs at the time) and asked him and his team to develop an enrollment management model—again something that was still very new in higher education. Between them, they concluded that as a policy and data analyst and researcher, I seemed to know more about the dynamics of our student enrollment than anyone else. They charged me with researching and developing a model and an organizational structure for enrollment management, and subsequently asked me to lead SLU's first Division of Enrollment Management. So it was that foundation in research and analysis that led to my first senior administrative role and assignment—a foundation that still characterizes my approach to enrollment management today.

Since leaving St. Louis University in 1993, I have subsequently had the good fortune to lead the enrollment strategies and enrollment management activities at two fine universities with inspiring missions: Xavier University in Cincinnati and now DePaul University in Chicago. Both universities already had reputable and successful enrollment management teams and organizations in place. Both also had presidents and chief academic officers (Fr. James Hoff and Dr. James Bundschuh at Xavier and Fr. Jack Minogue and Dr. Richard Meister at DePaul) who were broad thinkers and bold planners, were not content with the status quo, and were looking for new perspectives that would take their institutions in new directions. I've been fortunate to have the opportunity to help lead those efforts.

Can you discuss further your career progression and the reputation you have for being one of the more innovative and influential voices in defining Strategic Enrollment Management in American higher education?

I think what is notable is that unlike most of my colleagues who have reached a leadership position in enrollment management, I have never actually done the professional work of any of the functions in the divisions I've been privileged to lead. I have never been an admissions officer, never worked in financial aid, never been an advisor, never been in records administration and registrar work, never been a career advisor, and certainly never done any kind of marketing or university relations work.

While some may conclude that makes me wholly unqualified to do the job I'm now doing, I think it actually gives me

a particular and unique qualification to lead an enrollment management effort. Here are three examples why. First, it forces me to hire and retain top flight professionals in these functional areas who are able to direct and manage all those critical and complex activities. These individuals must have the requisite experience and background to be at the top of their profession because I can do so little to assist them, instruct them, or mentor them in their specific work. I believe the type of senior staff who works best with me are individuals who relish autonomy and independence in leading their units because inevitably that's exactly what will occur anyway. I'm not remotely capable of micro-managing those functions, even if I was so inclined.

The second consequence of this atypical professional career path where I have not had any actual experience in functions reporting to me, is that I tend not to be blinded or bounded by some of the traditional perspectives that characterize certain professional efforts or activities. The value of any "profession" is that it offers a set of guidelines, procedures, and principles designed to standardize practice in that field. It is absolutely imperative to have these professional standards in place, especially in areas as complex as student records, financial aid, admissions, and others. When it comes to the broader enrollment management task, however, those very same professional lenses that serve us so well in some situations can become blinders in other situations. Our professional allegiances and alliances are valuable lenses that bring issues and problems and solutions into sharp focus but they simultaneously blur or block from our view the possibilities of other perspectives. When one sees the world only through the lenses and language of one's profession, then one's work is focused on solving the problems which those lenses help you see and which that language helps you articulate.

Many of the most significant and seemingly intractable challenges we face in institutions of higher learning today don't fit readily within the parameters of existing professional frameworks; the real challenges and the corresponding opportunities are those that either transcend those traditional structures or result from a blending and/or bleeding across those boundaries. The fact that my foundational experiences were not originally grounded in any of those traditional professional tracks means that while I am not completely versed in the work done in those critical areas, I benefit from the naiveté that results, a perspective which I believe sometimes opens new vistas and new opportunities for innovation and institutional change.

The third consequence is that I believe this career path has enabled me to contribute a great deal to the defining and redefining of enrollment management in higher education. I have had the opportunity and privilege to keynote dozens of Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) conferences sponsored by AACRAO and other organizations—and those presentations typically focus on how to conceptualize the nature of SEM. It's quite natural that anyone's primary allegiance is to their professional roots and EM leaders with backgrounds

in admissions or student affairs or student records tend to reflect that background and heritage in the way they define, design, and do EM. Perhaps since I have no traditional professional allegiance or heritage, my focus is on SEM as SEM—viewing it and defining it independently of any of the specific functions that tend to comprise it.

So my professional career track has not been like moving up a ladder of professional responsibility in any traditional sense. And whatever reputation you kindly suggest that I have for bringing innovative perspectives to the national dialogue about this important work results in all likelihood from the fact that I have long been a bit out of my element in this work. As someone once said, it would hardly be a fish that would discover the existence of water.

I have known you to be working late at night, as well as early in the morning, sending e-mails at all times of a 24x7 day as an example. Describe how your day typically evolves at DePaul University.

Sleep is overrated! But it is not about long hours or any great volume of work to do, since I have no more or less to do than anyone else I know. I think my calendar has more to do with my personality. Part of it is because, as a night owl who does his best creative thinking late at night, I get everybody else in my family to bed and then I get back to work with a second wind after watching Jon Stewart on The Daily Show.

But what really creates the reputation for late hours is how I choose to use my time during the day. It is only during typical office hours that I have the opportunity to interact with my staff and my colleagues. If I were to fill up that time with writing memos, editing documents, preparing reports and doing all of that “solo work” that one has to do, I would miss the opportunity for interaction with colleagues. And that interaction is what the workplace is really all about. It is the social interchange throughout the day that gets things done and moves things along in an organization as complex as today’s university.

What characterizes my typical day is the access that I try to retain and the flexibility I fight to protect so that I can address things “on the fly” with staff and colleagues, so that we don’t have to wait two weeks for a regularly scheduled meeting just to discuss a new idea. Now, admittedly, maybe that is a lame rationalization for my inherited tendency to be hopelessly and completely *disorganized*. Despite the fact that I have a stellar support staff who keep things afloat, the single most productive moment for me is ‘the last minute’ since that’s when everything usually gets done. But I do try to keep my day as open as possible, trying to avoid too many committees and regularly scheduled meetings. I have one weekly staff meeting with my extraordinary senior leadership team, and of course I sit on any number of campus leadership councils and committees. But otherwise I try to keep the typical day open and flexible and responsive to walk-ins and drop-bys—which then results in a lot of the more “solo” work being done at night.

When reading your many articles or viewing your presentations, your impact on the profession can be seen and EM “comes to life” with words such as: challenge, change, goals, influence, innovation, leadership, market position, politics, risk, strategy, and transformation. Which speak most to your view of enrollment management? What do you feel are the major impacts you have made on the enrollment management profession?

Those are indeed many of the words that populate my speeches and presentations at campuses and professional conferences. However, when one looks over all of the presentations I’ve given at national conferences over the years, I think at the core of what I talk about and teach about are “mental models” and the process of “framing” policy or strategic issues. It’s all about trying to identify, clarify, and bring to the surface the dominant mental models underlying the work that we do, to recognize how deeply ingrained assumptions and concepts determine what we perceive as problems, what we consider to be relevant information, and what we envision as opportunities and possibilities. I believe that framing and reframing the mental models that define our work is at the crux of institutional leadership, of strategic change, and certainly of enrollment management. I think that’s the common denominator in what I have written, what I address in my presentations and consultations, and what is hopefully at the heart of whatever impact I have had in the institutions where I have worked.

For example, look at the sea change in the arena of financial aid as institutionally-budgeted grants and scholarships have been redefined as tuition discounts to be optimized, not expenses to be minimized. For the longest time, the debate raged between enrollment managers and university finance executives about this very topic because the dominant mental models in financial affairs—reflected in professional accounting standards—would not allow for the logic of leveraging aid as a tuition discount for revenue optimization. A number of us fifteen to twenty years ago were developing and introducing the analytical models that are now fairly common and which were intended to reframe what was the traditional way of thinking of how financial aid is used to achieve enrollment goals. It was only when the NACUBO accounting standards changed to report financial aid as a discount off tuition revenue that we knew that the fundamental mental model of financial officers had been transformed. Aid leveraging and discount management is not just some new enrollment strategy that has emerged in response to competitive pressures on colleges and universities—it is much more than that. It is a new way of doing business that reflects, requires, and results from a fundamental shift in the mental models underlying university pricing and finance.

As another very practical example, at DePaul we have reframed the way we think about the role of a career center as a marketing and enrollment strategy, to conceive of it not only as a student service but as a means to create career networks

and strategic intersections for students, employers, and faculty and alumni. I know that many career center staff say they teach networking skills and sponsor networking events, but my team reframed the core purpose of the DePaul Career Center to be the creation and cultivation of networks. Once this mental model takes hold with staff, a whole new set of opportunities, possibilities, and staff roles and functions begin to surface. But this first requires challenging the traditional “mental model” that a career center is primarily a service delivery function for career development or placement outcomes. Only by reframing its core purpose could our career center embrace an exciting new strategy for creating career networks for students, employers, faculty, and alumni—all as a means of strengthening the institution’s enrollment outcomes, brand promise, and market position. And that new concept underscores why and how a career center is more strategically aligned with an enrollment management model than a traditional student services model.

Lately, my focus has been on bringing a market-centered perspective to enrollment management, trying to bring to institutions I visit and to professional meetings where I speak a more systemic appreciation for what it means to have and hold a competitive position in the marketplace of higher education institutions. With my colleague Brian Zucker, president of Human Capital Research, I’ve been sharing information

that I hope provokes a perspective that can guide our thinking about enrollment strategy and enrollment outcomes, one which begins with an understanding of how the competitive and comparative position in the marketplace in fact determines the very outcomes that institutions seek in an enrollment management effort. Retention and graduation rates or diversity and discounts, for example, can all be understood as the predictable outcomes of an institution’s market position rather than the results of any singular thing its admission or enrollment management offices do. This way of framing SEM as a market-centered enterprise seems to strike a chord with many institutional leaders—and is a particularly important perspective to cultivate with boards of trustees.

So the concepts of change, innovation, and transformation are certainly the underpinnings of how I view the role of a leader of enrollment strategy. But what I really try to focus on is understanding what the dominant mental models are that dictate how we view our work in higher education, the assumptions which in turn dictate how we act, how we respond to situations and challenges, how we plan and organize, how we allocate our resources, and how we define success. We all need to continuously tackle those deeply held beliefs, concepts, and assumptions as things to be regularly surfaced, analyzed, challenged, and transformed. I think that is the way to achieve lasting and systemic change in organi-

zations as complex as colleges and universities, because, as Peter Senge has noted, organizations are the way they are because of how people think.

Some of us know that sailing on Lake Michigan has become your favorite pastime since moving to Chicago. What would be the parallels between sailing a boat and leading an enrollment management process?

Sailing and enrollment management are both about agility and responsiveness, reacting adeptly to ever-changing conditions. They are both about charting a course and envisioning a destination, then making steady progress toward that goal even when prevailing conditions work against you and may divert you from the most straightforward or apparently efficient approach toward your objective. In both activities, you learn that there are things you simply cannot control and cannot change but to which you can adapt and thereby overcome if you're patient.

I think both sailing and enrollment management tease you to seek out every last bit of performance from very complex and dynamic systems—and both reward you handsomely when you succeed in doing so. You learn how much impact you can have not by making huge sweeping changes in what you're doing but by making modest adjustments and improvements—like letting out some sail or falling just a bit off the wind. Even a modest change in the trim of the mainsail can improve speed and performance substantially—and the same can be said in most dimensions of enrollment management systems where relatively small changes can reap great advantage. In both you learn that excitement doesn't come from moving along conservatively with the wind at your back but by beating into the wind, sailing full and by, right on the edge of what you can control, bringing your craft to the peak of its performance. And in both, you learn that it's only when you are moving forward that you can control what you're doing and where you're going; you can't change course while sitting in irons or at anchor.

I think there are also important lessons about teamwork to be learned in both sailing and enrollment management. It is important that everyone on the crew understands how the overall system operates, to know what everyone else is doing, and to trust everybody else to do their assigned task. Everyone needs to understand the goal or destination so as to not be working at cross purposes. And everyone should be prepared to take the helm if necessary. And, finally, everyone needs to remember, as I believe Thucydides said, "A collision at sea can ruin your entire day."

Some institutions struggle with enrollment management, and while your articles are intricate and full of "aha" moments for the reader, the concepts are nonetheless understandable. What advice would you give on how to begin creating a culture of enrollment management understanding for the novice individual or campus?

There is no roadmap or set of instructions for effecting a change of culture on a given campus. The kinds of behaviors and norms that we tend to describe as 'campus cultures' are, like the mental models I mentioned earlier, the outcomes of deeply embedded assumptions and views of the world that aren't easily changed. However, in trying to shape new understandings, which is what strategic enrollment management is really all about, there is a lot of value in remembering the Gospel parable of the sower. We diligently sow seeds of change, and some fall in the thorns of institutional politics while some fall in the rocky terrain of harsh financial constraints. But sometimes the seeds of change fall on fertile ground and you begin to see the fruits of your labor and reap the value of your efforts over time. And the payoff is sometimes far off in the future, so distant in time and place that you don't know the difference you've made.

One of the most powerful ways you shape culture and effect systemic change is through information, bringing information to institutional leadership about market realities, enrollment patterns, financial projections, changing student characteristics, and so on. The way you define, analyze, illustrate, and present data and analyses can reshape reality, and challenge the status quo—or the prevailing campus culture, if you will.

For me, that starts with understanding how information is used. The scholarly literature in the field of public policy analysis discusses how the predominant use of information is not in how it helps solve problems or helps make decisions, but how it helps frame and define problems in the first place, and how it challenges prevailing myths and assumptions. The scholar Carol Weiss states that information's primary use and value in complex organizations is when it "percolates into the climate of informed opinion."

That's a powerful insight into how change occurs. I often meet colleagues who bemoan all of the effort they've put into research and analysis and wonder why nobody actually 'used it'. But if all we look for is a discrete decision that is discernibly different because of those data, then we're likely to be disappointed in our attempts to effect change. But when valuable, relevant, and interesting information begins to percolate into the climate of informed opinion and shape the terms, the vernacular, the language of our workplace, then it's working its magic. And subtly, almost imperceptibly, there begins the kinds of shifts in mindset that over a period of time can and will change cultures.

I can give countless specific examples and illustrations of how research that we've done at the institutions where I've worked—research about market position, about student expectations, about the impact of financial aid, about factors affecting retention, about alumni outcomes—have over time infiltrated into the language, the perspectives, the conceptual frameworks, the mindsets of critical institutional constituencies like the faculty, deans, executives, trustees, and so on. It has indeed percolated into the climate of informed opinion and over time it becomes the intellectual capital upon which they draw in doing their work. And thereby change happens.

And sometimes, as the snail told the police after being mugged by a turtle, “it all happened so fast.”

In the “Politics of Enrollment Management” article, you discuss influence (p. 154) “...up, down, and across the organization.” A few pages later (p. 157) you write, “If everyone agrees on what to do and how to do it, there is no need to influence others...hardly ever the case.” How can an enrollment management leader best influence others?

I recall the insights of Dr. Bob Silverman, professor of higher education at Ohio State, as he reflected 25 years ago on the fact that student affairs as a profession was constantly grappling and groping with issues about how they could be more appreciated, more valued, more readily recognized as being at the core of the university enterprise. Bob wrote a very provocative article in the *Journal of College Student Development* about the value that comes from not being at the core of a large enterprise, but from being on its periphery.

I think that article should be a “must read” for all enrollment management leaders. Because in enrollment management—whether it is a function, a process, a department, a division, or a person—real influence comes not from being at the core of what we are all about in higher education but rather from staking out a position on the boundary. When you are on the boundary, you communicate and articulate to the external environment the internal values and purposes and priorities of what that organization is all about. Simultaneously, only on the boundary can you scan that external environment and bring intelligence and perspective and information back to the core functions. The boundary of an organization is an exciting place to be.

In our industry, the faculty are at the core and will always be at the core of a university, and their primary activity is what higher education is all about, namely the functions of teaching, learning, and research. However, what Bob Silverman noted and what I’ve learned through my experience over the years, is that the core is not where real influence lies in an organization. Greater influence comes from being on the periphery, on the boundary. Enrollment management, by definition and in practice, is a classic example of a critical boundary-spanning activity. How we exert influence is precisely by not being at the core, but instead by being out on the edges of the organization, straddling the internal and external environments, striving to effectively translate one reality to the other.

In that same chapter you referenced I also tell of a story I once encountered about a university president who likened his campus to that of a cavalry regiment on the frontier in the old movie Westerns. He noted that real power at the fort didn’t rest with those who had all the trappings of power, who had the fullest breadth of command and held clear positions of authority. No, real power and real influence in the old Westerns rested with one person who had no obvious authority or apparent base of power at all and who wasn’t even part

of the line of command—namely the scout. It was the scout who had none of the authority but all of the influence, since he was the one person who knew the terrain, who knew the enemy, who by living at the fringe of the organization had all the critical information and thereby the most sweeping influence. Those in formal command ignored the scout’s information only at their peril.

Strategic enrollment management is higher education’s equivalent of scouting, pure and simple. It’s about being attuned to market realities, about understanding students and parents and employers, about translating our internal and often arcane academic vernacular and idiosyncratic jargon to audiences that often speak an entirely different language altogether. It’s also about bringing to those at the core of the organization and those with the authority—be they the faculty or the executive leadership—valuable intelligence and insight about the competition and about the customer, about market dynamics and demographic futures, about looming threats and new opportunities far off on the horizon or right around the bend. Therein lies SEM’s real influence and real value. And that’s also what makes it so much fun.

In “Tomorrow’s SEM Organization” you wrote of change (p. 188), using the book, *Who Moved the Cheese?* Instead of saying that it is the mice which resist change, you described the organization as most resistant. You explained how it is the rigidity of our staffing structures and the jobs themselves that are at the root of the challenges we face. Can you share a bit more about this organizational resistance vs. the individual resistance?

This comes back to the reality that organizations are the way they are due to how people think. To effect change in any complex system, you do not just move the boxes around on an organizational chart, or just manipulate goals and rewards. You start with the way people think about the work they do and as you shape the terms which frame the dialogue, challenge the prevailing myths, and offer alternative ways of viewing the challenges of the day, you effect change.

I fundamentally believe that work is a noble activity, and the specific work we do in the kind of industry we have chosen to be a part of is a particularly noble endeavor. And so I find it demeaning to liken it—even metaphorically—to mice in a maze, as has been done in the popular management literature. But the point you reference is my notion that the primary obstacle to change, to improving performance, or achieving goals is not that something’s wrong or deficient with the mouse or that something can be changed by moving the cheese (which represents the goals and purposes). Rather, it is the rigidity of the maze itself, it is the organizational structure itself that most often confines us and limits us to certain ways of approaching our work.

I went on to suggest that one of the unfortunate realities we face in our organizations today is that we are often seduced into thinking that a person’s primary purpose is

defined by their job. While it is important to do a job, the problem in many of our organizations is when you go from *doing* a job to *being* a job. When your role is solely defined in the context of a job description, you overlook many opportunities and fail to see many obstacles every day that do not fit squarely within the structure and focus of the job itself.

For example, when admission counselors think that their job is to recruit students, we need to remind them that while ‘recruitment’ may aptly describe much of their daily activity, that is not really their purpose. Their purpose is to work jointly with broader institutional efforts to enhance the university’s market position among high school seniors. The number of students, the quality of students, the diversity of students, the price that they pay and their discount, their mix across academic programs—are all a function of and reflection of the institution’s perceived value and position in the market. Student recruitment strategies are an important part of the enrollment process, to be sure. But to compartmentalize our staffs’ tasks within the confines of jobs defined as “student recruiter” ignores that in reality the freshman enrollment is a function and a reflection of so many other things. If you only define the enrollment management task or purpose so narrowly, you miss the opportunity for real strategic change.

In “Changing Places,” (p. 34) you discuss the dollars generated from alumni paying tuition for themselves and/or dependents. At some institutions, such as DePaul, these tuition dollars exceed the amount of monetary contributions they donate to the institution. Would you share some insight into this, particularly the impact for enrollment management at the institution?

This is a great illustration of what we were just talking about, of how structures shape and sometimes stifle strategy and the need for malleability or pliability in our organizations in pursuit of our ambitions. Our alignment of Enrollment Management and Alumni Relations did indeed attract a lot of attention about five or six years ago. But the real lesson there isn’t the specific organizational alignment but rather the importance of having organizational structure follow strategy, of recognizing how sometimes we unnecessarily constrain ourselves by allowing, vice versa, strategy to be dictated by traditional structure.

At the time, DePaul’s leadership and our strategic goals were oriented toward an enrollment growth agenda—and we based our planning on the assumption that an institution that is 80 to 90 percent dependant on tuition for its revenue should try to align with its enrollment growth strategy many functions that otherwise might be focused on other outcomes. Alumni Relations was a great example. We considered that the most significant benefit to the University from its alumni—and vice versa—was in the core business of academic instruction and career advancement, not philanthropy. The reality of this supposition was reflected in the fact that we generated about ten times more from alumni in tuition

revenue each year as they pursued second degrees with us than from their annual charitable donations.

Consequently, my team and I were asked to develop a market-centered approach to alumni relations that would dovetail with an institutional strategic goal focused on creating professional networks to drive enrollment and tuition growth. Instead of beginning with what the University needed from its alumni, we began by focusing on what they needed from us. In other words, start from a market orientation that looked to sustain and extend the relationship that first brought them to the University. Despite the university being 106 years old, approximately one-third of our 100,000 alumni had graduated since 1990 and most of them were working in metro Chicago. We quickly learned that these alumni preferred to connect and reconnect with DePaul around issues relevant to them today, not around reminiscences of days gone by, and their interests today are almost exclusively related to career and professional development.

Responding to the desire of alumni for a career-focused reconnection isn’t the dominant mental model among development and advancement professionals, who I’ve found tend to see alumni as “prior students/future donors.” The traditional and deeply ingrained mental model guiding alumni relations at many institutions is one of fundraising, which is a valuable and necessary perspective, but not the only way of framing the institution’s relationship with its alumni population. It is certainly not the most effective perspective if alumni are primarily seeking professional connections and career-advancing opportunities through their relationship with their alma mater.

So we explored and introduced new organizational models that aligned alumni relations with the career network initiatives I described earlier, as well as with our integrated marketing efforts in EM. We reframed the alumni strategy, shifting from an exclusive focus on traditional alumni clubs or associations designed for those who want to come back and reminisce together or rally around athletics, and focusing more on building alumni career networks where they could reconnect with the University around issues that are pragmatically relevant to their career today. And, as is typical of marketing and enrollment management approaches, we developed a comprehensive set of metrics much broader than the gift receipts previously tracked. The gains we realized in alumni participation, broadly defined and measured, were remarkable.

Recently, a new president and new board leadership are recognizing that DePaul has not taken fundraising as seriously as we should as part of our institutional strategy. One of the first things they are doing is affirming that if philanthropy is going to be more central to our strategy and our mission in coming years, various functions need to not only focus on that goal but be organizationally aligned with it. DePaul will return to a more traditional development-oriented organizational structure that will build upon the new foundation my team created. But again, I think the real lesson here—and a great example of DePaul’s agility—is that

any organizational structure and organizational alignments follow from strategy, and not vice versa.

Steven Covey may promote “Start with the end in mind,” but based on your experiences and writings, can that really occur within enrollment management, a seemingly constantly evolving profession critical to the future of an institution? In essence, can there even be an “end” or is it part strategic planning, part good fortune, and part talent?

Of course it is paramount that we begin with an end in mind, but the end that matters isn't an end in a temporal sense like a finish line, as you suggest. It is the end we all have in terms of the purposes that define us. What is the core mission that guides what we do? What is the overarching reason we have for doing what we are doing and being what we are being at our institution? The end that matters is not some distant or final objective but rather the end that we realize every day, and in every way.

Enrollment management is an enabling perspective and process by which institutions realize their core missions and fulfill their primary purposes. I have been fortunate to work at institutions that have noble and inspiring missions—and I've been very intentional about those choices. Being continuously clear about how that mission dictates all that we do in enrollment management is important to me and to my colleagues.

But what we do in enrollment management is not just *support* an institution's pursuit of its mission. What we do is force ourselves, our colleagues, our executive leadership and our faculty to grapple with the consequences of mission-based values and visions. It is in and through our enrollment management strategies that we clarify how the university's mission is manifested. It's reflected daily in the decisions we make about the kinds of students we enroll, the kinds of academic programs we support, the way we price ourselves, the way we aid students, the kinds of services we offer, and the kinds of outcomes we celebrate. In all these things, enrollment management is the crucible within which we grind out what those principles and purposes are really all about.

Keeping the end in sight requires that you embrace the institution's mission as something more than rhetoric. A mission is the litmus test for where you spend your dollars, who you are trying to enroll, and how you measure success in achieving enrollment goals and student outcomes. If you are holding out for some distant gratification when some final end is realized, it can all get frustrating very quickly. But every day and in every way, realizing the mission of the institution is how we all should both generate and expend our energies—in that sense, it's what constitutes the metabolism of our organizations.

What have been your greatest past challenges as an enrollment manager? Following that, what are some realities of the future of the profession with issues such as increased competition, sky-rocketing tuition increases, and seemingly

boundary-less city/state lines when it comes to other institutions “invading” another's turf?

Well each and every institution and each and every vice president of enrollment management has their own particular set of challenges to be addressed—challenges that justify having a salary attached to these roles and responsibilities. Discussing those would be a book unto itself. But I often think the most persistent challenge I've faced and continue to face is resisting the push to make 'enrollment management' into something that it is not. When I hear EM defined as a profession in its own right, or defined as a set of tools and techniques, or even a prescribed skill set that actually warrants calling some one individual an “enrollment manager” as your question posed—well, I worry about what that suggests about the work we do.

I visit institutions that insist they are doing enrollment management because they are leveraging their aid, employing predictive modeling, implementing CRM systems, and so on. And we all know that there are ample consulting firms adding to this celebration of technique. While I recognize that in any endeavor the tools define the trade, is that really what we consider EM to be? And isn't it critical to ensure that how a college or university pursues its optimal enrollment profile isn't somehow delegated or relegated to someone called an “enrollment manager” and thereby disconnecting it from the fundamental academic enterprise? That's what I'd identify as a challenge of the first order.

But your question about the dominant challenges facing enrollment management in higher education today really hits the nail on the head, recognizing that the most daunting challenges are not within but rather outside the institution. They lie and they lurk in the constantly shifting terrain, the ever-changing social, economic, political, and demographic landscape of higher education. The truly strategic enrollment management process continuously monitors that external environment and, like a beacon, focuses the institution's attention on what lies ahead, on the challenges that are distant from the pressing demands of the immediate management crisis. A strategic orientation enables us to escape 'the tyranny of the urgent' over our time and energy and attention, and to focus on less immediate but more insidious challenges. Your question should remind us that the primary threats we all face do not come from some sudden and perhaps unanticipated catastrophic events, like the recent tsunami. Rather, like global warming, the primary threats result from long term, almost imperceptible changes in our environment that can trip up both the complacent and the clueless.

For example, in terms of the access challenge in American higher education, our focus shouldn't be on President Bush's agenda and what it may do to Pell Grant eligibility. Rather, it must be on the slow but steady shift in this nation's view of higher education from being a public good worthy of public investment to being a private benefit where the cost is primarily and appropriately borne by the student and/or parent.

More insidious than the threats posed by any current or specific legislation are the broader changes in how we view the benefits of higher education. And this is happening, ironically, when the broad economic returns to communities, cities, states, and societies of an educated citizenry are increasingly apparent.

A related example is the raging debate about *U.S. News & World Report*. The primary challenge isn't in these rankings themselves that are now the compulsive focus for so many of our presidents and our boards. The fundamental challenge is what gives rise to such rankings in the first place and pre-dates *U.S. News*. It is the systemic reality of how our entire education system is in rabid pursuit of prestige, investing in an unrelenting arms race to improve prestige for its own sake, regardless of its effect on the quality of student learning. It is the long term and pervasive stratification of the higher education marketplace that heaps disproportionate attention and value on a few institutions that serve an extraordinarily privileged few students, institutions whose distinction lies in their exclusivity, and whose primary claim to fame therefore could be cynically described as their success in making silk purses out of silk.

There is a significant challenge for enrollment management in this regard, because those of us who lead these processes are culpable either by active intent or indifferent passivity, in perpetuating this perspective. Listen to the increasingly indignant protests about the commercialization of higher education marketing rising from professional gatherings of admissions professionals, financial aid professionals, high school guidance professionals, and the like. Or, read the voluminous literature on the condition of access in higher education and the diagnoses therein of the root causes of this persistent social dilemma. You will see and hear that many view 'enrollment management' and the marketization of higher education as the co-conspiring villains in the erosion of integrity, equity, and ethics in this arena.

These critics fail to see that these, like many of the other examples in your question, are the natural result of market forces shaping the academy. Perhaps *invading* the academy is a better descriptor for how many educators view today's environment, suggesting that heretofore our institutions were citadels insulating the academy from the market. They aren't that now, and never were.

In this sense, I would say the challenge we all face is what Robert Reich once pointed out: "In the corporate world, it's dog eat dog; in the academic world, it's just the opposite."

What advice would you provide others who are considering a career transition to enrollment management, or preparing for an increased role within enrollment management?

It's an interesting time in higher education administration right now for strategic marketing and enrollment management leaders. First, the practice and perspective of enrollment management has become common enough and valued enough over the last 25 years that universities realize the need for experienced leadership in this arena. The number of searches each year for leaders with significant years of relevant experience is growing. Since the number of searches exceeds the number of qualified candidates, one must conclude that it is a very promising career path.

But it's clear that we've not done all we need to do to groom younger talent for EM leadership and create an environment that attracts them to leadership roles. We also need to broaden our reach to develop EM leadership from professional fields beyond admissions. It puzzles me that financial aid professionals, for example, are so quick to criticize EM practices and perspectives but they seldom choose to pursue the very leadership positions that would enable them to effectively shape that very practice. EM as a practice and a perspective would benefit from a greater diversity in the professional pathways from which we select our next generation of senior leaders.

Would it seem ironic, however, if I suggested in response to your question that one should begin by not seeing enrollment management as a career at all? EM is not a clearly bounded set of roles, responsibilities, tasks, talents or competencies. EM is a pretty richly variegated tapestry of professional roles and a fluid set of activities. I've long thought that the only consistent thing in EM across the terrain of American higher education is the inconsistency in how it's conceived and practiced.

My advice would be that, like the scout in my previous metaphor, you always want to be in a position to anticipate and to respond well to change, taking advantage of opportunities as they come along. Enrollment management in American higher education today is such a fascinating and rapidly changing arena that any well conceived career plan is quickly rendered obsolete. Was it Eisenhower who said that "planning is everything but the plan is nothing"?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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