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# The Future of Enrollment Leadership





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# Preface

The work of enrollment leaders has always been shaped by challenges and opportunities facing higher education and our own institutions. New challenges and opportunities for higher education create new roles for enrollment leaders.

The higher education sector is seeing a growth in public skepticism about the value of a college degree; a decline in college student populations; challenges to using race in admissions; decreasing public funding; and increasing costs and student debt. At the same time, we have more data and information at our fingertips and better technology than ever before, as well as greater opportunities for collaboration and innovation with colleagues at our institutions and across the country.

All of these factors mean that enrollment leadership is changing. On a growing number of campuses, the role of enrollment leaders is expanding its reach and influence beyond the traditional enrollment structures of admissions, financial aid, and registration. They are increasingly called upon to shape strategy across an institution, while still needing to meet enrollment, retention, and graduation objectives.

In June 2018, the College Board assembled 31 enrollment leaders at its headquarters to consider the future of enrollment leadership over the next 15 years, and to imagine the roles they must play so their institutions and students—and higher education—can thrive.

Enrollment leaders led robust group discussions focused on the skills successful enrollment leaders bring to new and expanding roles on campus.

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## What This Monograph Is

Rather than reexploring the field of enrollment management, the focus of the monograph is the work of enrollment leaders who must have specific skills and capacities to be successful in traditional roles, who will address new challenges, and who will take advantage of new opportunities. This monograph sets forth key takeaways from our discussion, particularly the roles enrollment leaders will need to fill, including:

- Shaping how our institutions think, act, and evolve;
- Leading strategic conversations;
- Identifying new models and structures;
- Implementing the visions of presidents, trustees, and other senior leaders; and
- Increasing student success.

It reflects on and draws from current research and resources that help us frame how enrollment leaders can approach the most pressing challenges facing higher education institutions.

## What This Monograph Is Not

This document isn't intended to be a record of meeting proceedings or a chronological presentation of our wide-ranging discussions. It doesn't provide an exhaustive list of enrollment leaders' competencies, skills, and areas of expertise or cover the details of organizational structures or reporting lines. If you're looking for best practices in those areas, organizations like the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and the Center for Enrollment Research, Policy and Practice (CERPP) have many resources available on their websites. Another resource is the *Handbook of Strategic Enrollment Management* by Don Hossler and Bob Bontrager, which covers the administrative function of enrollment management.

## How the Monograph Is Organized

The monograph is organized by major topic, beginning with an Introduction that lays out the broad social and economic trends that impact both higher education and the role of the enrollment leader. In Chapter 1, the crosscutting skills that enrollment leaders uniquely bring to the institution are identified.

Chapters 2–5 cover key topics in enrollment leadership: data and analysis, the economic model, admissions, and student success. In each chapter, the roles enrollment leaders play are identified, and then the context and history that brought us to where we are today—key considerations, best practices, and examples of leadership in action—are provided. Each chapter concludes with a set of forward-looking questions. The monograph ends with a conclusion describing the ongoing centrality of the enrollment leader.

Enrollment management is a relatively young field, and it is already evolving significantly. We hope this monograph can encourage and inform thoughtful conversations about the future of this field.

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### CENTRALITY OF THE ROLE OF THE ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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## INTRODUCTION

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# Setting the Stage: Context and Challenges

## The Biggest Picture: Broad Forces That Are Reshaping Higher Education

Over the last three decades, higher education has faced a series of economic, social, cultural, and political challenges that have impacted the sector and shaped the emergence and growth of the enrollment management field. In the last 10 years, many of these forces have accelerated the pressures on higher education institutions, exacerbated further by the Great Recession of 2008. In response, some institutions are experimenting with, and introducing, new programs, outcome measures, and management structures to address the evolving challenges of recruiting, enrolling, and graduating students.

Globalization, technology, and growing economic inequality are driving the questions about the role of higher education in society and the economy. As population demographics continue to shift, workforce needs are changing rapidly. Economic fluctuations and uncertainty continue to create funding challenges for public and private institutions alike. And with the continued growth in the cost of college, the media and the public have begun to question the value and return on the investment of a college education. According to the Pew Research Center, **6 in 10** Americans think higher education is going in the wrong direction. Of those, 84% cite high tuition costs, and 65% say students aren't getting the skills they need to succeed in the workplace.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the current political and cultural climate is eroding overall public trust in institutions generally. The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer reports:

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1. Pew Research Center, "Most Americans say higher ed is heading in the wrong direction, but partisans disagree on why." (July 21, 2018). <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/26/most-americans-say-higher-ed-is-heading-in-wrong-direction-but-partisans-disagree-on-why/>

“In a year marked by turbulence at home and abroad, trust in institutions in the United States crashed, posting the steepest, most dramatic general population decline the Trust Barometer has ever measured.”<sup>2</sup>

Although the Trust Barometer notes that trust in education to better the world remains stronger than trust in 28 of the 30 industries studied, pervasive public distrust shapes nearly every aspect of our work.

In facing these challenges, enrollment leaders can either be actors, or they can be directors who use the skills and abilities required for success in enrollment to provide the vision and strategies necessary for campus success. Each campus and each enrollment leader must decide how to address these challenges and consider questions, including:

- How do I prepare to lead across campus, contribute to success strategies, and build toward the vision of my president or chancellor?
- How can I shape and frame the conversations on campus, rather than simply participate?

## **Key Challenges for Higher Education— and Opportunities for Enrollment Leaders**

Enrollment leaders appreciate that the fortunes of their institutions will rise and fall depending on their skill in calibrating this bottom line in response to market forces. New communications technologies, stringent cost models, dynamic student demographics, and shifting political and public perceptions about the value of higher education will impact colleges and universities everywhere.

These dynamic changes—which include a greater emphasis on college completion and more explicit calculations regarding the economic value of a college degree—place institutions’ admissions policies and practices at the center of a national conversation about college admission, college readiness, and college completion.

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2. Edelman. “Edelman Trust Barometer,” January 21, 2018.  
<https://www.edelman.com/trust-barometer>

Of the broad forces challenging higher education, enrollment leaders identified three that have the most direct relevance and impact, and around which the profession can lead and influence. They include demographic shifts, college cost, and rapidly changing workforce needs.

## 1. DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

Over the coming 15+ years, a series of demographic shifts will challenge higher education in fundamental ways. Not only will the United States see smaller high school classes beginning around 2025. The demographics and college-going rates of that group will also shift significantly, and regional variation and impact will continue to grow. According to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE):

- “After steady increases in the overall number of high school graduates over the last 15 years, the U.S. is headed into a period of stagnation. WICHE’s projections indicate that the number of graduates in each graduating class will average around 3.4 million through 2023, before peaking at 3.56 million prior to 2026.”<sup>3</sup>
- “The pending national plateau is largely fueled by a decline in the white student population and counterbalanced by growth in the number of nonwhite public school graduates—Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders in particular. Overall, there will be consistent declines in the number of white public high school graduates and robust growth in the number of public high school graduates of color (or, technically speaking, “nonwhite” graduates) in the coming years.”<sup>4</sup>

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3. Peace Bransberger and Demarée K. Michelau. *Knocking at the College Door*. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, Denver (2016), 2.  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57f269e19de4bb8a69b470ae/t/58d2ebfc3e00be70a4278e16/1490217985173/Knocking2016ExecutiveSummaryFINAL.pdf>

4. *Ibid.*, 3

- “By 2030, the number of white public school graduates is projected to decrease by 14%, compared to 2013. Even in 2024–2026, when the nation is projected to see some overall increase in the number of high school graduates, there will be about 110,000 fewer white public high school graduates than there were in 2013.”<sup>5</sup>

In *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*, Nathan Grawe ties demographic data to data on college-going rates to analyze the impact on particular college sectors and segments. Already, demographics are having a significant impact on college enrollment. Many institutions are failing to reach enrollment goals and are missing the mark for tuition revenue. Grawe’s major insights about implications of an increasingly diverse and geographically dispersed college-going population for the future of higher education include:

- **Birth Dearth:** Significant changes in national fertility rates—what Grawe calls a “birth dearth,” will have a profound impact on college going in America. He projects that, beginning in the latter half of the 2020s, enrollment will begin to fall. *“In just four years, at the end of the forecast period [2030], the four-year sector stands to lose almost 280,000 students.”*<sup>6</sup>
- **Location Matters:** The impact of the birth dearth will be felt most significantly in the Northeast and the Midwest, although all regions of the country—including the overheated population centers of California, the South, and major urban areas (N.Y., L.A., Chicago)—will face significantly less demand for higher education.<sup>7</sup>
- **Selectivity Matters:** Grawe predicts that the most selective colleges and universities will experience less fallout from the birth dearth, given their relatively limited enrollment capacity of this segment, and the increasing demand for “elite” education in the U.S. In contrast, less selective institutions will face much more significant enrollment challenges.<sup>8</sup>

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5. Ibid., 2.

6. Nathan D. Grawe, *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 69.

7. Ibid., 46–53.

8. Ibid., 70–71.

Already, demographics are having significant impacts on college enrollment. According to a 2017 *Chronicle of Higher Education* survey:<sup>9</sup>

- “Among public colleges, 44% failed to meet their enrollment goals, while 52% of private colleges missed those goals. A far greater share of the private colleges fell short by 5% or more.”
- “Private colleges were also more likely to have lowered their enrollment goals during the admissions cycle. Thirty percent of all private colleges had lowered their goals at least once, and 11% did so more than once. Those proportions were higher this year than in the previous four years of the survey. Among public colleges, 17% had lowered their enrollment goals at least once.”
- “Even more colleges missed the mark for tuition revenue. Fifty-two percent of public colleges and 55% of private colleges reported falling short on net tuition revenue. Almost half (48%) of private colleges raised their discount rate this year, on the higher end of results since the survey began.”

## 2. COLLEGE COST AND FINANCING

Over the past 20 years, the cost of college has significantly outpaced family income. Part of the increase has been driven by cuts in state funding. Overall, state funding for higher education has fallen steadily over the last 20–30 years, making up just 14% of all institutional budgets, compared with 69% from 1980, and falling significantly since the recession of 2008 (the average state spent **16% less** in 2017 than in 2008).<sup>10</sup>

If these dynamics continue, some public campuses may be looking at a 0% state contribution—meaning a heavier reliance on tuition and other sources of revenue.

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9. Scott Carlson, “How Enrollment Challenges Can Spur Change,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 21, 2018). <https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Enrollment-Challenges-Can/242276>

10. Thomas G. Mortenson, “State Funding: A Race to the Bottom,” *Back to the Presidency*. American Council on Education (Winter 2012). <https://www.acenet.edu/the-presidency/columns-and-features/Pages/state-funding-a-race-to-the-bottom.aspx>

At the same time, since 1980, the average annual increase in college tuition from 1980 to 2014 grew by nearly 260%. According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, as the sticker price of a college degree increases and family incomes stagnate, the amount of financial aid has become a more important factor in a student's college choice. "Although a school's reputation and its graduates' outcomes have remained important, the increased importance of aid reveals a changing student calculus."

Colleges of every type need to look proactively and deeply at their financial and cost models; study and track the impact of cost on applications and on yield and retention; and develop long-term cost management goals and strategies.

### **3. RAPIDLY CHANGING WORKFORCE NEEDS**

In the last 5–10 years, the employment landscape has changed at an accelerating pace. While members of Generation X were taught that they'd likely have 10 jobs over the course of their careers, current college students are predicted to hold between 10 and 14 jobs by age 38—approximately the first half of their careers. Every year, more than 30 million Americans begin working in jobs that didn't exist in the previous year.<sup>11</sup>

Rainer Strack, TED speaker and thought leader in human resources, predicts that without significant course adjustment, the world's economies will face a global workforce crisis by 2030.<sup>12</sup> Pressure points will include an overall labor shortage, a mismatch of workforce skills and industry needs, and growing cultural challenges created by the increasingly global economy.

Because the pace of technological change is so rapid, it's impractical to believe we can prepare students with knowledge of specific technologies. Instead, higher education needs to produce graduates who have a flexible and adaptive set of skills, including critical thinking, communication expertise, and the ability to understand and implement complex systems.

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11. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, and American Community Survey.

12. [https://www.ted.com/speakers/rainer\\_strack](https://www.ted.com/speakers/rainer_strack)

## A Matter of Urgency

The challenges impacting higher education are rising in number and intensity, and enrollment managers must convey a sense of urgency to senior leadership and forward-thinking institutional partners.

For those already experiencing the negative impacts on enrollment, conveying the urgent need to address the challenges will be a straightforward matter. For those who've been insulated from the impacts thus far, a case for innovation and forward thinking will have to be built, supported by enrollment models and demographic data.

Identifying strategic partners both internally and externally will yield stronger results. Randall C. Deike, senior vice president for enrollment management and student success at Drexel University, emphasizes, "Leading your institution to new ways of thinking and doing is not about how you build consensus. It's about how you build momentum."

## Where We're Headed

Enrollment managers can begin to address these challenges and maximize opportunities by asking key questions:

- How can we help our institutions think differently and shape strategic conversations?
- How can we help our institutions act differently, by driving changes to goals, priorities, and institutional structures?

## Where We Have Been: The Historical Lens

The challenges and opportunities of higher education during the last decades have shaped the work of today's enrollment leaders.\*

- **In the 1970s**, forces impacting the beginnings of enrollment management included "complex federal, state, and institutional aid programs that were designed to drive access and choice, and a growing body of empirical research on the college choice process." (Coomes) These two forces, along with projections of a declining number of college-age students, were significant early influencers on the role of enrollment managers.
- **In the 1980s**, the College Board and Loyola University of Chicago sponsored the first national conference on enrollment management, and enrollment leaders were "shaping and refining" concepts that were first named in the 1970s. (Coomes) In this decade, researchers and practitioners shaped the work of enrollment management and its structure. Research accelerated "on college choice, student persistence, and the impact of student aid on the two processes." (Coomes)
- **In the 1990s**, the focus became students as consumers, and colleges and universities were concerned about maintaining their "fiscal and enrollment viability." Public skepticism about the value of higher education, calls for reform in undergraduate education, and state disinvestment in public higher education contributed to the concerns of higher education leaders and enrollment leaders. Costs rose, and college costs covered by Pell Grants fell.
- **In the 2000s**, discussions about the Great Recession of 2008 prevailed. Cuts to state-funded education that started in the 1990s accelerated. The recession changed the financial underpinning of many colleges, ended with the housing bust, and drove discount rates higher. (Selingo)
- **In the 2010s**, decreasing national enrollments and worries about campus sustainability accompanied the closing and consolidation of colleges. Some of this was driven by changes in the for-profit sector, but concerns for nonprofit sector persist. Enrollment leaders manage an increasing campus focus on student achievement, outcome measures, and accountability. They also must respond to challenges to the use of race in admission and questions on the value of higher education.

Grouped at the highest levels, the issues discussed by enrollment leaders over two days and explored in this monograph are repeated over the decades: data and technology, campus finances and budget management, admission criteria and considerations, access and equity, and student success.

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\* Michael D. Coomes, "The Historical Roots of Enrollment Management," *New Directions for Student Services* (Spring 2000): 89, 5–18; Jeffrey J. Selingo, "How the Great Recession changed higher education forever," *The Washington Post* (Sept. 21, 2018).

## CHAPTER 1

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# Capacities Inherent in Enrollment Leaders

## Evolving Roles for Enrollment Leaders

- Market strategist and expert
- Demographic and financial forecaster
- Long-range planner
- Data-driven influencer
- Financial expert and adviser
- Access and affordability driver

This chapter outlines three unique skill sets of today's enrollment manager that can be leveraged to achieve broad impact on campus.

**“We have the opportunity to change the dynamic—  
from an admissions discussion to the development  
of an integrated academic enrollment plan.”**

—DOUGLAS L. CHRISTIANSEN, VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

## Where We've Been and Where We Are

More than 30 years ago, the enrollment profession began its first evolution—from admissions to enrollment. Leaders in the field typically had admissions experience, while some started in financial aid or the registrar's office. Gradually, institutions began to expand the enrollment portfolio beyond admissions to include financial aid, registration, and institutional research. Enrollment leaders began to hone skill sets in population

analysis, predictive modeling, recruitment strategy, revenue projection and modeling, scholarship fundraising and management, data analysis, and research. Today, at many institutions, the enrollment portfolio has expanded further—in addition to admissions, financial aid, registration, and institutional research, it is becoming increasingly common for enrollment leaders to have responsibility for marketing, career services, data management, student retention and success, and other student services.

Enrollment professionals have unique crosscutting capacities and skills and are positioned to provide valuable strategic insights that influence how the institution thinks about and responds to issues and challenges. Areas of expertise include:

- External perspective;
- Long-term thinking and analysis; and
- Integrated and systems thinking.

## Where We're Headed

### EXTERNAL FOCUS

At its core, enrollment work is externally focused. We study demographic, marketing, and economic trends, and we connect consistently with high school leaders, teachers, counselors, and the diverse universe of community-based organizations that support students. We regularly benchmark our institutions against others, looking for new ways to better meet our goals.

The input we receive from our external partners shapes our perceptions of student needs throughout the student life cycle, and our high level of engagement with external audiences gives us a window into how our institution can best connect with these individuals and communities. We also have a necessary focus on broad cultural dynamics, including socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, geographic, generational, and other cultural forces.

This external perspective and expertise can be a valuable tool to use within an institution. Enrollment leaders can successfully leverage external trend

data to influence strategy—including demographic data, cost benchmarks, workforce trends, etc. They also use qualitative and quantitative feedback from students and families to improve both communications and services for students.

## THE LONG-TERM VIEW

Enrollment leaders are accustomed to working with multiple cohorts of students simultaneously, meaning they work with students at any given step along the lengthy college choice process. They need to reach students at the right time and meet them where they are. Enrollment predictive models and data sets often span decades. Enrollment was once considered complete with the successful enrollment of the incoming class. Now, the work extends through orientation to the entire first year, and often through graduation, career transition, and alumni outreach.

**“The enrollment goals of today’s colleges and universities are almost always multifaceted and complex; they are also almost always in conflict with one another.”<sup>13</sup>**

Many institutions tend to focus on the near-term goal and struggle to look beyond the coming budget cycle. Enrollment leaders can drive longer-term thinking by sharing and convening conversations based on trend reports, e.g., demographics and workforce, and by engaging their peers in multiyear modeling and planning.

Enrollment leaders have the long-term vision and strategy to lead the development of 5- and 10-year plans for student success outcomes, funding, government relations, and the physical campus master plan. Building models for and actively advocating for the focus on long-term help in moderating risks, anticipating challenges, and planning for success.

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13. Donald Hossler and David Kalsbeek. “Enrollment Management and Managing Enrollments: Revisiting the Context for Institutional Strategy,” *Strategic Enrollment Management Quarterly* (April 4, 2013), American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO).

## INTEGRATED AND SYSTEMS THINKING

The third major crosscutting skill that enrollment leaders possess is systems thinking. They naturally approach problems structurally and systematically, define the context, identify the key lifecycle points, and articulate the desired outcome. In a university environment, where work is often siloed, the ability to create more integrated frameworks and goals around which to organize strategy, collaboration, and action is a highly effective asset.

**“When we think about structure and influence, we should make sure that we don’t only think top-down. Consider ways to formally institutionalize relationships through matrix structures, cross-organizational teams, and other similar structures. A range of models can help us to bridge traditional institutional silos.”**

—RANDALL C. DEIKE, DREXEL UNIVERSITY

As further chapters will describe in greater detail, systems thinking is particularly relevant to a more integrated use of data and to the design, management, and execution of student retention and success initiatives. These conclusions can be made:

- The external perspective of enrollment leaders, supported by data, can be a galvanizing asset in shaping campus conversations.
- Helping to refocus institutional perspectives from 1-year cycles to a long-term view will bring about the best results for students and institutions.
- Integrated and systems thinking provides enrollment leaders with the opportunity to lead internal departments to collaborate around student-centered goals and outcomes.

## CHAPTER 2

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# Data and Analysis

## Emerging Roles for Enrollment Leaders

- Business intelligence expert
- Data steward
- Privacy expert/advocate and ethicist
- Social media expert
- Big data strategist

Big data and the analysis of data are increasingly important in all aspects of campus life. Enrollment leaders manage increasingly complex and granular data that come from a myriad of new technology systems and that play important roles throughout the student life cycle in the responsible collection, analysis, and use of data. Data privacy, data accuracy, and ethical use of data are all areas that would benefit from the wisdom and influence of enrollment leaders.

## Where We've Been and Where We Are

Data, their analysis, and their strategic use are all foundational to the success of the campus enrollment office. As the use of data becomes more ingrained in American society, enrollment leaders need to be more strategic and sophisticated in their analyses to stay competitive. While this trend is nearly ubiquitous, it is most easily seen in the proliferation of vendors offering increasingly intricate data analysis and benchmarking for use in enrollment management.

The rise in available data streams and usages has been accompanied by increased challenges in managing the flow. Inconsistencies in data collection and naming are common, and many enrollment leaders report that these inconsistencies have caused significant communication breakdowns, created campuswide inefficiencies, complicated internal

processes, and confused internal and external audiences. Some enrollment leaders now oversee offices of institutional research that can bring powerful solutions to fix inefficiencies and break down silos but also can bring additional complications and new challenges in analyzing and sharing data. We are working with increasingly complicated data sets, in many cases using information architecture and technology from the last century.

As one leader commented, “our careers and the student experience are based on what is contained inside these boxes and lines.” As enrollment leaders, we are poised to bring fresh thinking and to advocate for consolidating data systems and eliminating data silos. With the proliferation of new systems, the ability of individual departments or programs to manage large complicated spreadsheet databases is stretched. At the same time, competing campus priorities for data management and institutional research mean that enrollment leaders are tasked with taking more active roles in ensuring the “truth” of the data collected. Beyond the quotidian concerns of day-to-day data management and processes, it’s important to remember that the data collected have real implications for every aspect of the student life cycle.

Acknowledging the expanding and pivotal role data play in the lives and well-being of students, enrollment leaders discussed the need for strong data governance structures and policies serving campuses and the clear need for campus leadership in this area. If they haven’t already, they are poised to play new leadership roles in this area, advocating for the consolidation of data systems and the elimination of data silos.

They identified two promising trends leading toward better data practices on campus:

- Consolidating data systems through the increasing use of customer relationship management (CRM) software. CRM systems have allowed many campuses to centralize student information from enrollment, development, and communications, as well as all academic and administrative units; and
- Emerging leadership roles in both information technology and institutional research can enhance enrollment leaders’ skills and capacities and allow them to serve their institution more effectively.

The increasing reliance on big data sets and sophisticated analysis will undoubtedly continue in, and put pressure on, systems created with the previous century's information architecture in mind. Enrollment leaders are positioned to bring fresh thinking and best practices to this process.

## Challenges and Opportunities on the Horizon

Data will increasingly become the currency of the full student life cycle—from recruitment to student success and completion—just as policy and practice will continue to be definitively influenced by its analysis. Data sets will be bigger and more complex than ever, and enrollment leaders will need to be well versed in new data sets, new data sources, and the emerging analytic tools that will be available.

Enrollment leaders discussed the desire to be data informed and student-success driven. These are some of the key issues identified as central to the next several years on their campuses and others:

- Taking on increasingly larger roles in data stewardship that improve student success outcomes;
- Ensuring that student privacy is honored and maintained;
- Asking difficult questions about how much data are necessary for the decisions campus leaders face;
- Seeking out and leveraging crosscutting and interdivisional expertise; and
- Improving institutional benchmarks to make sure they track the outcomes that matter most.

## TAKING A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN DATA STEWARDSHIP IMPACTING STUDENT SUCCESS

Campus data systems store an amazing amount of data to mine in analyzing factors for student success. Part of the opportunity and challenge for enrollment leaders will be having the right data and engaging with leaders from other campus areas—especially academic leaders and faculty. One leader who serves as co-chair of the student success committee on their campus reflected on their experience saying, “... every initiative around student success comes from that ... we’re using predictive analytics for information in a big way to drive student support strategies.”

We must engage faculty and academic leaders in data-informed discussions about student success based on analyses beyond admissions statistics. Successful collaboration with these partners can help institutions build momentum and impact their students throughout graduation and beyond.

Data are critical to developing and implementing new and effective communication streams that can impact student success. For example, data sets like attendance tracking can be used to develop targeted messaging and academic interventions that may help increase student success. Other data such as career services engagement can be used to start early conversations with students.

**“Of all the things in the student life cycle, the career information is the most actionable and in many ways the least intrusive, because you’re just seeing who hasn’t done something and then you can devise models to engage them.”**

—MATT LOPEZ, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Data-driven interventions like these can help leverage limited resources to reach ambitious institutional goals successfully.

The correct and accurate analysis of data is key to any sort of data-driven intervention. For this to be possible, enrollment leaders identified several critical requirements:

- A common and accurate data set;
- A strong investment and adequate resources; and
- Adequate training on using the data.

It's critical for enrollment leaders to build institutional buy-in so the results of data analysis and data-driven interventions are used in a way that informs and changes behavior across campus. Collaboration and partnership across campus are necessary to take full advantage of available data. For example, classroom data can drive strategic curriculum and instructional changes that would improve overall student success and retention rates.

## **PRIVACY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE PARAMOUNT**

Although data collection as granular as tracking web traffic isn't unique to colleges and universities, it is relatively new to the sector. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published a white paper that summarizes several of the ethical issues inherent in the use of "big data" and the privacy concerns it raises.<sup>14</sup> In it, Goldie Blumenstyk calls out a truth that drives the difficulty in dealing with these issues:

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14. Goldie Blumenstyk, "Big Data Is Getting Bigger. So Are the Privacy and Ethical Questions," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 31, 2018). <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Big-Data-Is-Getting-Bigger-So/244099>

**The next step in using “big data” for student success is upon us. It’s a little cool. And also kind of creepy. This new approach goes beyond the tactics now used by hundreds of colleges, which depend on data collected from sources like classroom teaching platforms and student-information systems. It not only makes a technological leap; it also raises issues around ethics and privacy.**<sup>15</sup>

Enrollment leaders noted that it will become increasingly important to continuously balance student privacy with how much of their privacy students and families are willing to trade for ease of application, registration, or saving time on daily activities.

Understanding where data science ends and the ethics begin will become increasingly important for the experienced professional. On one hand, there is a broad body of research and writing that points to a very high tolerance for giving up privacy for convenience. A recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* described “geolocation attendance features” of new technology and relates the ease with which students became users of iris-detection cameras to speed entry into dining halls.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, broader policy movements, such as the European Union (EU)–enacted General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), point to an increased tightening of privacy and data security.<sup>17</sup> This legislation has already had a deep impact on the collection and use of personal data by technology companies in the United States and touches colleges and universities as well. This type of policy will impact student recruitment

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15. Ibid.

16. David Rosen and Aaron Santesso, “How Students Learned to Stop Worrying—and Love Being Spied On,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Sept. 23, 2018). <https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Students-Learned-to-Stop/244596>

17. Joanna Grama, “The Seven Things You Should Know About GDPR.” EDUCAUSE Learning Initiatives (May 1, 2018). <https://library.educause.edu/~media/files/library/2018/5/eli7156-pdf.p.1>. For further background, see Andrew Cormack, “Why Care About GDPR?” EDUCAUSE (March 21, 2018). <https://er.educause.edu/blogs/2018/3/why-care-about-gdpr>

and admissions activities, study abroad programs, faculty and staff recruitment, and international research activities. Enrollment leaders must ensure that these interactions are fully understood, documented, and assessed for compliance. While the data privacy landscape domestically is quite different, an open question remains on whether similar legislation may be put forward at the national or state level.

Enrollment leaders will need to navigate these changing waters by constantly analyzing the ethical and privacy implications of collecting and using certain data insights. They gave some examples of common data privacy opportunities and risks worth examining on campus:

- A potential risk: using data key cards, financial records, mobile app information, or information from social media to identify or evaluate students who are at risk. Using these data as the basis for interventions to encourage retention, student success, or even student safety is a potential risk to student privacy; and
- A potential opportunity: Career data are an example of actionable data with few privacy concerns. Institutions can look at which students are using career services and intervene with those who aren't. Because they're looking for future insights, fewer privacy risks and ethical issues exist.

Outside the bounds of your campus the use of data mined from social media in admissions decisions have far-ranging potential effects and ethical implications. While the use of interaction tracking and audience qualifiers is well established in sectors such as online marketing, one enrollment leader challenged the field to think deeply on this issue:

**“Imagine a system in which we didn’t have an admissions application, but we had students’ browser histories, their Google searches, and their Facebook pages—all this data we could collect from the ether. We would rightly say this is laughably invasive, but there aren’t many guardrails around the work we’re doing because we haven’t had time to think about where they ought to be.”**

Financial data are other examples of where the ethics for higher education are fuzzy. The same data point—such as examining spending behavior—has a huge potential for an institution to take proactive steps to support student success, but it also raises major ethical issues around what institutions should collect and track when it comes to student spending.

Campus leaders must acknowledge that strategies and actions based on the flood of personal data on individual behaviors will have wide-reaching implications that go beyond ethical violations. Enrollment leaders must ask:

- Can we take action on the data we're collecting?
- How can we ensure that it is the least intrusive?

**“We have to be really thoughtful about how much we reach into students’ lives—once we start doing that, then we start affecting student behavior in ways that are really unhealthy and I just worry about that.”**

—STUART SCHMILL, MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

## HOW MUCH DATA DO WE NEED?

With more data, there is a need for increased data storage, and the technology is exciting for the world of enrollment. But we must continue to assess the extent to which data collection is necessary—just because we can collect unprecedented amounts of student data doesn't mean that we should. Particularly for those enrollment leaders who love to ask for data, the exponential increases in data can pose real challenges. For these leaders, the dilemma of too much information and confusing processes can complicate the need to focus on the data necessary to make good decisions.

**“There’s always more information to be had, but when is there enough information to make a good admission decision, academic advising recommendation, student intervention? It is hard to answer what is curiosity and what is insight. We can chase down a rabbit hole.”**

—MICHAEL KABBAZ, MIAMI UNIVERSITY OF OHIO

Enrollment leaders must prioritize their strategies based on relevance and resources. The differences between priority data and a “rabbit hole” may depend on the institution and the solutions it needs. For example, one enrollment leader shared that:

“Forty-six percent of the students who visit on overcast days apply. This is far below the 59% who apply when they visit on sunny days. Perhaps there is an opportunity here to drive a communication strategy for those who visit when it’s raining outside.”

This enrollment leader collects data on weather correlated with student visits, and it is actionable information for this institution. It’s easy to envision a scenario where an institution with the resources and know-how could launch a recruitment campaign targeting rainy-day students. For other institutions, this information may not be useful at all. The bottom line is that we must possess a deep understanding of our institutions and pair this with the knowledge and skills to use data correctly to separate good data from diving down a rabbit hole.

One enrollment leader noted: “It takes a certain level of sophistication to use data well. I think one of the things I see all the time in our profession is people putting data out there and using them in ways that don’t make a lot of sense to me.”

Common risks and issues around proper data use include:

- Building correlations that don't actually exist, misinterpreting correlations as causal; and
- Missing the inherent nuances of data and/or mistaking bias for meaning.

Without strong gatekeeping and curation, decisions are informed by erroneous data leading to failed strategies that damage both the institution and its students. Especially when it comes to potentially sensitive academic or administrative data, enrollment leaders can ensure that data are used correctly and that analyses are sound.

Not all enrollment leaders have a deep grounding in statistical analysis, but the need to understand data and translate data into strategy was universal. And many do lack the time to do the analyses themselves. So it's important to build a team skilled at working with large data sets and performing complex statistical analysis. Many enrollment leaders reported adding teams focused solely on data analysis. Others are taking a larger role with institutional research groups to help bring all of those elements together to make effective decisions. One leader noted recent changes in their staff's work with data: "One of the transitions we made over the last year is move from a production unit to an analysis unit."

The growing need for analysis, not just for data production and reporting, is reflected in staffing and the use of outside enrollment analysts within enrollment offices. The potential benefits of using outside analysis firms include significant benchmarking information to provide a perspective on critical issues on campus.

## IMPROVING AND EXPANDING INSTITUTIONAL BENCHMARKS

Leveraging data to benchmark your college or university against direct competitors or an aspirational set of peers is widely seen as a deeply informative exercise when developing and working toward strategic goals. Looking forward, expanding institutional benchmarks to areas that haven't traditionally been measured or examined can be an effective approach to increasing your institution's strategic momentum.

Even across the complex landscape, it remains clear that enrollment leaders will increasingly take advantage of new analytical insights resulting from a convergence of data elements to inform new institutional comparisons. One enrollment leader said:

“Data collection and analysis are the necessary science, but the art will be found in the creativity of the questions that enrollment leaders ask and the solutions they proffer, as informed by the data. This work will lead to new opportunities to experiment and may result in competitive advantages and institutional distinctions.”

As with all data issues, benchmarking must be approached with an eye toward sound strategy and equitable practice. These are some important considerations enrollment leaders flagged:

- Big data can introduce bias and prop up unrealistic models against which all students, regardless of experience, are judged;
- Comparative or competitive data sets can be difficult to define for specific types of institutions—for example, a historically black women's college, an extremely small faith-based institution, or a university offering the single opportunity to pursue specific subjects; and
- Creating market distinctions, finding new efficiencies, improving the student experience, or positively affecting institutional net revenue will all require a nuanced and balanced look at benchmarks because there are many advantages that can't be directly copied or compared to other institutions.

**“So, our role—data integrity, good data governance, creativity, and analytics—gives each institution an opportunity for distinction that cannot be taken away. By focusing on the data gleaned from careful and continuous examination of the student life cycle, enrollment leaders can provide advantages to their institutions in truly distinctive ways.”**

—CAREY THOMPSON, RHODES COLLEGE

Enrollment managers must strategically shape their institutions' approaches to benchmarking and advocate for expansion into new lines of comparison.

## CHAPTER 3

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# Economic Leadership in Higher Education

## Emerging Roles for Enrollment Leaders

- Demographic/economic expert
- Revenue and budget modeler
- Revenue generator
- Budget model revolutionary
- Scholarship designer and promoter

## Where We've Been and Where We Are

In recent years, conversations on the economics of higher education have often focused on the question: “Who pays?” And, in many cases, the discussion that follows is dominated by a round of “Not I.”

The changing face of the economics of higher education, along with the pressing challenges and unique opportunities presented by the nation’s rapidly changing economic landscape, is a major force defining the roles a successful enrollment leader is expected to play.

Examining some of the most important economic changes deepens the story. Declines in federal and state funding of higher education and the escalating cost of a quality education are long-term shifts that drive changes in who pays for higher education. The following are some of the key indicators for this movement tracked in the College Board Trends in Higher Education reports:

- In 2015-16, appropriations for each full-time equivalent (FTE) student were 11% lower in inflation-adjusted dollars than they were a decade earlier and 13% lower than they were 30 years earlier;<sup>18</sup> and
- The \$76.1 billion in total state and local appropriations for higher education in 2015-16 (excluding Illinois) represented less than a 1% increase in inflation-adjusted dollars over a decade and a decline of 7% from the peak of \$82.0 billion (in 2015 dollars) in 2007-08.<sup>19</sup>

Concurrent with this decline in state and federal support is an increase in overall tuition costs. This means that the greater share of the economic load has fallen to students and families.

Trends in Higher Education calls out the elevated financial burden that remains regardless if a student attends a private or public institution:

- Between 2007-08 and 2017-18, published in-state tuition and fees at public four-year institutions increased at an average rate of 3.2% per year beyond inflation, compared with 4.0% between 1987-88 and 1997-98 and 4.4% between 1997-98 and 2007-08;<sup>20</sup> and
- The 2.4% average annual rate of increase in published tuition and fees at private nonprofit four-year institutions over the most recent decade was a decline from 3.3% between 1987-88 and 1997-98 and 2.7% between 1997-98 and 2007-08.<sup>21</sup>

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18. The College Board, Trends in College Pricing (2017), 4. [https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/2017-trends-in-college-pricing\\_1.pdf](https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/2017-trends-in-college-pricing_1.pdf)

19. Ibid., 4.

20. Ibid., 3.

21. Ibid., 3.

At the same time, the institutional practice of tuition discounting has grown. According to a 2017 Tuition Discounting Study by NACUBO:<sup>22</sup>

- In 2016-17, the average discount rate for first-time, full-time freshmen reached 48.2%, and it is expected to have reached 49.9% in 2017-18, the highest level recorded since the tuition discounting study began. The discount rate for all undergraduates in 2017-18 rose to an estimated 44.8%, also an all-time high;
- Using inflation-adjusted values, net tuition revenue, which accounts for the bulk of funding for private institutions, has been flat or declining for the last five years. The decline was attributed to rising discount rates; and
- “About 89% of first-time, full-time freshmen received institutional grants in 2017-18, and the average grant award in 2017-18 covered 56.7% of tuition and fees, up from 55.3% in 2016-17.”

By looking at long-term trends, it is possible to clearly see the legacy of student aid policies during the recession. Because of rapid increases in grant aid and tax benefits, particularly in 2009-10 and 2010-11, average net prices declined even in the face of unusually large increases in published tuition and fees.<sup>23</sup> This yielded some benefits for students—in the public two-year and private nonprofit four-year sectors—after adjusting for inflation, the average net tuition and fees remain below their levels of a decade ago. On the other hand, it is unlikely that this will hold true for long. Net prices have risen for eight consecutive years for full-time students at public four-year institutions, seven years at public two-year colleges, and six years at private nonprofit colleges and universities.

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22. NACUBU. <http://products.nacubo.org/index.php/nacubo-research/2017-tuition-discounting-study.html>

23. Trends in College Pricing, 3-4.

## Looking Forward: Challenges and Opportunities on the Horizon

These trends show no signs of abating in the near- or long-term future. Economic pressures will require higher education leadership—particularly the enrollment office—to conduct ongoing, realistic assessments of the financial picture for individual institutions. Equally important will be making strategic changes based on those analyses to steward our institutions into the future. This section examines some of the most pressing challenges and opportunities that enrollment leaders must address, including:

- Staying abreast of changing demographics and creating a clear-eyed view of what this will mean for economic models;
- Exploring new funding and revenue streams;
- Addressing issues of transparency in pricing, including both financial aid and scholarships; and
- Investigating the feasibility of student success-centered resource allocation models.

### FINANCIAL IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

Campuses must plan for the reality of the upcoming demographic changes in the coming years and decades and their possible impact on costs, affordability, and campus finances. Enrollment leaders have an opportunity to guide the data analysis and drive an understanding of the new realities that will come with demographic changes. These changes won't impact every institution in the same way. The impact will differ by institution type, location, and student body composition, as described in Nathan Grawe's book, which we will examine in Chapter 3.

These demographic shifts will have real economic impacts that will require enrollment leaders to ensure that hope doesn't become their institutions' go-to strategy. There are a number of strategies for economic stability, but as one leader noted, demographic changes can't be ignored.

**“The reality is you can’t wish yourself out of a demographic situation.”**

Additionally, it will be important to monitor existing strategies and eliminate those that will be ineffective for the changing landscape. For example, there can be a tendency for campus leaders and boards of trustees to assume there is a way to “market” their way through the demographic changes. A clear-eyed reading of Grawe’s analysis shows that the demographic changes are profound and deep enough that neither broad recruitment markets nor strong materials and messages will be realistic paths to success.<sup>24</sup>

A key part of developing a realistic strategy for economic sustainability is to elevate the discussion beyond this year’s class. Success requires a long-term view of the economic health of the institution, one that is inherent to enrollment management across the student life cycle. Focusing the conversation on long-term strategies can be difficult when near-term budget realities loom large, but it’s a role that enrollment leaders are well equipped to play.

## **NEW REVENUE STREAMS**

Continued economic pressures mean exploration of ideas for new revenue streams to fund the increasing costs of education and help support students. While there is much hope and many ideas, there is little consensus among enrollment leaders on viable replacements for traditional funding sources or solutions for the cascading effects of discount rates and price confusion. Some areas that enrollment leaders mentioned in discussion include the following:

- Endowments provide a solution for a small number of institutions and have created a specific role for enrollment leaders engaging with major donors.

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24. Nathan D. Grawe, *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education* (Baltimore: *The Johns Hopkins Press*, 2018), 103–109.

- Corporate funding that some institutions use for graduate students and graduate programs could be models to consider for undergraduate programs as well.

## **MEETING NEED AND AFFORDABILITY**

Enrollment leaders have identified strategies to increase both enrollment and graduation rates for underrepresented students and have employed these strategies to successfully recruit increasing numbers of low- and moderate-income students.

Securing institutional commitment to raise funds for need-based scholarships is the key to addressing access. Some leaders described a focus on, and some success in, earmarking some portion of large-scale fundraising campaigns for need-based scholarships. Another strategy is to identify new ways to direct endowment revenue toward access initiatives.

Some institutions are promoting new corporate funding streams—they identify and partner with major corporations that give tuition benefits to employees and they promote corporations that incentivize retention by increasing the scholarship award for a student’s successful completion of each year.

## **TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY: CRITICAL FOR STUDENTS**

At the intersection of meeting needs and affordability are the critical issues of transparency and accountability. These issues are especially critical for middle-class students. Practices such as high-value merit scholarships, tuition discounting, and an overall emphasis on affordability for the lowest-income students place middle-class students in a difficult position. These students often have too much income to be truly needy, but they may not have the support or resources to apply or qualify for merit scholarships. Enrollment leaders recognize this squeeze in the middle, but solutions are scarce.

A related issue also exists for transfer students. Nationally, only 42% of students who transfer from a two-year institution graduate from their

four-year destination institution.<sup>25</sup> This presents a challenge for enrollment leaders to provide the right financial aid and the success and completion supports for transfer students, who have different needs than traditionally matriculating students.

Researchers from the Community College Research Center have noted that transfer completion rates differed by income levels, with students from lower-income levels generally showing a lower rate of bachelor degree completion. The research also showed that barriers to accessing financial aid are key complicating factors in getting transfer students to graduate.<sup>26</sup>

## **STUDENT-CENTERED RESOURCE MODELS**

Enrollment leaders have long played critical roles in generating revenue and securing funding for institutions. As institutions increasingly prioritize metrics such as retention, graduation, and student success, enrollment leaders have an opportunity to play a larger role in the allocation of resources and to advocate for new models that put students at the center of campus budgeting processes.

Many institutions employ a Responsibility Centered Model (RCM). A Lumina Foundation paper formally defines RCM as “a decentralized model that engages deans and other midlevel managers in development and management of budgets, thereby creating broader understanding and accountability for the budgetary and programmatic consequences of administrative decisions.”<sup>27</sup> Informally, RCM is described as “every tub on its own bottom.”<sup>28</sup>

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25. Davis Jenkins and John Fink, “Tracking Transfer: New Measures of Institutional and State Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students Attain Bachelor’s Degrees,” Community College Resource Center. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/tracking-transfer-institutional-state-effectiveness.pdf>, 18.

26. *Ibid.*, 42.

27. Linda A. Kosten, “Outcomes-Based Funding and Responsibility Center Management: Combining the Best of State and Institutional Budget Models to Achieve Shared Goals,” Lumina Foundation. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/obf-and-responsibility-center-management-full.pdf>, p. 2.

28. Leroy W. Dubeck, “Beware Higher Ed’s Newest Budget Twist,” National Education Association. [https://www.nea.org/assets/img/PubThoughtAndAction/TAA\\_97Spr\\_07.pdf](https://www.nea.org/assets/img/PubThoughtAndAction/TAA_97Spr_07.pdf), 81.

Advantages of RCM listed in the Lumina paper include deans who are “more fiscally aware, empowered to manage their unit, more accountable and, as a result, more entrepreneurial.”<sup>29</sup> However, their drawbacks, including competition between academic units instead of collaboration and a focus on unit goals at the expense of institutional goals, were noted as well.<sup>30</sup>

Enrollment leaders are discussing their increased involvement with campus budget strategies, and whether the RCM model makes it difficult to put students and their success at the center of the budget model. Some leaders are exploring ways to advocate for developing new models that focus on student success. They acknowledged that there is no perfect budget model; each university needs a model specific to its structure and culture. Focusing on student success can galvanize campus stakeholders, instead of exacerbating competition for resources.

For an institution of higher education to deliver success for its students, it just makes sense to put student success at the center of the institution’s economic model. As an example, one institution has determined they could decrease the time to graduate by nearly 20% for current students who took AP® courses but didn’t apply for credit if they can get those students to use all the AP credit they have earned. Increasing student success here involves campus policies, and it has a complex effect on students, time to degree, department offerings, space availability, and budgets.

As enrollment leaders, we bring unique experience in student finance, resource allocation, and external engagement. We can provide our leaders with insight into growing trends in areas of academic interest, workforce changes that call for changes in curriculum or majors offered, and critical programs that may help identify underfunded programs. But advancing this approach isn’t always easy. It is often easier to justify cutting the budget of one area if there is a clear and demonstrated benefit to students. As one leader noted, a budget model focused on strategic investments was a much more positive conversation than one focused on programs or projects to cut, but gaining traction was slow “until people saw areas that

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29. Kosten, 4.

30. Ibid., 4–5.

are really good but that are being underfunded in ways that hurt the overall economy of the institution.”

In all of these areas, the role of the enrollment leader is critical to institutional success. As they think about how to influence financial strategies and decisions, they might consider these questions:

- What can we do at individual institutions or collectively to help students understand the real cost of attendance at each college? What can be done to increase the transparency of complicated net price tuition models? Which students will benefit most from greater transparency in pricing? How will student decision making be changed?
- What would a resource allocation model centered on student success look like? What programs would be prioritized? On what criteria/ measures would decisions be made? What institutional or division behaviors would be invented? What organizational policies and actions should be incentivized? Which should be restrained?
- What new funding sources might be explored? What would have to change on campuses to make new funding models realistic?
- How can campus-based scholarships and aid be reimagined to increase access and affordability? What econometric analyses can we bring to tuition models to evaluate discount models and understand affordability for both low-income and middle-income students?



## CHAPTER 4

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# Admissions Risks and Opportunities

## Emerging Roles for Enrollment Leaders

- Access advocate
- Chief information officer
- Social media expert
- Statistical genius
- Student of culture

In this chapter,<sup>31</sup> we grapple with some of the overlapping and occasionally contradictory forces that shape higher education admissions policies. These forces include dynamic changes in the composition of the college-going population, the legal landscape concerning what can and what can't be considered relevant for admission, and new admissions models that more effectively tap applicants' breadth of talents and skills.

## Where We've Been and Where We Are

Traditionally, the most visible and important responsibility of enrollment leaders has been the evaluation of applicants for admission. And while their portfolio might also include outreach, recruitment, marketing, and yield activities, success in these positions is based on a simple, but nonetheless powerful, metric: the number of students who ultimately enroll at their institutions. Considerations about the educational fit of those students, the accommodation of legacies, the diversity of the admitted class, or the academic preparation levels of students complicate this metric, but they don't undercut the exacting necessity of filling seats.

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31. Topics and themes in this chapter draw from "Change in the admissions evaluation process: A study of the adoption of committee-based evaluation at selective colleges and universities." Romero da Silva, Y. M. (2017) Philadelphia, PA. University of Pennsylvania.

# Looking Forward: New Opportunities for Enrollment Leaders

## DEMOGRAPHY AND HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENT

Enrollment leaders have always been challenged by the need to fill seats in a way that addresses institutional mission and student success. Although experienced enrollment leaders are skilled at anticipating the long view regarding the market for higher education, there is reason to believe that the next decade and a half will test their skills to the utmost. Tracking enrollment growth among key college-going constituencies, advancing student diversity, exploring new admissions evaluation models, and tapping into new markets are all on the agenda of admissions and enrollment leaders in the coming decade.

As explored in previous chapters, Nathan Grawe recently published an analysis of the demand for higher education over the next two decades in which he concluded that overall college enrollment is expected to drop by 5% by the mid-2020s.<sup>32</sup> Forward-thinking institutions are anticipating this issue and moving strategically to manage the impact on future enrollments. For example, some institutions are reaching out to new populations of students, such as community college transfer students, as a way to mitigate declines in more traditional student constituencies. Others are working with K–12 schools to prepare students for college who may not have considered their college for their higher education career.

Experienced admissions and enrollment leaders have dealt with “doom and gloom” predictions about U.S. higher education before. In the past, U.S. colleges and universities responded to changes in demand by encouraging new populations such as women and individuals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups to apply and enroll at their institutions. Although many of the formal barriers to higher education for students from underrepresented groups no longer exist, higher education institutions must think differently about attracting and enrolling different types of

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32. Nathan D. Grawe, *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2018).

students than they have in the past, and they must ensure that all groups of students are prepared to succeed.

In earlier decades, higher education could count on relatively generous support from state governments, a burgeoning federal involvement in research and development, and extremely high levels of public support for the mission of higher education. These elements remain important parts of the higher education infrastructure today, but enrollment leaders know that if current trends in state and federal support continue, it will be insufficient to sustain the kind of changes needed to advance higher education in the future.

Should higher education's cost curve continue to trend upward, postsecondary institutions will find it increasingly difficult to find individuals willing and able to pay higher tuition costs. Moreover, should state appropriations not rebound sufficiently from the Great Recession, middle-class Americans may turn increasingly to less costly options, such as community colleges, a trend recently reported in *The New York Times*.<sup>33</sup>

With these issues in mind, key questions for enrollment leaders include the following:

- What's happening in the student pipeline for individual institutions or institutional segments? Is the pipeline drying out, flattening out, or increasing?
- How will a reshaped college-going population affect the ways colleges and institutions serve students?
- What strategies can colleges and universities use in this dynamic demographic environment to prepare more students, especially those from underrepresented groups, for a successful postsecondary career?

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33. "Middle Class Families Increasingly Look to Community Colleges," *The New York Times* (April 5, 2018).

## **THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE FOR ADMISSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCESS AND DIVERSITY**

In addition to dynamic changes in the number and composition of college-going populations, the legal framework regarding higher education admissions policies and practices—an area of extremely fraught political battle lines for the past two decades—stands to become even more complicated in the future. On July 3, 2018, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice issued a joint letter rescinding a policy that directs schools to consider race in efforts to diversify campuses across the nation. At the same time, a federal court is scrutinizing Harvard University's enrollment policies and practices regarding the ways that applicants—in this instance, Asian American students—are evaluated for admission.

Admissions and enrollment leaders understand that how we craft a class is subject to society's views about what constitutes appropriate preparation for success for college. They have, however, watched with growing alarm the extent to which the parameters for our professional judgment has been narrowed and circumscribed by state and federal courts.

The intersection of population dynamics and the higher education legal landscape will continue to keep the subject of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status at the center of the debate about who gets to go to college and where. Will the trajectory of these two issues collide, or will one render the other irrelevant? As the U.S. population continues to become more diverse, a larger portion of individuals from groups who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education will pursue a college degree. Will our legal structures accommodate the needs of these emerging populations, or will it erect more barriers?

Enrollment leaders need to continually study the changes in laws and policies that govern enrollment and the legal constructs they must operate within. They will need to find ways to demonstrate that a commitment to diversity means not only greater gains in the number of students who complete a degree but also that those degrees are valuable for society. They must expand their focus on the incoming class to include careful analysis of the graduating cohort, especially as it relates to access, diversity, equity, and justice. A careful examination of the success of those who graduate will

further advance student success. Enrollment leaders need to change how they communicate about diversity-focused data and work closely with media to avoid the misuse and oversimplification of the data.

As the nation's colleges and universities continue to advance the cause of access and diversity, we must address the following issues:

- What are the values that institutions hold as the most important when it comes to access and diversity?
- How can higher education eliminate barriers in society that prevent access to colleges and universities by underrepresented populations?
- What kinds of data that demonstrate the importance of access and diversity must be mobilized, not simply for the institution but for the communities and regions that those institutions serve?
- What are the broader coalitions that higher education must forge to advance the cause of access and diversity?

## **STUDENT PREPARATION, COLLEGE ADMISSION, AND THE POTENTIAL OF HOLISTIC REVIEW**

Nowhere is the spotlight on admissions practices more intense than on the methods the nation's most competitive colleges and universities use to select undergraduates for admission. Although these institutions represent only a small part of U.S. higher education, they set the tone for how students, parents, high school counselors, and others perceive and approach the college admissions process. Many believe that only a high-pressure mix of academic achievement, extreme levels of leadership, original creative work, and high volume of service work are sufficient for admission to the most prestigious institutions. With a proliferation of applications, generated by electronic application processes that have made it possible for students to apply to multiple institutions easily, the perception today is less a process than a gauntlet without a predictable outcome. Enrollment leaders have the ability to either calm or inflame this perception through their communications with students, families, and counselors.

It is true that the arithmetic of growing numbers of applicants, coupled with a finite number of available admissions slots, means that large numbers of high-performing, well-qualified students are turned away. In this way, college admission has become inadvertently the arbiter of student qualities and success. One enrollment leader describes the challenging situation facing both applicants and institutions:

**“The factors and criteria by which we admit students are being held up as the standards for the ideal American child. I don’t know that this is to blame for the increasing stress and anxiety in college-going students, but people link it because they’re trying to match up with what we signal we value. Strong grades, leadership, athletic and extracurricular distinction, community service, research, civic engagement, and overcoming adversity—parents are working with their children to get in line with these factors.”**

—YVONNE ROMERO DA SILVA, RICE UNIVERSITY

Although admissions decisions were once often generated using a series of blunt cut scores, many leaders have incorporated holistic processes into their review of applications, promising a deeper evaluation of students’ credentials for admission. Providing a full file review of applicants places greater value on the multidimensional qualities of individuals. This approach also provides admissions and enrollment leaders with an opportunity to apply a broader portfolio of criteria with which to evaluate the preparation of students for their institutions.

Reliance on holistic or comprehensive review processes comes with significant costs. Reviewing every college application in detail is labor intensive and time consuming. Such individualized practices are well suited to institutions that receive a limited number of applications and have sufficient staff to assess the educational fit of every student who seeks admission.

When does holistic review become something other than comprehensive if a reader has only a few minutes to quickly scan an application that a student has spent many hours preparing? Several leaders stressed that such a workload is neither efficient nor practical, and described the challenge of quickly increasing application volumes, complex admission standards and reviews, and use of external readers. One noted: “Our leadership wants to continue to increase applications and to enroll more of the students who aren’t present in the current applicant pool. Hiring and keeping enough employees to evaluate this volume of applications is unsustainable.”

Often more problematic is the expectation of transparency perpetuated by holistic review. If higher education says it will fully evaluate all applicants for admission, it is obligated to effectively explain why a decision to admit applicant X is justified by denying admission to applicant Y. It becomes exceedingly difficult to explain to a rejected applicant what made them unsuitable for admission.

Higher education admissions policies and practices will need to evolve to address heightened scrutiny by a variety of constituencies. As a result, admissions and enrollment leaders will need to carefully assess the following:

- What is the role of human judgment in admissions and to what extent should new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, be involved in the process? Will admissions practices that increase efficiency, but reduce human evaluation of applications, increase or decrease public confidence in these processes?
- How much transparency can be incorporated in the admissions process before the autonomy of institutions—and the ability to craft classes that are mission-centric—is compromised?
- How can enrollment leaders battle personal bias, personal preferences, anchor bias, and correspondence bias as they relate to admissions decisions?
- How will institutions accommodate increased application volume in ways that serve institutional needs but which also provide a comprehensive evaluation of an applicant’s file?

- To what extent will community colleges accommodate the public's growing need for *affordable* higher education access? How will this segment serve the broader higher education community in such areas as student transfer?

## THE GLOBAL ENROLLMENT LANDSCAPE

Another major factor that enrollment officers need to achieve their goals in filling seats with qualified students is recruiting students from around the world. We know the value of creating campuses that represent not only the rich cultural and academic diversity of the U.S. but also the enormous talent available in countries around the globe. There is also the need to develop new markets to offset domestic enrollment decline.

This interest in international students comes with added responsibilities for enrollment leaders. They need to become expert in laws and regulations that apply to out-of-state and international students, as well as become strategists assessing competition in the global market. They will be challenged to understand the economic conditions of nations and the potential of students who are there to study. Moreover, domestic and international political events often require enrollment leaders to contemplate and implement multiple strategic scenarios to ensure that they hit their enrollment targets.

For example, enrollment leaders are already beginning to track the movement of Chinese universities in shaping their incoming classes. Most Chinese universities can shape a small proportion of their incoming class outside the *gaokao*, China's standardized test for higher education admission. The student's score determines whether they are admitted. In fact, a few Chinese institutions can shape a much larger proportion of their class without relying on this test. These universities are interested in learning about U.S. holistic review, but families find holistic review more confusing than admission determined by the *gaokao*.

An additional challenge, especially for public institutions that want to enroll large numbers of out-of-state and international students, is a need to balance a desire for worldwide diversity while staying true to serving local families. As the number of international students coming to the United States has increased, in-state families want to know that there will be opportunities for enrollment at local, publicly supported institutions. Enrollment leaders must be mindful that their admissions processes don't inadvertently disadvantage in-state applicants as they seek a more international student profile.

Key questions for enrollment leaders interested in recruiting students abroad will include the following:

- What new strategies must be developed to identify and recruit students from abroad? How will these strategies align with stricter laws around the world about the use of personal information?
- How will higher education address the needs of students from different regions of the globe? Are colleges and universities prepared to make the necessary investments not only to welcome these students but also to accommodate their specific needs?
- How will colleges and universities balance the need to accommodate students in their regions with broader appeals to out-of-state and international students?

## Summary: Commitment to Evaluation

The issues raised in this chapter don't suggest obvious or easy solutions; they echo our theme throughout this monograph of the growing need for collaboration across departments and across institutions. Enrollment leaders must become both more strategic and more experimental, relying on rigorous methods of evaluation to assess the effectiveness of their efforts. They need to veer from traditional ways of doing business toward establishing new markets, helping to prepare more nontraditional students for college and enhancing the effectiveness of holistic admissions processes to address institutional enrollment needs.

Although the guiding question for all enrollment leaders will continue to be how they can best support students' academic achievements, getting good answers will be more difficult:

In the past, it's been easy for institutions to blame the lack of student success on admissions decisions. It's tougher to identify institutional sources of struggle and success. We must study the root causes and arm our campus communities with facts.

As institutions increasingly look to enrollment professionals for leadership, we will increasingly be asked to help advance students after matriculation, areas that have been traditionally addressed by other departments. Nevertheless, the issues defined in this chapter carry over to a broader discussion of student success, the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

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# Student Success

## Emerging Roles for Enrollment Leaders

- Boundary breaker
- Champion of students
- Communications expert
- Data advocate
- Forward thinker
- Institutional strategist
- Pattern tracker
- Retention evangelist

This chapter describes the ways enrollment leaders are contributing to campuswide initiatives to increase the number of students who graduate from college. It describes why older models of institutional cooperation will need to be revised to accommodate heightened postsecondary expectations by a new generation of students. Following a discussion that identifies powerful forces shaping higher education's renewed commitment to student success, this chapter then delineates several strategies, led by campus enrollment leaders, that will address the unique academic needs of new populations coming to U.S. colleges and universities, identify sources of data and information critical to informed decision making, highlight the need for innovations in financial aid to boost completion rates, and emphasize greater coordination among faculty and student service professionals on campus in a collective effort to increase student success.

## Where We've Been

The U.S. goal of increasing access to college has been spectacularly successful. Following World War II, spurred by federal initiatives such as the GI Bill and the National Defense Act, social influences such as the civil rights movement, and demographic events including the baby boom, colleges and universities provided access to millions of Americans from a wide variety of groups. These efforts increased college-going significantly. Among industrialized nations, the U.S. enrolled a greater proportion of 18- to 24-year-old individuals than any other country. By the start of the 21st century, more than 6 in 10 college-age individuals were enrolled in some form of postsecondary education. This extraordinary degree of college access included large numbers of individuals who historically had been underrepresented in higher education, including women, individuals from specific ethnic and racial groups, and those from low-income backgrounds.

During this period, the contribution of enrollment managers to college access was essential but somewhat limited. Fairly or not, their role was simply to select the “best” students for admission. This ensured—or was thought to ensure—that most students enrolled would have the best shot possible to succeed. In fact, institutional admissions requirements—the first point of contact for most prospective students—were crafted to ensure that admitted students have the proper academic foundation for future collegiate success.

Contributing to this institutional marginalization, enrollment management operations were often separate from or subsumed under other campus units, such as student affairs or academic affairs. Despite these leaders' critical roles in recruiting students to the institution, evaluating their readiness for admission, and providing financial aid to increase access and diversity, degree completion was often assumed to be the responsibility of others who oversee the mechanics of matriculation. Data collected at the point of admission, for example, were often passed along to academic departments, the registrar's office, and student advising/counseling units that were charged with ensuring degree progress. Although these campus functions contributed significantly to student success, the coordination of effort was linear rather than integrative, with one unit, in effect, “handing off” students to another unit as students progressed to their degrees.

Such an approach worked well enough when the major focus of higher education emphasized college *access* rather than college *completion*. However, with increasing pressure by the public and its political representatives to boost completion rates, this linear approach needs to evolve into a more integrative model, one that is both conscientious and strategic in helping more students to graduate from college. Enrollment professionals need to be at the center of this effort to define and operationalize these new strategies, understanding that their expertise in so many facets of the educational enterprise—outreach, recruitment, data analysis, admissions, yield, financial aid, and enrollment—is key to student success and institutional advancement.



## Where We Are and Need to Be

Sustaining and expanding student access to college remains an important goal for all postsecondary institutions. The emphasis, however, is shifting, with a more intense commitment to increasing the number of students who graduate with a college degree. Although the U.S. provides unparalleled access to postsecondary education, the proportion of students who earn a degree or certificate has languished, especially in comparison to other industrialized nations. But the U.S.—and by extension, higher education—is faced with several challenges that require more individuals to earn postsecondary credentials:

- **Workforce Demands:** The U.S. is increasingly dependent on a skilled workforce that possesses, at minimum, some postsecondary education. Research consistently shows that students with a high school diploma are at a significant disadvantage in the labor market, compared to individuals who complete two- or four-year degrees. Moreover, the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce predicts that by 2020, 5 million jobs will go unfilled because of the lack of skilled applicants.<sup>34</sup> Current completion rates, however, will not satisfy these manpower needs, despite the federal government's pressure on institutions to boost completion rates.
- **Economic Equality:** Full participation in the middle class is increasingly dependent on individuals who have earned college degrees. Yet the index of generational mobility shows a steady decline since 1940: While the increase in lifetime earnings is well documented for those who earn an undergraduate degree, only 64.7% of students who start at a public four-year institution will complete a degree within six years. The completion rate for those starting at private four-year institutions is 76%.<sup>35</sup>
- **Shifts in the College-Going Population:** As discussed previously, demographers predict a flat or declining high school graduation rate overall, and growth among populations that have been traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education. These "new" students may demand different ways of being served so that they are likely to graduate.

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34. Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.Press-Release.pdf>

35. Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P.K., Yuan, X., Nathan, A. & Bhimdiwali, A. (2017, December). *Completing College: A National View of Student Completion Rates—Fall 2011 Cohort* (Signature Report No. 14). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. p. 4.

- **State and Local Political Expectations:** State support for higher education has stagnated, the result of competing fiscal demands in such areas as healthcare and corrections. To close the fiscal gap, colleges and universities increasingly rely on tuition revenue to support their operations. As a result, higher education has become an increasingly expensive proposition for many American families. Politicians and policymakers—along with families paying higher tuition bills and students burdened with ever larger loans to pay off—are demanding greater accountability, especially regarding the number of students who graduated from institutions and the extent to which the institution’s degrees prepared their students for gainful employment.

These conditions place higher education at the center of a U.S. economy that must compete more effectively in a global marketplace while serving as the intellectual common ground for a democratic society that is challenged by upheavals in its social fabric. To boost completion rates, presidents, provosts, and boards of trustees are searching for new strategies that can serve students more effectively.

Enrollment professionals will lead this strategy. More than most of their colleagues, they understand that so much of what challenges higher education today depends on the way institutions address foundational necessities that emanate from undergraduate enrollment. These necessities include enhancing the institutional brand in a competitive higher education marketplace, hitting critical tuition and revenue targets to sustain mission-driven operations, and improving students’ education fit and academic success using sophisticated admissions evaluation metrics.

Nevertheless, they also understand that boosting graduation rates requires a campuswide response—an integrative approach that coordinates the activities of campus professionals at all levels of the institution in a focused, strategic effort to serve students’ educational goals. These coordinated efforts will be aided by advances in communications, technology, and organizational practices that provide higher education leaders with more nuanced data and the means to apply this information in ways that serve students’ educational needs more effectively.

As a framework for grappling with the complexities of improving degree completion, enrollment leaders identified six broad areas that are linked to student success, all of which are informed by the work of campus enrollment professionals. Not exhaustive, but central to this effort, these areas include: a broader campus commitment to improve student success, a new or renewed institutional mission that will sustain upward student mobility, better data to inform—not replace—decision making, new financial aid models to support student retention, and a greater faculty focus on pedagogy and teaching that serves student learning effectively. All of this must be supported by the sustained commitment of senior leadership.

## INSTITUTION-WIDE COMMITMENT TO STUDENT SUCCESS

**“More work is not always the answer. We need to stop doing 10,000 things and do the smaller number of things that really matter. We will use evidence and listen to students to know what is most effective in supporting students and helping them succeed.”**

—MJ KNOLL-FINN, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

At most colleges and universities, successful enrollment and completion strategies will need to become a campuswide responsibility, led by enrollment professionals in partnership with other administrative and academic units. Such coordinated efforts will help campuses deliver other promises that are often viewed as unrelated to enrollment, such as more stable financial positions, improved institutional rankings, enhanced student experiences, and positive alumni relations. Data gathered at the point of admission should be integrated with data gathered after students matriculate. Academic information about students is plentiful. What appears to be lacking, however, is a strategic and thoughtful integration of data in ways that serve students more effectively. As one leader noted, “There is no shortage of retention initiatives, but there is a vacant hole of cohesion, collaboration, and evaluation of what works and what doesn’t.”

To lead in this dynamic environment, enrollment leaders will be asked to:

- Create and implement more nuanced admissions tools and strategies to ensure student preparation for college;
- Apply data garnered at the point of admission for tasks that serve students beyond matriculation, such as course placement, major selection, and student advising and intervention;
- Leverage state, federal, and local financial aid resources to help enroll students from diverse backgrounds; target merit aid to encourage better-prepared students to enroll at their institutions; and provide “as needed” interventions and emergency aid and resources that help students persist and graduate; and
- Forecast enrollment trends well beyond their local regions as they exercise greater influence in mapping budgetary strategies to sustain institutional operations.

## UPWARD MOBILITY FOR NEW STUDENT POPULATIONS

**“Surprising to many, our campus research shows the highest attrition rates in the first year aren’t students on financial aid, but rather white students not on aid and international students not from China. It’s important that we are very careful to challenge assumptions and avoid stereotypes.”**

Participation in higher education has been viewed as an intergenerational marker of success for families in the U.S. The ability to advance beyond one’s parents’ education level is often cited as one of the ways the nation secures its democratic foundations. People believe they have a stake in the culture and the economy if opportunity is seen as dependent on effort rather than on social standing or wealth.

As new populations of students make their way to colleges, the enrollment leader’s challenge is to ensure that the opportunities offered to earlier generations would accrue to these students as well. However, the wealth

divide in the U.S. makes this challenging. Students with fewer resources are coming to college and their needs, in such fundamental areas as housing and food, will require higher education leaders to grapple with issues unknown only one or two decades ago. For example, higher education has taken an important lead nationally in identifying “first-generation” college students, individuals who lack parents or access to peers and others who’ve had a college-going experience. Admissions and enrollment leaders have long understood that those students with a family or social structure that is familiar with and responsive to the demands and expectations of college are at an advantage over students who lack this information. Research reveals that those with “college knowledge” or access to individuals who can help them navigate the academic environment are more successful in college. This is true for students entering college for the first time or community college students who wish to transfer to a four-year institution to earn a baccalaureate degree.

Even as we anticipate the needs of nontraditional students coming to college, it will also be essential for higher education leaders to inform their campuses about misperceptions related to student success. “Our highest retainers for the first year are African American, Hispanic, and first-generation students,” says one enrollment leader.

Enrollment leaders interested in serving the needs of nontraditional populations will need to keep the following in mind:

1. How are your admissions requirements calibrated to help students prepare for success at your institution?
2. What academic interventions are available to students who are admitted but have been identified as having academic difficulties based on data collected at the point of admission?
3. What strategies effectively combine admissions data and data obtained after a student enrolls that will, collectively, help the student earn a college degree?
4. What strategies effectively combine admissions data and data obtained after a student enrolls that will, collectively, help students earn a college degree?

## DATA TO INFORM DECISION MAKING

There are many varied reasons why students leave, and it's not always the reasons we think. That is why the data are important.

Enrollment leaders' influence campuswide is growing, fueled by a realization that data gathered at the point of admission are enormously important in helping students start college well prepared for its demands.

Given the wide variability in high school effectiveness and resources, coupled with significant changes predicted to the profile of college-going populations, colleges and universities must take a larger role in preparing students for college success. They understand that their institutions will neither meet their enrollment goals nor their degree completion objectives by catering to traditional college-going populations, which are predicted to decline in the next two decades. Former Harvard President Derek Bok summarizes what demographers have been predicting for a decade:

“The only way to increase attainment levels substantially will be for high schools and colleges to discover better ways of preparing low-performing students to succeed in the classroom and graduate with the knowledge and skills to become productive employees.”<sup>36</sup>

This expanding institutional role—daunting yet essential—positions the enrollment leaders at the center of a strategy that will take advantage of advances in data analytics to predict, inform, and track student progress. Such efforts are central to the campus at large, not a single department or individual. Information that flows unidirectionally isn't sufficient to boost completion rates. Campus leaders will need robust feedback loops to predict student academic outcomes, track progress, and evaluate success. For example, in the absence of information about students' graduation rates, admissions officers may be hobbled by using outmoded strategies to recruit students. Unless registrars monitor and report on gateway course enrollments, student academic progress may suffer. Lacking faculty input on the preparation of students, an institution may miss an important

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36. Derek Bok, *The Struggle to Reform Our Colleges* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 187.

opportunity to revise admissions requirements in ways that ensure student academic success.

Greater experience with student success measures and other data will assist enrollment leaders' abilities to guide decision making and strategy. Data will be used not only to help explain why students leave the institution but also why others *stay*. Increased use of data won't replace professional judgment and years of experience; rather, it will enhance and extend those judgments and perceptions. Emphasizing this point, one enrollment leader noted: "Using evidence *and* listening to students is most successful in supporting students and helping them achieve."

Of course, too much data can be as paralyzing as too little. Given the demands of the job, enrollment leaders are expected to act, using data and evidence that are available at the moment. Indeed, the most important skill may be in asking the right questions now, even if the answers aren't readily available. One enrollment leader noted three key questions that should be on the minds of all enrollment professionals: "What do we have the ability to measure that we do not? What policies and practices serve students well? What are those that add no value?"

Posing such questions—even if the answers are elusive—will become an increasingly important part of the enrollment leader's job:

- What institutional roadblocks hinder students' ability to complete a degree? Are these roadblocks programmatic (insufficient orientation outcomes), curricular (lack of access to foundational or gateway courses), or cultural (insufficient attention paid to the cocurricular aspects of campus life)?
- In what ways does the institution regularly monitor the progress of students in their courses? What kinds of messages are sent? What type of engagement is supported?
- How much of a student's admissions data is used in the identification of needed academic interventions? Is there a need for additional data to ensure students' effective transition to the institution?

## FINANCIAL AID STRATEGIES TO SUSTAIN STUDENT RETENTION

**“We have advisers who start making remote outreach to students over the summer, providing advising before they are on campus. There are remote financial aid appointments that start as soon as a student deposits. We start to build that relationship early on, so when it comes to orientation, it isn’t such an overwhelming transition. This has really helped, especially with our very high-need students”**

—JESSICA MARINACCIO, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Enrollment leaders will increase their focus and attention on identifying aid strategies to prevent attrition, increase graduation rates, and decrease average time to graduation. Traditional financial aid strategies—scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study—will remain pivotal to student success. Nevertheless, enrollment leaders are in search of new financial support initiatives that can advance student degree progress.

One suggestion is to apply an institution’s expertise in fundraising and development to support not only scholarships but also to support structures that provide direct student service, such as endowing study centers, specific tutorial services, or advising institutes. Fundraising might also be directed toward more flexible aid scenarios: “We know that \$3,000 would solve more than 42% of the emergencies that come up in a student’s daily life and cause them to withdraw. Funding that need is a financial aid goal that’s within our reach,” notes one enrollment leader who oversees financial aid for her institution.

Beyond campus-based strategies, enrollment leaders believe that student enrollment trajectories and financial aid strategies must be more closely aligned. Institutional data reporting is built around four- and six-year graduation rates, understanding that some students are unable to complete a degree in the “normal” four-year time frame. As colleges and universities seek to enroll more students from underrepresented populations, such as first-generation students, the need for extra time to

complete the degree may be necessary. Although Federal Pell Grants fund six years of undergraduate education, the clear majority of scholarships are awarded for four years or fewer. “We know some students have financial need during those last two years, and yet we don’t make awards that reflect that knowledge. It’s an issue of bad planning,” says one enrollment leader. Institutions can best support students to succeed by fundraising for, and changing the length of, scholarship awards.

As a positive force in helping students earn their degrees, traditional financial aid strategies may need to be adjusted to boost student completion rates, leading to the following questions:

- What new models are being employed to sustain retention through the use of financial aid?
- What insights are available that might galvanize new strategies to help students sustain their involvement in college?
- How can the financial aid process be simplified in ways that help students plan more effectively throughout their entire undergraduate career?

## **FACULTY-DRIVEN INITIATIVES TO ADVANCE DEGREE COMPLETION**

The centrality of faculty in advancing student success is unquestioned. But like enrollment leaders, they also need to be part of a broad campus effort that sees student success as an institution-wide commitment.

Enrollment leaders are well placed to serve faculty in this role. They can supply pivotal data about the academic preparation of new students and their subsequent performance in college-level courses. They can also identify areas where admissions requirements may need to be revised and help inform new strategies to enhance pedagogy and promote better alignment of students’ interests with appropriate majors.

Enrollment leaders can partner with faculty to develop initiatives that improve learning and student success. This is especially true in specific gateway courses. In an earlier era, a “sink or swim” mentality guided perceptions about completion of such pivotal courses. Today’s workforce needs render such judgments, at best, inadequate. Enrollment leaders will be central to the development of academic supports that help students advance through the curriculum. Data obtained at the point of admission present faculty and academic support personnel with powerful predictors of student performance. Enrollment leaders will become increasingly vital in identifying students who may be at some academic risk, based on their high school or community college profile. Targeting resources to these students, especially in the first year of college, is an investment that is likely to pay positive dividends on graduation rates.

Faculty members are key to increasing completion rates at colleges and universities and can be aided in this effort by admissions and enrollment leaders:

- How are faculty members’ insights about student preparation factored into the institution’s admissions requirements?
- What methods that engage relevant staff and faculty in a sustained discussion about student retention and graduation rates are employed?

## Summary—The Need for Leadership Across the Campus

Presidents, provosts, and other senior administrators will view enrollment leaders as increasingly important advisers in the promotion of student success and the advancement of institutional goals. Given the importance of enrollment on all aspects of institutional operations, they will increasingly need to provide senior leadership with information about application, admissions, matriculation, and retention trends. This consultation will also need to include more sophisticated scenario planning and prioritization exercises that alert leaders to the competitive landscape of higher education, the need to invest strategically in new markets, and the resources needed to ensure that matriculated students finish their degrees.

Enrollment leaders also need to offer their expertise in strategic planning. Increasing completion rates, for example, is a long-term goal. Even if current enrollment levels are stable or improving, pushing the institution toward increased student success requires a proactive, multiyear approach. Retention and completion efforts must be carefully calibrated. If insufficiently tailored to the strengths of the institution, a good deal of well-intentioned efforts, as well as resources, will be ill spent. The need to work more closely with senior leadership shouldn't dissuade enrollment leaders from also cultivating a broad campus following that focuses on enrollment issues and student success. They need to be available to colleagues throughout the institutional enterprise in ways that help to initiate and galvanize conversations about student success. By focusing on areas outside traditional reporting lines, they can find new allies in their effort to improve the institution's commitment to student success. "We need to begin to use data to talk more about what is not always thought of as critical to our enrollment work," said MJ Knoll-Finn of New York University. This should also extend to discussions about student success after graduation; for example, the ways graduates make their way in the work world and how well their training at the institution prepared them for successful careers.

## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

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# The Ongoing Centrality of Enrollment Leadership in the Evolution of Higher Education

As external forces shape the life within campuses, enrollment leaders continue to see their expertise tested and to grow more valuable. Their roles on campus have grown accordingly. At first, this may have meant units like orientation and the registrar's office came into enrollment management. Now, some chief enrollment officers have a seat at the president's cabinet table, where their input is critical to building institutional strategy and realizing the vision of the president. Many leaders reported that their roles now include the supervision of a number of divisions not traditionally in the enrollment portfolio, including data integrity, marketing, institutional research, career services, Division I athletics, student affairs, retention and graduation, housing, and other areas depending on the campus.

**“Campuses benefit from having a knowledgeable senior enrollment officer who can sit at the table with other senior policymakers and bring an enrollment management perspective to policy decisions related to student enrollment and academic and financial planning.”<sup>37</sup>**

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37. Donald Hossler and David Kalsbeek. “Enrollment Management and Managing Enrollments: Revisiting the Context for Institutional Strategy,” *Strategic Enrollment Management Quarterly* (April 4, 2013), American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), 6.

Looking forward, there are a number of areas where enrollment leaders will be critical:

- Trustees relations—They can both provide information and build trust-based relationships that leverage the expertise of trustees in areas of student success;
- External relations—They can impact media relations, messaging, and communications to focus on key issues such as the value of higher education, spurring coverage and shaping the public discourse;
- Government and policymaking—They can help shape conversations with elected and career government employees who are collectively having an increasingly large impact on institutions, in enrollment and in other areas;
- Fundraising—Although some have been working with development for scholarships for many years, there appears to be a growing connection for enrollment leaders with key donors and major gifts distributed throughout the student life cycle;
- Budget and resource allocation—They can help influence strategies for investing campus resources that are student centered and that move the institution toward the vision of the leaders;
- Academics—They are well positioned to provide support for faculty and for critical input on the investments needed to ensure student and academic success; and
- Data, research, and technology—Enrollment relies heavily on these functions and increasingly the enrollment leader will be called on to provide input in strategic planning, research projects, and technological advancement.

But as one member noted, change is difficult and “we all work for institutions that are, as a rule, slow to change.”

Whether or not structural changes are made on a campus is a decision unique to every institution. Hossler and Kalsbeek noted that there is no empirical research to show which specific structure works best for enrollment management, suggesting that “structure should follow strategy

and also be reflective of the particular and idiosyncratic institutional culture, climate, and character.”<sup>38</sup> And not all institutions are ready for structural change. “Leaders on campuses where enrollment divisions are relatively new and/or traditionally defined can find themselves limited in the ways they can use their skills to enhance campus and student success.”<sup>39</sup>

## Centrality: A Voice of Influence in Critical Decisions

Successful enrollment leaders seek out fellow forward thinkers, internally and externally. They partner with visionary colleagues to infuse creativity, test ideas, and assemble a relay team to advance bold, future-focused institutional moves. These collaborations can be employed regardless of the structure of the organization when enrollment leaders are involved at the highest strategy and decision-making level of institutions.

Collaborations yielding promising strategies include:

- Approaching alumni and trustees to tap their expertise in areas like IT implementation, brand strategy, public relations, and strategic planning;
- Listening to and offering thoughtful insights to other forward thinkers;
- Offering the skill sets of the enrollment team and the resources of the other units within enrollment management can help partners in their initiatives; and
- Sharing data analysis, IT solutions, event planning, project management, software systems, and many other resources for the advancement of common goals and priorities.

Issues like college cost, emerging technology, and global workforce trends impact institutional stability and present critical opportunities for creative thinking and action.

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38. Hossler and Kalsbeek, 6.

39. For a more complete discussion of the dynamics at these institutions, see Hossler and Kalsbeek, 5.

## Moving Forward

So how does enrollment work move forward? What are critical actions and roles for enrollment leaders going forward?

Enrollment leaders must broaden the conversation. The enrollment leaders who met at the College Board offices were from institutions that regularly meet or exceed their enrollment goals. It is important to broaden the focus on student success with a much larger and more diverse group of enrollment leaders.

Preparing the next generation of enrollment leaders will be key in ensuring they have the appropriate seat at campus leadership tables. The smartest future leaders are a little frightened about what they don't know and haven't done. We must clearly frame the essential work so that institutional leaders don't lose sight of the critical functions of enrollment leaders, which is to be a guide throughout the student life cycle.

Partnerships across campus and effective learning opportunities for all campus leaders will be increasingly critical to overcome the tendency to reduce enrollment leadership to traditional recruitment and admission. AACRAO, the College Board, NACAC, and other professional organizations offer key support for enrollment leaders. No one organization can meet all the needs for every college and university.

Moving forward, there will be an increasing need for the facilitation of critical discussions between forward-thinking leaders—including chief enrollment officers, presidents, and chancellors on issues as fundamental as the survival and transformation of the American higher education system.

Change is coming quickly in higher education, bringing new challenges that will shape the work of enrollment leaders. Those in enrollment leadership positions will be called on to play new and important roles in areas where, in most cases, they haven't traditionally been included. We hope this publication will inspire and inform conversations on the future of enrollment leadership.

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## About the College Board

The College Board is a mission-driven not-for-profit organization that connects students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the College Board was created to expand access to higher education. Today, the membership association is made up of over 6,000 of the world's leading educational institutions and is dedicated to promoting excellence and equity in education. Each year, the College Board helps more than seven million students prepare for a successful transition to college through programs and services in college readiness and college success—including the SAT® and the Advanced Placement® Program. The organization also serves the education community through research and advocacy on behalf of students, educators, and schools.

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