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Heather Zimar, C&U Managing Editor, AACRAO, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20036; Tel: (607) 273–3337; E-mail: zimarh@aacrao.org
It is snowing as I sit in my office in Boston writing this introduction to Volume 90, Number 2 of College & University. My institution, like many in Boston this winter, has lost several class days due to snow. An idea for a research article occurs to me: best practices in scheduling class make-ups. Any potential authors out there?

In this issue’s first of four research-based features, Bradley Barnes and Brian Bourke examine Strategic Enrollment Management through the lens of campus culture and make the case for SEM as an agent of change. Next, Laura Jacek reviews the effectiveness of various interventions institutions might take to increase online course evaluation completion rates.

Michael J. Kutnak and Steven M. Janosik discuss U.S. federal legislation, case law, and government agency rulings pertaining to higher education admissions and students with disabilities and explore the legal implications for higher education administrators. They make recommendations on ways administrators can better serve this student population and their institutions.

Our final feature, by Kristy Tucciarone, investigates how universities can increase enrollment by advertising in internships, which can be vital to college graduates’ entrance into the job market, to prospective students.

This edition’s Forum section includes several timely articles. It’s not unusual to read an online comment on articles concerning the use of consultants in higher education asking why faculty experts couldn’t have been employed instead. Ann Minnick describes how faculty expertise was quite successfully used to improve an administrative process at Macalester College, my alma mater, in “The Magic of Math: Utilizing Faculty Expertise to Improve First-Year Assignments.”

In “Lessons from Occupy Wall Street: Creating Mass and Momentum to Lead the Functional and Technological Direction of Vendors,” Michael Burke advocates changing the way we interact with vendors—and with one another—to more effectively influence the ongoing development of information systems supporting higher education.

Lou Farrell, in “The Student and Exchange Visitor Program and the Academic Partnership to Protect National Security,” describes the Student and Exchange Visitor Program and the important role schools play in national security.

In “The Rebirth of Student Search: A Marketing Correction through the Challenging Economy,” Jonathan P. Epstein describes the history of direct marketing outreach, “student search,” one of the largest and most expensive annual recruitment activities, and suggests ways that a new kind of student search effort might improve outcomes for colleges and universities.

Based on a review of several studies on incentive programs to encourage student success, Michael C. Davis and Karl E. Burgher make recommendations regarding program design and analysis in “Paying to Succeed: Lessons from the Literature.”

Our prolific reader and reviewer Matt Fifolt reviewed four books for this edition, exploring topics such as: policies that have shaped U.S. financial aid programs; practical advice about college admission, enrollment and graduation; educational reforms for the 21st century learner; and transformative learning experiences.

Finally, Jerry Ross reviewed “The First 90 Days: Proven Strategies for Getting Up to Speed Faster and Smarter” by Michael Watkins. Watkins argues that today’s new leaders must start making progress in a short time and provides strategies for achieving success.

I was recently at a meeting of the registrars of the American Association of Universities institutions. Based on discussions at the meeting, I received some suggestions for article topics: APIs extending student information system functionality; the value of IT roadmaps; and what to do when your institution’s IT unit transforms itself. All good ideas! Potential authors: please contact me. I’d also love to hear your article suggestions.

Jeff von Munkwitz-Smith, Ph.D.
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The authors advance the concept that institutional culture is a purposeful framework by which to view SEM’s utility, particularly as a cultural change agent. Through the connection of seemingly independent functions of performance and behavior, implications emerge that deepen the understanding of the influence of culture on performance outcomes when addressing specific institutional needs.
For decades, researchers and practitioners have built upon the theoretical frameworks established by founding strategic enrollment management (SEM) theorists using three primary contexts: structural, academic, and marketing. While these contexts have purposefully served as essential building blocks for understanding critical issues within our field, the extent to which we are able to utilize them to examine contemporary challenges is not without limitations. Increasingly, institutions utilizing SEM to boost enrollments are experiencing only partial success because planned change often meets cultural resistance. Analyzing culture and SEM using traditional structural, academic, and marketing frameworks marginalizes the lens by which to examine performance. The infrequency of cultural frameworks in the SEM literature is glaring and suggests that culture plays an insignificant role in SEM. Nevertheless, institutional culture offers a context by which to better understand the relationship between SEM performance and the values and beliefs necessary to sustain change. Contributing to this growing body of research, this study analyzes SEM performance using a cultural context in order to offer a fresh perspective that is a departure from traditional frameworks as well as to gain insight into the relationship between SEM and institutional culture.

**RELATED LITERATURE**

Over the course of SEM’s short history, we have observed enrollment management’s adaptability to diverse higher education conditions as well as its utility in serving specific institutional needs. Regardless of its application, SEM
is consistently relied upon to enact change. The literature tells us that SEM’s purpose of enacting change is widely acknowledged and accepted to function as a set of activities that shapes student outcomes (Dolence 1993; Hossler and Bean 1990; Kalsbeek and Hossler 2009; Kemerer, Baldridge and Green 1982). However, much of the literature is framed by structural, academic, and marketing contexts that have the potential to limit the extent to which systemic change can be measured. This literature review acknowledges the significance of traditional frameworks in our field while proposing a case for the cultural construct. Building upon the idea that SEM is deeply ingrained into an institution’s culture (Henderson 2005), this study makes a case for institutional culture as a viable framework within which to view SEM’s utility, particularly as a cultural change agent.

The early SEM works of Ihlanfeldt (1980) and Dolence (1993) and the more recent cultural study of Toma, Dubrow and Hartley (2005) provide an interdisciplinary structure by which the present study examines the integration and sustenance of planned institutional change. Applying a cultural framework to SEM brings together two bodies of literature that together “provide administrators with the capability to better articulate and address this crucial foundation for improving performance” (Tierney 1991, p. 128). To help organize this framework, this study defines SEM’s cultural context as a research approach by which the unit of analysis is the entire academic conglomerate and activities that comprise an institution’s culture. As a more contemporary design, the cultural context provides SEM theorists and practitioners with an additional tool by which to measure performance. The following review of traditional SEM frameworks chronicles an evolution of contexts that has emerged out of necessity to serve a burgeoning profession.

**STRUCTURAL CONTEXT**

Kemerer, Baldridge and Green (1982) first gave notice to SEM’s utility as an organizational structure by introducing four models: committee, coordinator, matrix, and division. Each was designed to serve a specific purpose according to the organization’s structure, resources, and strategic plan. Examining SEM performance within a structural context has served as the standard framework by which to analyze related administrative and organizational situations. While a traditional application of the structural context has provided SEM professionals with adequate perspective over the past few decades, SEM’s affiliations have expanded to include a wide range of departments and divisions. As SEM’s association with the campus base has grown, so too have our approaches to examining and framing its performance. Building on the structural models of Kemerer, Baldridge and Green (1982), Hossler’s early enrollment management research emphasized the utilitarian nature of SEM and prompted additional frameworks within which to examine performance.

**ACADEMIC CONTEXT**

One such framework that emerged was the academic. Analyzing SEM from an academic perspective reveals institutional qualities immeasurable through a structural lens. SEM literature credits Michael Dolence as an early advocate of SEM’s utility within the academic context (Henderson 2005). Dolence (1993) broadened the perspective on SEM’s utility by defining enrollment management within the academic context of the institution. During this period, the literature began recognizing the potential for faculty to play key roles in the management of student enrollments through retention efforts. Recently, the academic context has been described as emphasizing the value of involving the academic community in SEM in order to improve performance outcomes (Kalsbeek 2006). Academic performance rankings can be used to measure a wide range of outcomes; perhaps the most familiar is institutional quality.

**MARKETING CONTEXT**

In an effort to determine a more exacting measure of institutional quality, researchers at the Institute for Research on Higher Education (IRHE) at the University of Pennsylvania developed a regression model to better evaluate quality as a marker of market position. Their taxonomy for institutional classification (Zemsky 2004) was refined, resulting in a taxonomy of five segments of four-year institutions: medallion, name brand, core, good buy, and user friendly (National Center for Postsecondary Improvement 2001). (For a complete discussion of the taxonomy, see NCPI 2001; Zemsky 2004; Zemsky, Shaman and Ian- nozzi 1997). Practitioners such as Huddleston (2001) and Ihlanfeldt (1980) have long embraced the coexistence of
enrollment management and marketing. Their work has paved the way to these and other marketing concepts as means by which to leverage institutional resources for increased market presence. Kalsbeek and Hossler (2009) make a case for SEM’s marketing framework: “It focuses on the marketing structures and dynamics that shape enrollment management’s practice and outcomes” (p. 10). The work of Toma, Dubrow and Hartley (2005) details both the significance of using institutional culture in a way that strengthens institutional identification and the reality that brand recognition and awareness present unique opportunities to enact institutional change.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Obscured by traditional concepts, SEM’s utility to function as a cultural change agent has largely gone unrecognized in the literature. For example, we accept that SEM has represented campus-wide processes related primarily to enrollment and student outcomes (Dolence 1993; Hossler 1986; Hossler, Bean et al., 1990; Kemerer, Baldridge and Green 1982). The difficulty in perceiving SEM as a cultural change agent likely stems from the standing assumption that SEM and culture function independently of one another, one communicating expectations of performance and the other expectations of behavior. Further, SEM’s utility has long been relied upon to address systemic issues ranging from revenue generation to student access and campus diversification (Barnes and Harris 2010; Heller 2001; Hossler, Hu, and Schmit 1999). Similarly, organizational cultures influence performance outcomes but through the representation of values, beliefs, and attitudes (Chomsky 2003; Schein 2004, 2010).

Hofstede (1984) proposes that the cultural context is best defined by the perceptions of the individuals affected by change and that “it is impossible to coordinate the actions of people without a deep understanding of their values, beliefs, and expressions” (p. 82). Like Hofstede (1984), Toma, Dubrow and Hartley (2005) submit that successful management initiatives hinge on a true understanding of the institution’s values and beliefs. While their culture-based work does not focus specifically on enrollment management, it does advocate that the effectiveness of management outcomes rely on the degree of integration of and value afforded individuals. Illustrating a breadth of components that affect organizational change, the literature on organizational culture provides an appropriate context within which to consider institutional culture’s relationship with SEM.

DEFINING CULTURE

There seem to be as many definitions of culture as there are cultural theorists. Many are shaped by core values such as behavior and beliefs. Schein (2004) defines culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration” (p. 17). This definition increasingly is applied to higher education as universities respond to greater competition for rankings and scarce resources such as student tuition revenue. “Although colleges and universities are generally free to pursue their aspirations, they exist in a highly competitive and crowded environment” (Toma, Dubrow and Hartley, 2005, p. 7). Schein’s (2004) definition provides a number of levels by which to measure SEM’s performance effectiveness for cultural change.

Toma and his colleagues (2005) stress that institutional culture comprises key cultural elements around which individuals come together as cohesive groups that become bound by those elements. In his treatment of organizational culture in colleges and universities, Tierney (1988) utilizes a framework consisting of six concepts: environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership. In considering the significance of culture in SEM, Tierney’s (2008) six elements are interwoven: Each influences the others, resulting in a complex interplay across the organizational culture as well as the individuals who make up the organization. Integration of the six elements builds complexity into an organization’s culture and increases the difficulty of cultural change.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a sociocultural interpretation to describe the relationship between SEM and institutional culture pre- and post-change integration. In an attempt to capture campus culture (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995), this process included methods of historical documentation suggested by Yin (1994) to guide and supplement other forms of data collection; interviews, one of the most common forms of data collection (Houser 2015; Merriam 1998); and field notes through observations. The decision to select The University of Alabama was based on two
Factors: Its presidential tenure from 2003 to 2012 marked an era of historic change for the campus, but, more important, it serves as a national model for integrating and sustaining cultural change through SEM. The University of Alabama is not without a storied past of cultural stagnancy and resistance to change, making this site most appropriate to examine within a sociocultural context.

The following research question guided the study of SEM’s change performance and the role of institutional culture: How do senior campus administrators and faculty view SEM’s relationship with institutional culture in the context of integrating and sustaining change?

An ethnographic research design was selected so as to focus on the cultural experiences of participants at The University of Alabama. This qualitative approach was utilized to interpret and describe the shared values and beliefs of the institution, which is consistent with the cultural framework used in this study. To gain perspective throughout all phases of the change implementation that occurred over the nine-year period, it was important to conduct interviews with campus officials who held key positions before, during, and after the president’s tenure.

Interviews were conducted with seventeen senior administrators and faculty at The University of Alabama. Although basic themes were explored in each interview, a semi-structured format was utilized to build upon interviewees’ responses (Lindlof and Taylor 2002). Open-ended questions were asked in each interview in order to limit bias and provide opportunities to classify data in ways that might provide new understanding of basic themes. Mainstream media and historical documents from the university’s special collections library supplemented in-person interviews and provided insight into the institution’s culture and conditions.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This study theorizes that SEM functions as a cultural change agent by strategically integrating change with an emphasis on core institutional values such as behavior and beliefs. One faculty member explains institutional culture’s inherent characteristics:

*In general, higher education culture or any organizational culture is slow to change and, by nature, resistant to change because you have those shared perspectives and beliefs.... I do think there are instances—disruptions, for example—that do happen that can make that change occur a little more quickly.*

Colleges and universities that self-identify with institutional culture can more effectively adapt SEM planning strategies and influence performance outcomes. Conversely, higher education institutions that fail to recognize their cultural identity within a context of change risk efforts to integrate change that will prove ineffective and that may lead instead to cultural resistance and, ultimately, to vulnerability to market competition.

With its history of conservative values and traditions, the culture of The University of Alabama campus seemed to present significant challenges with regard to change. One senior administrator explained the university’s position:

*The campus culture at The University of Alabama is not necessarily unique in comparison to other top research universities in the South Eastern Conference (SEC).... By that I mean that other institutions experience many of the same cultural challenges that we face. What is different about Alabama is the degree to which the campus culture has changed within such a short period of time...a lot of that has to do with the way its growth has been financed.*

Decreases in state fiscal support have been a growing concern for The University of Alabama for the past decade. According to a study by the Grapevine project at Illinois State University (Belanger 2013), the state of Alabama ranked fourth in the nation in cuts to higher education from 2008 to 2013, having slashed $556 million or 28 percent from college and university budgets in order to accommodate lost revenue during the recession. Having reached the point at which the university’s quality of education and ability to attract top faculty and administrators became a concern, three progressive steps to secure more predictable revenue sources were taken. (Data pertaining to each are provided in Table 1, on page 7.) Over time, these actions directly contributed to a shift in the university’s culture.

The first step was to enhance campus infrastructure such as facilities, roads, and support services in order to accommodate sizeable enrollment growth. A senior administrator hints of initial budgetary concerns during the onset of the transition period:
Growing campus infrastructure in anticipation for growth makes sense conceptually, but from a financial standpoint, some boards view it as fiscally irresponsible. I’m not saying that was the case here, but there was skepticism. What we actually experienced was cautious optimism allowing for concurrent growth in infrastructure and enrollment.

One campus official describes how the university’s campus landscape has changed as a result of a decade of carefully planned enrollment growth:

Since 2003, our building initiative has involved the addition of 47 new buildings and additions or renovations to 37 more buildings. Thirty-eight additional new or renovated buildings are in progress. My colleagues at other institutions still tell me today that they don’t know of any other institution with a more aggressive building program.

Many of the informants responding to the changes in campus infrastructure offered specific examples of how the building program altered behavior. One senior administrator explains:

As the number of buildings increased, parking areas within the interior of campus disappeared, and I didn’t like it. It changed how students and faculty navigated campus—and I don’t mean just our commute time, but how we transported ourselves.

She continues her interpretation of the changing campus landscape within a cultural context:

For example, parking for students and faculty has been moved to the perimeter of campus to create a campus environment that is walking and biking friendly, which in many ways has made us a more health-conscious campus.

The second step was to significantly increase non-resident enrollment and the number of faculty. Initially, campus faculty met the university’s strategic goal to increase enrollment with a degree of reservation. In fact, faculty were reluctant to increase enrollment because, in the words of one faculty member, “the aggressive move to increase enrollment could have resulted in very negative consequences for students.” Faculty interests stemmed

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>New Students*</th>
<th>FTE Faculty</th>
<th>New Academic/Research Facilities</th>
<th>New Student Residence Halls</th>
<th>Research Grant and Contract Awards</th>
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* New students include first-time undergraduates, undergraduate transfers, new professional students, and new graduate students.
** Financial data were not included in the 2010 UA Factbook.

both from concern for the quality of education they were going to be able to deliver as well as increasing course loads. Anticipating these concerns, university administration directed controlled growth in these particular areas by increasing course offerings and hiring new faculty. Nevertheless, one faculty member explains that simply enacting change was not the primary concern:

“When talking about strategic change or planned change that comes from the president, from the board, and all the way down, those can bring about change to culture, although not always successful. So I don’t know that I necessarily consider it hard to change culture—I truly don’t—but I think it is hard to sustain change.

Taking the initial steps of increasing enrollment and faculty proved critically important in bringing about change; however, these actions didn’t necessarily ensure sustainability.

One faculty member describes the breadth of change that SEM imparted to the university’s culture:

“There are so many changes going on here right now that not only impact student culture but multiple other aspects of culture. Part of that is bringing in more geographically diverse students than there used to be but also diversity in terms of faculty. I don’t know if we would have brought them in a decade ago because there’s an energy here [now] that’s attractive to people.

For other campus officials, attracting talented faculty in response to the excitement and momentum from increasing enrollment meant the opportunity to initiate an additional revenue stream in the form of research grants.

The third step that most informants identified was the increased emphasis on research grants as a source of funding. One senior faculty member describes the change by saying, “Cultural value of research has shifted in that it has increased to bring in research dollars.” Another faculty member shares her account of the relativity of research grants prior to 2003:

Grants have always provided important funding to research initiatives here or temporary positions over there, but these same grants are increasingly necessary to fund portions of research operations that we never considered ten years ago.

Non-faculty informants mentioned the addition of revenue streams as a benefit of the changes that occurred as a result of SEM, but they did not specifically mention research grants in their initial responses until they were questioned about revenue types. Further examination of the increased emphasis on securing grants in order to fund research operations supports the idea that SEM has changed this particular aspect of The University of Alabama’s campus culture.

CONCLUSION

This study increases awareness of the challenges that colleges and universities endure when confronted with the task of integrating change. Institutional culture provides an appropriate lens through which to examine how SEM’s affiliations extend beyond those institutional relationships and functions that are found within traditional constructs. Specifically, examining SEM through a cultural lens provides a degree of clarity to institutional change integration that is not possible with the use of traditional structural, academic, and marketing frameworks. Characterizing SEM’s utility as a change agent is an emerging concept that deserves further examination, particularly given the economic indicators that suggest that SEM will continue to serve as the leavening agent for colleges and universities amid shifting economic landscapes. This study reinforces the claim that SEM is a key element for integrating cultural change. In demonstrating so, this study suggests the value of further research on the role of SEM as a cultural change agent in order to better understand the relationship between SEM performance and the values and beliefs necessary to sustain change.

REFERENCES


About the Authors

BRADLEY BARNES is Director of Enrollment Management at the University of Alabama and also serves as a graduate faculty member in the College of Education. His areas of research include student enrollment markets, resource dependency, and privatization of public higher education.

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UNITED KINGDOM
Offers guidance on the structure and content of the United Kingdom’s education system. The five-chapter guide includes a historical look at major legislative and policy changes affecting the system as a whole, and offers details on the country’s Further Education, Secondary Education, and Professional Qualifications frameworks. Additionally, helpful reference information can be found in the book’s five appendices, including a key to system-related acronyms; listings of the UK’s higher education institutions and further education colleges; details on the National Qualifications Framework; and a comprehensive listing of professional bodies and learned societies.

Item #9027 $95 nonmembers | $70 members (2006)
WHEN AN INSTITUTION DECIDES TO MOVE TO ONLINE TEACHING EVALUATIONS, THEY OFTEN FACE CONCERNS THAT THEIR RESPONSE RATES WILL FALL WITH THE CHANGE. THIS FEAR NEED NEVER COME TO PASS, HOWEVER. THERE ARE MANY INTERVENTIONS THAT CAN RAISE RESPONSE RATES. GOOD COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES, IMPROVED STUDENT AND FACULTY ENGAGEMENT, AND GRADE HOLD ARE JUST A FEW IDEAS THAT CAN HELP ASSURE THAT RESPONSE RATES INCREASE, OR REMAIN HIGH. WHILE THERE ARE MANY VARIABLES THAT WILL INFLUENCE HOW A GIVEN TYPE OF INSTITUTION OR STUDENT BODY WILL RESPOND TO AN INTERVENTION, INSTITUTING ONE OR MORE INTERVENTIONS WILL POSITIVELY AFFECT RESPONSE RATES. THE DEGREE TO WHICH RATES MAY BE EFFECTED IS DISCUSSED.
Online evaluations are the future. Why? They offer a cost savings in materials and labor over paper evaluations and are less prone to error or interference than those completed in class. The data are available quickly and in a form conducive to analysis. Still, only about one-fourth of colleges and universities have moved their teaching evaluations online (Miller 2010). The primary concern given by institutions debating this change is that response rates may decrease. When the audience is “captive,” there is a fairly high probability that it will remain in class and complete the survey. When a college or university moves to an online system, however, the time used to complete a teaching evaluation almost always is students’ personal or study time. For this reason, if no other, online evaluation rates often fall below those that an institution has come to expect with their paper-based evaluation system. The question typically asked is “Given that our rates may drop, should we go online?” A better question might be “What are the methods we can use to increase our online response rates, and how effective are they?”

COMMUNICATION
Institutions communicate with students about evaluations through “advertising” the evaluation process, faculty members’ written and spoken instruction, and other posting of evaluation information. Norris and Conn (2005) found that posting the evaluation announcement to a class discussion board was associated with higher response rates (equal to 50 percent), and posting in two alternate locations netted response rates almost as high. Compare this to a 31 percent average response rate for all classes. The same study assessed general verbal or email reminders that evaluations were “coming up” and found them to be effective in increasing rates. Norris and Conn (2005) found that the greatest increase in response rates came when instructors announced the evaluation in class two to three weeks prior to the end of the course (>3 weeks netted response rates of 25 percent; <2 weeks netted response rates of 44 percent, two to three weeks prior netted response rates of 48 percent).

Reminders are key, regardless of whether they are given prior to, or during the evaluation period (at both times is ideal). Most of the literature asserts that reminders sent during the evaluation period are an important tool. Really, measures of the impact of reminders are proxies rather than direct comparisons because there are no experiments in which researchers purposefully reminded students in one group while maintaining a separate control group to whom reminders were not given. That said, there is still some valuable information in the literature. First, there are data from studies that followed up with non-completers of course evaluations. In Johnson’s 2002 study, where he followed up with non-responding students, 50 percent reported having “no idea” that the survey was available to be taken, and another 16 percent “forgot,” possibly indicating that reminders would have helped increase evaluation completion rates. Anderson, Brown, and Spaeth (2006) found that 67 percent of students had
forgotten, had run out of time, or hadn’t bothered because completing the evaluation wasn’t required or encouraged by the instructor.

A valid question is how many of these students would have completed evaluations had they been given additional reminders. Layne, DeCristoforo, and McGinty (1999) gained 12.8 percentage points after a reminder was given. The authors were technically “done” evaluating and sent the extra reminder after the formal close of the evaluation period, because they wanted more responses; this suggests that the increase they measured was definitely the result of the reminder itself. The Online CTE Project team (2005) at Lingnan University in China found that evaluation completion rates were lower for online evaluations in classes that had a larger number of undeliverable emails.

One assumption stated repeatedly in course evaluation research is that response rates spike after reminders. At the University of Oregon, evaluations are given on a nine-day evaluation cycle during the regular academic term. In order to understand how the three reminders sent during that period affected response rates, completion data were collected each hour throughout the evaluation period. Vertical lines denote a reminder being sent. (See Figure 1.)

Response rates spike each time a reminder is sent. Does this mean that overall rates were higher just because students were reminded? Though we didn’t experiment on two like populations and compare rates for reminded vs. not-reminded populations, it is compelling that had the slope of completed evaluations stayed relatively constant throughout the evaluation period, rates would have ended more than 20 percentage points lower than they did. While this isn’t a direct measurement, it would certainly encourage one to remind.

In addition to reminders, students benefit from demonstration. When Dommeyer et al. (2004) compared courses in which an instructor had demonstrated how to find and complete the evaluations to students who had never done so, response rates averaged 24 percentage points higher than in courses in which no demonstration was given. It is unclear whether the increase was due to the demonstration itself or to the message implicit in the demonstration—that the instructor felt that evaluations were valuable and wanted to encourage student participation.

Student motivation to participate is stunningly important and is heavily influenced by their interactions with instructors around evaluations. Students want to believe that they will be listened to—that instructors will hear and respond to the feedback they provide. In advertising or otherwise promoting evaluations, institutions tend to emphasize the fact that they are used in promotion and tenure decisions; yet this is not the use students find most compelling. Chen and Hoshower (2003) found that students consider an improvement in teaching to be the most important outcome of an evaluation system, followed closely by an improvement in course content and format. Using evaluations for tenure, promotion, and salary decisions or making the results available to inform students’ future course selection were far less important to students. In fact, in 1979, Overall and Marsh found that the best way to interest students in completing an evaluation was to have them complete a midterm evaluation and to follow it with an honest discussion of the results. Students saw the midterm evaluation as proof that their input was important to the instructor and to the class and that it would be acted upon. That alone increased response rates.

**Engagement**

It shouldn’t come as a surprise that engagement is one of the most important factors related to student response
rates. It is important to point out, however, that this includes not just student engagement but faculty engagement as well. Anderson, Brown, and Spaeth (2006) found that response rates were highest in the courses of both department heads who had been involved in the set-up of the evaluations, and subsequently (when evaluations were rolled out to the entirety of the institution) in the courses taught by faculty reporting directly to those department heads. So what can instructors do to improve their engagement with students around evaluations and students’ engagement with the process itself?

Anderson, Brown, and Spaeth (2006) found that 10 percent of non-responders believed their input would not be acted upon or listened to. A Brigham Young University study suggests that improved instructor and student engagement helped increase response rates from 40 percent to 62 percent during three pilot projects (Johnson 2002). The same study also showed a strong correlation between level of communication and response rate. Anything done to increase student and/or faculty investment in course evaluations and how they’re used can be instrumental in increasing response rates.

This has certainly been the case at the University of Oregon. About three years ago, we initiated a concerted campaign with its faculty to reinforce the value of evaluations. We added pages to our website, providing ideas about how to improve response rates and to help faculty learn how to better educate and engage students on the topic of evaluations. We emailed information to faculty, letting them know that evaluations would open soon and when evaluations had opened. As a direct result of this campaign, student evaluation completion rates increased an average of 5 percent, and our declines decreased 8 percent, giving us a total increase of 13 percent in our active completion rate. No other facet of our evaluation process changed in that time frame, so the increase is entirely attributable to increased faculty and student engagement. As more faculty incorporate these strategies into their courses, we expect to see students’ evaluation completion rates continue to increase. Many students sent emails such as the following:

*Could you help me reset my evaluation? I was going to blow off evaluations this quarter, but my prof explained why they were so important.*

—UO Student, 2012

## INCENTIVE

Academics both love and hate incentives. Faculty don’t want to offer incentives they believe will compromise the integrity of their grading. Universities are willing to offer incentives but don’t want to incur costs as a result of doing so. Offering extra credit—while effective—is not necessary, nor is it productive to offer iPads to “winning” evaluation completers.

Johnson (2002) found that making the evaluation an assignment, with no points offered for its completion, resulted in a 77 percent response rate, compared to 70 percent for paper evaluations in the same study. When instructors in the study did offer a small point reward for completing the online evaluation, response rates soared from 32 percent (with no incentive to complete the online evaluation) to 87 percent.

It may be beneficial to publish course evaluation data online. Given Pick-a-Prof and similar sites, instructors may be more sensitive than ever about posting their ratings. They might be challenged, however, to consider that it’s better for students to see those ratings at their home school, where the system imposes a limit of one rating per “customer” and confirms that a student actually took the class before rating it.

Ravenscroft and Enyeart (2009) analyzed data from ten mid-size private and public research-intensive institutions. They defined response rate as the percentage of students who filled out one or more course evaluations in a given term. They found rates to be between 10 and 20 percentage points higher after an institution began to publish evaluation results.

Results are mixed in relation to lotteries and sweepstakes, generally showing that several small prizes are more effective at increasing response rates than one or two big prizes that students are unlikely to win. Many students tend to ignore these awards regardless, minimizing their value as incentives.

## DISINCENTIVES: GRADE WITHHOLDING

Very few references are available for one of the most frequently considered and most hotly debated methods of increasing online evaluation response rates: grade withholding. There are various degrees to grade withholding severity: grades may be viewed early by students who complete course evaluations; they may be released a week or
more after the regular grade-posting date; or they may be withheld until the evaluation is completed, regardless of when that may be. The assumption is that students will be more likely to complete course evaluations if they are able to see their grades early or if their grades are withheld as a consequence of their decision to complete (or not complete) online evaluations.

Myriad questions are associated with grade withholding: Does it improve response rates? If so, how much improvement is realized? How long do student grades have to be withheld before it makes a difference? What happens if students are allowed to actively “decline” evaluations and suffer no consequence? Little in the literature answers these questions, though University of Oregon data do provide some insight. A search of return rates at institutions that withhold grades provides an even more robust picture.

Does grade withholding improve response rates?

Many schools institute online evaluations and grade holds at the same time, so the effect of grade hold is impossible to separate from that of moving evaluations online. It’s rare to find data for online evaluation return rates both before and after grade withholding is instituted. Figure 2 (on page 17) displays findings from a survey of institutions that either published their data on the web or responded to personal communications. The data suggest that grade holds can increase response rates between 20 and 60 percentage points; the average increase was 34 percentage points. These increases were due solely to the initiation of grade holds, providing credible evidence that grade holds increase course evaluation response rates—and in a substantive way. The data for the University of Oregon are the least reliable, because its only data for a non–grade hold online evaluation period were from a pilot of the online system that applied to only one-third of the institution’s courses. The other data points were after campus-wide roll-out of grade holds for online evaluations of all courses. Note that the higher the school’s initial evaluation completion rate, the less its increase as a result of grade withholding tended to be.

What factors determine how successful a grade hold is?

Grade holds can vary by type and severity. The most lenient provide course evaluation completers with early access to their grades. Unfortunately, students tend to perceive this as a grade hold, regardless of the benefit it confers. Punitive grade holds prevent course evaluation non-completers from accessing their grades until after the time they normally would be viewable. Such holds may extend for a week, a month, or even indefinitely. Some institutions withhold some other aspect of the student’s record that is required for him or her to make progress toward a degree. At one medical school, a student will not receive the evaluations of his or her work—required to advance—until completing course evaluations.

What does the timeframe of a grade hold have to be, in order to be effective?

Figure 3 (on page 17) presents several types of grade holds, the duration of each, and the resulting response rates. These data were obtained from online sources and personal communication as well as published academic papers. The rates vary widely. As holds extend beyond one week, response rates increase. Note, however, that the most moderate holds netted response rates that were almost as high as—or even higher than—many of those with the strictest holds. These institutions also communicated the evaluation process extensively. This may influence the data but speaks as well to the institutions’ investment in course evaluations. That investment is evident in higher response rates (aside from the effects of grade holds). As in Figure 2, the University of Oregon data were from the period immediately after course evaluations went online and a grade hold policy for non-completers was implemented. Since then (as mentioned above), the university has instituted other interventions to increase response rates. The university’s earliest course completion rates are plotted in this table in order to isolate the effects of the transition to the grade hold policy from other interventions that have been instituted.

What will happen to response rates, if you allow students to decline without penalty?

Princeton and the University of Oregon allow students to log on to the respective institution’s online systems and decline evaluations. If the student declines electronically, it is counted as a completed evaluation and will prevent the student’s grades from being held. We added this to our procedures as an assurance to faculty that students would
not get angry over having their grades held and take out any resulting frustration on faculty by submitting poor evaluations. Regardless of whether students might have taken such retaliatory action, we’re now left with the legacy of our choice, and it does lower the numbers of our completed evaluations. On average, Princeton receives approximately 17 percent of its evaluations as declines. At the inception of our grade hold, the University of Oregon received approximately 19 percent of its evaluations as declines. As described previously, about three years ago, the university initiated a concerted campaign with its faculty to reinforce the value of evaluations, to help faculty learn how to improve student response rates, and to convince students that evaluations were worthwhile. As a result, our declines decreased to 14 percent in the first year of this campaign and then decreased again to average only 11 percent of our total responses. Allowing students to decline will decrease the amount of data collected, but depending on how your faculty communicates with students about evaluations, that loss can be greatly mitigated.

**INSTITUTIONAL VARIABLES THAT AFFECT RESPONSE RATES**

Determining what a given intervention will “do” for your institution can be more challenging than simply having difficulty finding data on how other schools have fared, using those techniques. There are variables that affect an institution’s base response rates that cannot be changed. While one institution may publish the response to a certain intervention, it might be a private or rural college whereas yours is urban and perhaps twice as large. How will that affect your students’ response to the same intervention? And why, when moving to online evaluations, will one college’s rates decrease more than another’s? Several areas bear looking at, and most relate directly to an institution’s demographics.

Leverage-saliency theory predicts that the salience of a survey, or individual interest in the survey topic, is strongly correlated with survey response. According to this theory, people place different levels of importance on the features of a survey. This is a litmus test for students: does this evaluation matter to them? The evaluation is more likely to matter—and, thus, to be accepted or completed—if the course is in the student’s major, for example, or has been overwhelmingly positive or negative. Several studies have
confirmed the positive impact that salience has on response rates (Groves, Presser and Dipko 2004; Groves, Singer and Corning 2000; Kojetin, Borgida and Snyder 1993; Van Kenhove, Wijnen and De Wulf 2002). Is your institution a law school, a medical school, or a graduate school? Your response rates likely will be slightly higher than those at a broadly focused undergraduate institution. Urban institutions also have consistently lower survey response rates than rural institutions (Groves and Couper 1998).

Student survey response rates vary across institutions according to engagement (Kuh 2001, Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). In other words, students who are more engaged in the college experience are more likely to respond to surveys endorsed or supported by their college. For example, college students who participate in more extracurricular activities will respond more often than those who are not engaged in such activities (Porter and Whitcomb 2005). What is the state of clubs, greek organizations, and athletics at your institution? The percentage of students engaged in such activities may affect your institution’s response rates. The engagement literature has found that students at private schools (Kuh and Hu 2001) and at liberal arts colleges (Kuh and Hu 2001; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Pascarella et al. 2004; Umbach and Kuh 2003) also tend to be more engaged than students at public schools and research universities, though this finding isn’t absolute.

With regard to web surveys, some additional variables may sway your institution’s response rates from the norm. Certainly, access to a computer is necessary to respond; schools that have extensive computing facilities should have higher web survey response rates than schools with less extensive computing facilities. Perrett (2013) found higher response rates at schools with a lower student per computer ratio. Comparing two hypothetical schools—one with a computer for every ten students and one with a computer for every five students—he estimated that one could expect the latter school to have a response rate an estimated 30 percentage points higher than the first school.

Female students consistently respond to online surveys at higher rates than do male students, so an institution’s male to female ratio will play a part in response rates, as will the proportions of graduate versus undergraduate students. Graduate students respond at higher rates than do undergraduates—likely due to the increased salience of graduate student coursework.

Each of these factors will affect an institution’s response rates—and how plastic those rates will prove to be in relation to interventions. Also remember that there is a point of diminishing returns. As response rates increase, more interventions likely will produce less reaction in your population. Keep these factors in mind, when discussing what interventions an institution should use that may positively affect change, and how much change might be expected. Remember that the effects of interventions are not likely to be additive. Because one intervention in isolation increases response rates 20 percentage points and another in isolation does 10 percentage points doesn’t necessarily mean that together they will increase response rates 30 percentage points. They might. But the effect also might be greater or less than that, depending on how the two strategies together affect student understanding of and engagement in the evaluation process.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the plethora of options available, which interventions should an institution implement to increase course evaluation completion rates? The choices are obviously many. One of the most beneficial things an institution can do is to begin working with its faculty immediately. Improve buy-in and engagement. Not only will this increase response rates, but it also will provide long-range benefits to the institution. Faculty will be more invested in their evaluations and in improving their teaching and may be more receptive to their department chairs’ comments when discussing evaluation feedback that challenges their “typical” style of teaching. Engaging the instructors also means that students likely will become more engaged: One instructor who speaks to students in one class about the importance of evaluations improves the odds that those students will evaluate every course in their schedule. Don’t wait to see how well your first thought works before trying something new. Send reminders; set up a website to better engage students and answer their questions about evaluations; approach your faculty about adding a grade hold to your system. Anything you do will help increase your evaluation completion rates. In fact, those rates will continue to increase as students and faculty become more
accustomed to the process and as you begin to improve the culture around evaluation at your institution.

REFERENCES


About the Author
LAURA JACEK is Assistant Registrar for Operations at University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon. She worked as an institutional researcher for thirteen years before moving into the Registrar’s Office at University of Oregon where she keeps the course evaluation system running smoothly. She has given several presentations on different aspects of course evaluations and continues to do research in that area. She earned her Ph.D. from Oregon State University.
Admissions, Decisions, the Law, and Students with Disabilities
During the last 25 years, students with disabilities accounted for the largest increase in postsecondary student populations in the United States (Palombi 2000). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), 19.1 million students enrolled in higher education in the United States in 2008; students with disabilities accounted for 11 percent of that total (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2009).

The population of students with disabilities has increased continuously since the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rothstein 2004; U.S. Government Accountability Office 2009). A review of journals focused on college students with disabilities reveals few entries specific to admissions. A similar review of journals focused on college and university admissions reveals little scholarship related to college students with disabilities. For example, the most recent article in the Journal of College and University Law addresses the use of flagged test scores in the admissions process (Pullin and Heaney 1997). Rothstein (1986) addresses emerging issues for college and university administrators in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Tucker (1997, 1998) reviews disability discrimination in higher education in two separate papers. Most recently, in the College and University Journal, Marcum and Perry (2010) summarize legal issues for those who assist students with disabilities. Beyond these publications, a detailed review of legislation, recent case law, and administrative rulings pertaining to admissions procedures for students with disabilities is lacking. This paper helps fill this void by examining the status of U.S. higher education admissions procedures as it pertains to students with disabilities and makes recommendations for administrators and disability service providers.
**FEDERAL DISABILITY LEGISLATION**

The U.S. government has concerned itself with the education of individuals with disabilities since the early 1970s. Congress enacted the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to create conditions in which Americans with disabilities could function in society as capably as those without disabilities. This had a significant impact on the substantial number of higher education institutions that received federal funding (Thomas 2000).

In 1975, the federal government passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which enhanced students with disabilities’ access to K–12 programs (Rothstein 2004). To receive federal funding, states were required to fund education for students with disabilities in all state programs (IDEA 1975). School administrators were required to proactively identify and work with individuals with disabilities. As a result, more students with disabilities successfully completed high school and then turned their aspirations toward college (Rothstein 2004).

In 1990, Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to ensure equal protection for individuals with disabilities. The ADA (1990) defined an individual with a disability as a person with a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. The courts have also ruled on the flagging of test scores earned under the ADA (1990) in determining admittance to a program specifically for students with disabilities, and the use of standardized test scores.

The courts have ruled on several issues pertaining to the use of disability information in the admissions process. In *Southeastern Community College v. Davis* (1979), the Supreme Court ruled that academic and technical standards required for admission to clinical training programs could allow for reasonable physical accommodation without violating Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. University or college administrators may also find an applicant unqualified for admission if the individual has a significant risk of recurrence of a mental or physical condition that would render him incapable of fulfilling the prescribed program requirements (*Doe v. New York University* 1981). If accommodations requested by a particular student would fundamentally alter her experience in a particular program, a college administrator does not have to provide those accommodations (*Ohio Civil Rights Commission v. Case Western Reserve University* 1996). However, if a student is otherwise qualified for admission to a program yet is denied admission solely because of her disability, that constitutes a violation of the ADAAA of 2008 (*Pushkvin v. Regents of the University of Colorado* 1981).

Programs designed for students with disabilities must be able to verify whether a student has the disability required for participation in the program (*Halasz v. University of New England* 1993). Administrators coordinating programs for students with disabilities can inquire about a disability prior to admitting a student to such a program (Milani 1996).

Another important area for consideration in admissions practices is the use of scores on standardized tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the Graduate Record Exam (GRE). The courts have ruled that institutions may use standardized testing scores in their admissions process because those tests are available in alternative formats to individuals with disabilities (*Halasz v. University of New England* 1993). As long as the test score is only one criterion among others, institutions do not run afoul of the law (*Mallett v. Marquette University* 1993). The courts have also ruled on the flagging of test scores earned by students who received testing accommodations, finding the practice a violation of the ADAAA (2008) (*The Department of Fair Employment and Housing v. LSAC Inc. et al.*
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Practically, this means that once a test score is obtained, it cannot be marked in any distinguishable manner.

**OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS’ RULINGS PERTAINING TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND ADMISSIONS**

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) is the federal agency responsible for enforcement of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the ADA (1990), and the ADAAA (2008) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights n.d.). The OCR has ruled on a variety of admissions-related issues as they pertain to individuals with disabilities. For example, certain types of programs can inquire about specific disability prior to admission if that disability would directly affect the student’s ability to participate in and fulfill the requirements of a particular program (Milani 1996). Preadmission inquiries into disability status are not allowed when they do not relate directly to the requirements of the program (Milani 1996).

The OCR has also addressed the use of standardized test scores in the admissions process. First, the OCR accepts the use of standardized test scores in admissions processes because most test scores are believed to add some value to the decision-making process and can be obtained by providing some form of accommodation (Rothstein 2004). Second, “schools may not give different weight to scores achieved on standardized tests taken under nonstandard conditions” (Milani 1996). All test scores must be weighted equally in the admissions process (Milani 1996).

**OTHER LEGAL ISSUES RELATED TO ADMISSIONS**

**Campus Safety**

Another important consideration for college administrators is campus safety. Admissions officers, in particular, understandably want to avoid admitting potentially dangerous students to their campuses. Several court cases define the duties of college and university administrators with respect to campus security. For example, an institution must “ensure the safety of its students” within residence halls and perform these duties with due care (Mullins v. Pine Manor College 1985). Merely having a safety system in place on campus is not enough; administrators also have a duty to inform students, faculty, and staff about how to use these systems (Stanton v. University of Maine System 2001). Administrators who are aware of a dangerous situation must fully disclose this information to students; they have a duty to protect them from foreseeable harm (Nero v. Kansas State University 1993). Higher education administrators also must warn students of potentially dangerous situations and take responsibility for correcting the dangerous conditions (if possible) because the institution is legally liable for any injuries that may result from its failure to do so (Peterson v. San Francisco Community College District 1984). The Jeanne Clery Act (1990) of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 requires all postsecondary institutions to report criminal activity on campus and disclose potentially dangerous situations “in a timely manner” to students, faculty, and staff (20 U.S.C. 1092[f]). Clearly, higher education administrators must provide for the safety and security of the students enrolled at their institutions.

**Clear and Present Danger**

Keeping potentially dangerous individuals from entering campus is an important aspect of safety and security. Pre-screening potential applicants for information that may impact campus safety is increasing (Ramirez 2008). According to Barmak Nassirian, “It’s very tempting for colleges to say we’re excluding the next Jack the Ripper from sitting next to your son or daughter” (as cited in Ramirez 2008, p. 41). Yet the need to protect the college community from harm must be balanced with the need to protect an individual’s rights. In instances where a clear and present danger is identified, authorities may take protective actions (Schenck v. United States 1919). This concept applies not only to speech-related issues but also to individual actions.

**Agency**

The concept of agency is defined as a relationship “in which one person acts for or represents another by latter’s authority, either in the relationship of principal and agent, master and servant, or employer or proprietor and independent contractor” (Black 1983, 31). Information obtained by an agent is information obtained by the entire business or institution, whether or not the agent actually shares that information with the rest of the organization (Lake 2007). It is further assumed that each business collects and synthesizes all information in a coherent and efficient manner. For several decades, the courts have transitioned away from giving broad legal immunities to
colleges and universities and instead have moved toward treating institutions more like business enterprises. Increasingly, businesses are required to protect against foreseeable harm—a duty once reserved solely for law enforcement and government officials (Lake 2007). The law of agency grounds much of modern business law and is likely to play an increasing role in administrative decisions regarding campus safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS
As these cases and rulings illustrate, admissions personnel must use disability information carefully. The following recommendations can help guide admissions personnel in their review of applicants to their programs and institutions:

Advocacy

- Inform new students of their responsibilities for advocacy in the collegiate environment. Many individuals with disabilities do not realize the shift in responsibility that takes place when they transition from high school to postsecondary education (Palombi 2000). Ensuring that new students with disabilities arriving on campus are aware of the shift in responsibility will help them transition to their new role.

Disability Information

- Highlight all mental or physical abilities required by specific programs in all promotional material. This includes programs specifically designed for individuals with disabilities. The courts have ruled that administrators may request disability information to determine whether persons are qualified for admission to programs especially designed for persons with disabilities (Halasz v. University of New England 1993). Such requirements should be specified in all promotional materials related to that specific program.

In all other situations, administrators may only consider disability information for admissions purposes if it directly affects the applicant’s ability to successfully complete the essential requirements of the program (Doe v. New York University 1981; Ohio Civil Rights Commission v. Case Western Reserve University 1996; Pushkin v. Regents of the University of Colorado 1981; Southeastern Community College v. Davis 1979). Administrators must be explicit with all applicants about the uses in any admissions process of information related to their disability. Specify the requirements, and explain why they are in place. Administrators may prevent misunderstandings about these and related issues by doing so.

Standardized Test Scores

- Define how test scores are used in the admissions process and whether alternative criteria have similar importance. Once in the postsecondary environment, students with disabilities must make the difficult decision of determining when to self-identify (Palombi 2000). Knowing what administrators do with that information once it is disclosed is a critical component of that decision. By informing students in advance how test scores fit into the overall admissions process, students gain an understanding of how their test scores may influence their application to the program or institution.

- Use the information submitted by an applicant in her application packet. Students are responsible for requesting any necessary accommodations when they take standardized tests (Halasz v. University of New England 1993). If students with disabilities choose to take a standardized test without accommodations, the law does not require them to receive special consideration should the scores submitted to the institutions to which they apply not prove satisfactory (Halasz v. University of New England 1993).

Campus Safety

- Be sure that safety information is communicated in multiple formats that are accessible to a wide variety of users. The Jeanne Clery Act of 1990 requires that safety information be available to the general public, and the ADA of 2008 requires that public information be available in multiple formats. Doing so will ensure that as more individuals arrive on campus with new and different disabilities, administrators will not need to revise the materials already in use. Being proactive can reduce institutional risk and liability.

- With respect to campus safety concerns, base admissions decisions on the concept of clear and present danger. Denial of admission for safety reasons is acceptable only when the individual presents a clear and present danger...
to the campus, faculty, staff, or student body. Disclosure of a particular disability in and of itself does not necessarily constitute a clear and present danger. Administrators must train their staff members not to stigmatize the act or the facts of disclosure.

Staffing Practices

- Keep abreast of legal developments concerning individuals with disabilities, and be prepared to change policy, procedures, and programs accordingly. The law has changed considerably since the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and it will continue to do so. Administrators must be prepared to make adjustments as new legal decisions are made.

  Admissions staff members must be familiar with the disability services offered on campus so they can answer prospective students’ questions. Many students who are aware of their disability before they seek admission ultimately choose which college to attend on the basis of information and staff members’ knowledge about disability services on campus (Palombi 2000). The first administrators and staff members with whom many applicants come in contact are admissions personnel, making them key sources of information about campus life. When students interact with admissions representatives, they seek detailed information to aid their decision-making process (Palombi 2000). Alternatively, “the student might interpret the limited information or the offer of contact information [for disability services personnel] as a lack of interest and therefore no longer consider the institution” (Palombi 2000, p. 32).

- Include disability services personnel in admissions policy development. On-campus disability service providers are the best sources of information regarding laws and regulations governing how an institution interacts with individuals with disabilities (Thomas 2000). Including disability service professionals on the team responsible for generating admissions policies will help ensure that those policies apply appropriately to applicants with disabilities.

- Admissions staff should actively promote disability services to prospective students. By actively promoting disability services to all prospective students, administrators can ensure that incoming students are aware of institutional programs and services that would support their educational experience and academic success. This is important given that any individual has the potential to become a member of this particular protected class at any given time. “Disability” as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the ADA (1990), and the ADAAA (2008) describes a variety of conditions that may arise at any time in an individual’s life. It is entirely possible for a student to become aware of a personal disability while she is in college. By providing disability service information to all students, institutions help ensure that students will be able to address the issue in a timely manner should they have the need to do so.

Agency and Foreseeability

- Understand the institution’s expectations of agency relationships and supervisors’ expectations regarding information collected by direct reports. Administrators and disability services professionals can be viewed as agents of their respective institutions in a variety of legal contexts. That is, their knowledge of individual students’ disabilities and related needs and services is perceived as being held by the entire institution. Admissions administrators therefore must know their institutional processes and supervisors’ expectations with regard to sensitive, individually identifiable information; they are responsible for properly handling any such information. Supervisors must communicate clearly to their employees their expectations and all institutional policies related to disability services to help protect individual students, administrators, and the institution from unnecessary harm.

CONCLUSION

The law as it pertains to individuals with disabilities has evolved. Congress and the courts have expanded the definition of disability and the rights associated with that protected class with each new piece of legislation. The Office of Civil Rights and courts at all levels continue to issue rulings that shape the rights of individuals with disabilities. Current trends demonstrate that increasing numbers of students with disabilities are attending postsecondary education institutions across the country (Rothstein 2004, Thomas 2000, U.S. Government Accountability Office 2009). As more students with disabilities seek admission to U.S. colleges and universities, more legal challenges will
arise. Students’ first interaction with a college or university typically is through the admissions process, making it particularly sensitive to new developments in disability law. By proactively monitoring disability law, admissions administrators can ensure that their institutions comply with the law while successfully interacting with students with disabilities.

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This study investigates how universities can increase enrollment by advertising internships to prospective students during the college search process. The primary reason students earn a college degree is to secure a good-quality career with earning potential. Internships—the single most important credential for recent graduates—are the key selling point for postsecondary institutions in gaining the attention of prospective students. Using the qualitative research method of focus group interviewing, this study reveals that college seekers pay attention to higher education advertisements that speak with them not at them. Prospective students most often cite social media, streaming television, direct mail, the Internet, and classroom visits as the most important “touch points.” These findings will guide admissions and recruitment officers as they strive to communicate and connect with—and convince—graduating high school students to move from the college search to the college choice phase.
College students who had watched the movie The Internship, featuring Vince Vaughn (Billy) and Owen Wilson (Nick), searched their iPhones using the key word “internship” as the credits rolled. Eager to land an internship to promote their own future careers, student viewers of the movie heeded the actors’ warning:

Nick: *You got us a job at Google?*

Billy: *Well, not a job job. It’s an interview for an internship that could lead to a job. Nick, this might be the last chance that we’ve got.*

Vince Vaughn (Billy) was right when he said that an internship could lead to a job. In 2012, 69 percent of companies with 100-plus employees offered full-time employment to their interns (Smith 2012), and 59 percent of companies with fewer than 50 employees offered full-time employment to recent college interns (Internships.com 2012).

Between 2013 and 2014, 1.8 million bachelor’s degree-earning students graduated (National Center for Educational Statistics 2013); four out of every five sought to land a full-time career (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2012). Gone are the days when a bachelor’s degree was the ticket to full-time employment. “Students are realizing right now that they’re in college in order to become marketable to corporate America” (Zmuda 2011). However, according to a 2013 survey, 63 percent of recent undergraduates thought they needed more experience and training in order to secure a career in their desired field (Haynie 2013). In fact, the key to full-time employment for recent graduates is what advertisers define as the “point of differentiation”—that is, what makes an individual stand out from other graduates. The answer? Internships. A recent survey revealed that 66 percent of employers contend that relevant work experience and interview skill “... are the most important factors in their hiring decisions—far more significant than strong academic performance” (Smith 2012).

*Marketplace* partnered with *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and netted similar results from its survey of 700 employers around the country. The report concluded: “In industries across the board, employers viewed an internship as the single most important credential for recent grads—more than where you went to school or what you majored in. Even your grades” (Scott 2013).

Given the increased desirability of internships to students as well as employers, how are higher education institutions communicating such opportunities to students? Perhaps even more important, the current research addresses how universities can increase their enrollment by advertising internships to students during the college search process.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

For students immersed in the job search process, internships are now being called the “new interview” (Smith 2012). The internship, a form of experiential learning, is defined as “learning and making meaning from direct experience.” Internships require students to translate the concepts and the principles they learn in the classroom into practical application in the workplace. In addition, internships provide students with the opportunity to further their studies—to master effective communication, insightful thinking, critical problem solving, definition of abstract processes, and analysis of data before making a decision.

In 2012, 47 percent of higher education institutions required undergraduate students to enroll in a structured internship experience. Sixty-three percent of students completed at least one internship, and 28 percent completed two or more internships during their undergraduate studies (Internships.com 2012). Advocates of internships argue that the classroom should not be the only venue for student learning. Limiting student learning only to the classroom would negate engagement of the whole student (Grasgreen 2012).
Companies offer paid as well as unpaid internships. In 2012, one-third of internships were paid. Companies that made the top-ten list for paid internships included ExxonMobil, VMWare, Facebook, Google, ConocoPhillips, Microsoft, Amazon, IBM, BlackRock, and Yahoo!—despite the fact that 72 percent of students rated compensation as the least important factor when selecting an internship site (Internship.com 2012). Job content is the most important factor for students when considering an internship site (Gordon 2007).

Two-thirds of internships in 2012 were unpaid. Companies that offered unpaid internships offered one or more of the following in lieu of compensation: college credit, company perks, travel stipends, and food stipends. Companies should be cautious when offering unpaid internships: The U.S. Department of Labor is intervening to ensure that students are not performing the work of full-time employees—that is, that companies are not displacing current employees and using interns to perform those employees’ work for less or no pay (Lipka 2010). The U.S. Department of Labor has established the following criteria for companies offering unpaid internships:

- The internship is for the benefit of the intern.
- The intern works under close supervision and does not displace regular employees.
- The employer derives no immediate advantage from and may in fact be impeded by the intern.
- The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job after the internship.
- The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages.

The Labor Department contends, “The more an internship program is structured around a classroom or academic experience, as opposed to the employer’s actual operations, the more likely the internship will be viewed as an extension of the individual’s educational experience” (Lipka 2010).

Students are learning the true benefits of internships as the days of getting coffee, filing, and making appointments are gone. Internships provide students with the opportunity to expand and apply theoretical and conceptual knowledge in an organizational environment. “Such settings are generally more complex than can be simulated in classroom-based exercises or case studies” (Schambach and Dirks 2002). “Internships help students see practical applications for what they are learning in the classroom and clarify their own career aspirations (regarding not just what they want in a job but also what they don’t want)” (Grasgreen 2012). Internships.com (2012) reports that students rated learning new things, real-world work experience, and working with colleagues as key internship benefits. Other benefits that may seem less obvious to the student intern are “soft skills” (Schambach and Dirks 2002). These include interpersonal concepts such as constructive communication with employees, clients, and vendors; appropriate social interaction with employees, management, and clients; synergy in teamwork; and the ability to deconstruct problems and offer viable ways to solve them. At the conclusion of their internship, students will have work samples that will enhance their resumes and convince potential employers of their ability to handle a variety of work responsibilities. In addition, the students will have gained several professional contacts they can use as references when they seek full-time employment upon graduation. The fact is, the days of being hired by a company and receiving on-site training are long gone. Today, employers expect new hires—including college graduates—to enter the work world ready to perform from day one (Fisher 2012).

Internships are critical to the student, the university and its departments, and the employer. Internships enable students to gain entry to a job market that appears to be impenetrable. An internship also allows a student to “test-drive a career before committing” (Smith 2012). Universities and their departments benefit by connecting with the professional world and bridging the boundary between school and workforce. For educators, the curriculum highlights concepts and principles while incorporating relevant workplace competencies; this is referred to as ‘career mode.’ Employers benefit from the free or cheap labor that student interns provide. In addition, the employer gains a low-risk opportunity to assess the student’s work competence. Assuming the intern is eventually hired, her talents will help the company grow (Internships.com 2012). Stuart Lander, chief marketing officer at Internships.com, said, “Entry-level employees are the future of a company and so in many ways the most important recruiting decisions an employer can make” (Smith 2012). “Often, the students can offer new ideas (based on classroom exposure
to new concepts or technologies) and new perspectives” (Schambach and Dirks 2002).

“Academic internships are a three-way partnership among an institution of higher learning, the internship site, and the student” (Westerberg and Wickersham 2011), with each entity benefiting in multiple ways. The desire to pinpoint one’s career aspirations as well as secure one’s place in a challenging job market is a decision made from multiple perspectives. Students rely on their parents, friends, and faculty to guide them through the rocky terrain of the job search (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2012). In addition, they seek the expertise of career counselors. Seventy-three percent of college students receive assistance from career services during their senior year (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2012). Students obtain support with writing their resume and reviewing current job postings and often have the opportunity to attend career and employment workshops. Social media such as LinkedIn are another influencer during the job search process and are used to research current employees, understand specific job duties, and network (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2012).

Hollywood may have the loudest voice when communicating about internship benefits and how to secure one’s career. In 2013, 20th Century Fox released “The Internship.” The plot focuses on two “old-school” salesmen who find themselves out of a job when the company they work for closes. They try to find new jobs, but the employment landscape has changed, and their outdated skill set hinders their prospects. Desperate to find a job, Billy (Vince Vaughn) gets them a chance to work at Google, but they first have to undergo a long internship. During the movie’s opening weekend, it ranked fourth at the box office and appeared on more than 3,000 U.S. movie screens in addition to an international release (Box Office Mojo 2014). The movie inspired not only adult interns who may be transitioning to a different career or who were laid off and seek continued work and compensation (Longo 2013) but also current college students. A 20-year-old UC Berkley sophomore said, “Watching the movie gave me a sense of hope that I can find a job after graduation” (Guynn 2013). The movie taught several life lessons: (1) Be yourself during the job interview; in fact, be your best self. For example, creativity, humor, and enthusiasm shone in the characters when they answered the interviewers’ question: “You’re shrunk down to the size of nickels. How would you get out of a blender?” (2) Education may get an intern in the door, but what will earn an intern full-time employment is what he does with that knowledge. (3) Aim to impress everyone. Company employees are constantly observing interns’ work ethic, creative execution of projects, and interpersonal relationships with co-workers and clients (Levin-Epstein 2013).

Higher education has grown tremendously over the last 350 years. Currently, there are 4,100 colleges and universities, each offering its own specializations (Horovitz 2010, Nafukho and Burnett 2002). One reason that higher education continues to grow is the number of high school students seeking postsecondary education. Total enrollment at postsecondary degree-granting institutions increased 15 percent just since fall 2010, and this trend is slated to continue until fall 2021 (Hussar and Bailey 2013). Given the plethora of higher education options as well as the number of high school graduates seeking postsecondary education, internships could be a key factor in university choice as students engage in the laborious college search process.

older siblings, peer groups (Cole 2006, Johnson and Stewart 1991, Wilson 1971), and college admissions consultants (Clayton 1999). Finally, college choice may be dictated by family legacy (Wingert 2003).

Advertising initiatives also influence how students learn about college options. Research by Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) reveals that “...college direct marketing and recruitment activities had an effect on the choice stage...” (p. 96). Given that job placement and income are cited as the major reasons that students attend and graduate from college (Fischer 2012) and that 69 percent of careers are birthed from internships (Smith 2012), why are universities not using internships in their advertising to attract prospective students? As stated previously, the number of high school graduates will continue to increase until 2021. Between 2013 and 2014, 3.3 million students will graduate from high school (National Center for Education Statistics 2013). Traditionally, internships were reserved for current college students and recent graduates. However, a recent survey finds that interns are getting younger as high school students are entering the workplace before they ever set foot on a college campus (Aronowitz 2014). The survey, conducted by Millennial Branding and Internships.com (2012), finds that “77 percent of high school students are either extremely or very interested” in gaining work experience (Aronowitz 2014).

Soon-to-be high school graduates will be receptive to advertising about internships—advertising that can also increase university enrollment as graduating high school students engage in the college search process. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2013) (which distributed the Internship and Co-op Survey), “Internships and co-operative education programs are an essential component of college recruiting programs” (p.3). Yet the majority of institutions are advertising internships not to prospective students but only to currently enrolled students. Birmingham Metropolitan College is one institution advertising its commitment beyond graduation; it is using the tagline ”Let What You Love Become What You Do” (Newbold 2012).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Self-persuasion theory guides the current research project. It states that the more involved receivers of a message are with the message itself, the more they will be persuaded by it. That is, receivers of a message will “take an active role in establishing the advertisement’s meaning and persuading themselves to bolster, accept, distort, derogate, or reject the advice contained in the message” (Advertising Age 2003). Given that the choice of which university to attend is a “high involvement” purchase, making the wrong choice carries greater risk and higher associated costs. As a result, college searchers are more engaged with higher education messages (i.e., advertisements) that yield a greater degree of involvement and reaction—and, ultimately, persuasion.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
This study relies on Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three-stage model of college choice. The first phase is *pre-disposition* and “refers to the plans students develop for education or work after they graduate from high school” (Hossler, Schmit and Vesper 1999, p. 9). *Search* is the second phase; in it, students explore various college options and gather information about each college’s characteristics. The last phase is *choice*, when a student decides to enroll at a specific institution (Hossler, Schmit and Vesper 1999). Because this study examines how universities can increase their enrollment by advertising internships, the relevant stage for this study is *search*. It is during the search phase that college-bound students pay attention to institutions’ advertising initiatives, which ultimately influence students’ college choice.

METHODOLOGY
This qualitative study investigates how universities can boost enrollment by advertising internships to prospective students during the college search process. Undergraduate students were asked to participate in this study because they were recent high school graduates who had engaged in the college search process. Prior to attending college, they had preconceived notions about higher education. Questions that these students entertained before entering college included “should I attend college,” “which college should I attend,” and “what is college about?” To answer these questions, the students browsed solicited and unsolicited information (e.g., brochures, catalogs, and flyers) from colleges. In addition, they may have paid attention to radio, television, and billboard advertisements. It is also possible that they visited colleges that appeared to meet their needs, wants, and interests. They also may have used
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their personal computers to download colleges’ literature (Hebel 1993), take a virtual campus tour, or chat with currently enrolled students at the college.

Undergraduate students rather than high school juniors and seniors were asked to participate in this study also because they understand the nature of internships. They are critically aware that internships are key to employment in today’s marketplace (Hering 2014). The state of the economy has made it more challenging for current graduates to distinguish themselves from other graduates as well as from seasoned professionals who are seeking employment due to their previous employers’ downsizing or restructuring. For these reasons, undergraduate students are well positioned to offer advertising strategies featuring internships that will resonate with graduating high school students.

Research participants included 117 (60 male and 57 female) undergraduate students enrolled in 39 degree programs at the largest public university in St. Louis, Missouri. Participants were traditional-aged college students between eighteen and 23 years of age. Twenty-two students were freshmen; 26 were sophomores; 29 were juniors; and 40 were seniors. Nationality was not considered in this study given the institution’s diverse student demographics and the consequent generalizability of its findings. More important, 93 (79%) of the participants had engaged in and completed an internship, and sixteen (14%) had participated in student teaching and/or clinical placements.

Focus-group interviewing was utilized in the current study for several reasons: First, this method encourages subjects to speak freely, completely, and without criticism about the “behaviors, attitudes, and opinions they possess” (Berg 2001). Second, focus-group interviewing creates a “synergistic group effect,” which lends to greater ideas, analysis, and discussion about the given topic (Berg 2001). Third, and most important, this method is based upon interaction. “Meaning and answers arising during focus-group interviews are socially constructed rather than individually created” (Berg 2001). It is imperative to this study to use focus-group interviewing because, as in focus groups, the process of selecting a college occurs socially. After the focus group, the researcher bracketed the data (Berg 2001). Bracketing allows the researcher to more closely examine the phenomenon (i.e., internship effect on enrollment).

As the focus-group moderator, the researcher explained to the undergraduate participants the project as well as how the focus groups would operate. Participants were told that their responses would be recorded for subsequent analysis by the researcher. The number of research participants per focus group was limited to between eight and ten, for a total of twelve focus groups (Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells 2009). The focus groups were conducted on a university campus in a private classroom with round-table seating. Each focus group met twice for two hours. To elicit discussion about increasing enrollment by advertising internships to prospective college students, the researcher crafted a series of discussion questions (see below)—a common practice because focus groups provide a means for assessing intentionally created conversations about research topics (Berg 2001).

- How important is an internship to your future career?
- What perceptions do you hold about internships—both positives and negatives?
- When searching for colleges, what advertising message about internships would gain your attention?
- When searching for colleges, what media are the most effective by which to receive messages from universities?

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The researcher analyzed the recorded discussions and identified concepts the undergraduate participants deemed to be true. Redundancies in the discussions prompted the researcher to identify similarities and make connections. Interviews allow a researcher to study a phenomenon and understand the essence of the research topic without having to collect as many examples as possible. The following insights and direct quotes summarize the impressions of the undergraduate participants in this study.

How important is an internship to your future career?

Using a scale ranging from critical to very important, important, somewhat important, and not important, 24 (21%) of the participants agreed that internships are critical; 43 (37%) said they are very important, 25 (21%) said they are important, 17 (15%) said they are somewhat important, and 8 (0.07%) said they are not important. The
opinion of the eight who said that an internship is not important is a direct result of their guaranteed employment upon graduation (six will work for a family-owned business, and two have a connection—meaning that a parent holds an executive position and can make a job opening available for his or her graduating son or daughter).

What perceptions do you hold about internships—both positives and negatives?

More than half (52%) of the participants agreed that real-world experience is the most positive aspect of having an internship. “Real world” is defined as practical or actual experience (as opposed to the abstract, theoretical, or idealized sphere of the classroom or the laboratory). Participants agreed that internships hone performance skills that demonstrate to prospective employers that the intern is well-equipped for the job. Other positive aspects of an internship include increased likelihood to be offered a job (which can lead to a career); extended knowledge about a specific career (which helps answer the question “is this career the right fit?”); a more robust resume; and increased distinction between a job candidate with an internship and one without. A paid internship was also cited as an internship positive, though this ranked last compared to the other positives noted by the participants.

Contrary to paid internships ranking last on the list of positive attributes, the most cited internship negative was lack of pay. One participant said, “If an internship is not paid, then we are forced to balance school, internship, and work. This is way too much. So, if an internship is paid, it takes one less responsibility off my plate. This makes me less stressed! But if I had to choose between understanding a specific career and getting paid...well, I pick understanding.” Research participants identified other negative aspects of an internship, including that it can be time consuming, can involve doing busy work instead of work related to a specific career or industry, that it can be difficult to find a good-quality internship, and having to pay to work for school credit.

When searching for colleges, what advertising message about internships would gain your attention?

Matt Britton, who is cited in “Marketers Get Creative Targeting Hard-to-Reach College Students,” said, “College marketing used to be block and tackle” (Horovitz 2010). But this strategy does not work today. Gaining the attention of the intended audience is critical to the success of any advertising campaign. And gaining the attention of prospective and current college students is most effective when the message is “deeply intertwined in their lives” (Horovitz 2010). Such messages yield greater comprehension and may result in students’ acceptance of the message as true. Research participants said that university advertising should talk with them, not at them. An advertising message that talks “with” prospective and current students incorporates their desires and behaviors while asking them to add to the dialogue; in other words, the message has to be about them, not the brand (i.e., the institution). Advertising messages can be rational, emotional, or a combination of both. College seekers prefer a combination of both—a message that is motivational and memorable. For example, a university could boost enrollment by using the slogan “Scholarships Will Get You Here, Internships Will Get You Out”; “Sports Will Get You Here, Internships Will Get You Out”; “The Major Will Get You Here, Internships Will Get You Out”; or “Social Life Will Get You Here, Internships Will Get You Out.” These slogans are effective because they are tangible (Reis 2012). In addition, they speak to both the left (logical) and the right (emotional) sides of the brain.

Higher education institutions have a plethora of recruitment tools (e.g., hosting open houses, offering campus visits, encouraging prospective students to visit their website, speaking with currently enrolled students, blogging, podcasting, networking on social media sites, sending text messages, listings in directories, mailing course schedules, and advertising in high school newspapers) they can utilize to promote their academic specialties, athletic activities, financial aid and scholarships, and clubs and activities. Internships, however, have not been part of the recruitment message. Participants in the current research study contend that college recruitment efforts must expand to include internships. After all, internships are a direct result of academic achievement and often result in a job offer pending graduation. One research participant declared, “I think internships are much more important to your job future than a good football team, but students must understand how important internships are for [them] to sway decisions in the college search.”
Another participant said, “If a university didn’t promote [advertise] internships, then I would wonder about my success at that school.”

When searching for colleges, what media are the most effective through which to receive messages that offer internships as the selling point?

Once the message is developed, media placement is the next critical step to reaching the right audience at the right time. It ensures that the target audience has the greatest potential to engage and interact with—and react to—the message and the brand. Media placement means that the advertiser (i.e., university) must not only understand the target audience (i.e., college seekers) but also where and how prospective students spend their time. Participants in the current study rated social media, streaming television, direct mail, the Internet, and classroom visits by current and recent graduates as the most effective ways in which to advertise internships and boost enrollment.

Research participants agreed that social media are ideal for connecting with prospective students. Currently, 68 percent of high school students use social media to research colleges (Lytle 2012). Favorite social media include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Students gravitate toward social media because they provide conversation that incorporates the student voice. As one participant shared, “I get a lot of e-mails. It would be nice to get Facebook posts and videos showing me about internship benefits. I can also read what other students are saying and add my opinion.” Arts University Bournemouth witnessed the power of social media when it realized a 15 percent increase in applications because of an interactive app (Shaw 2014).

Television is also an effective medium for communicating with prospective students. However, for today’s college-aged population, television means watching programming on Hulu, iTunes, Netflix, and Sidereel on a computer. Streaming video from one of these providers can be an effective way for universities to advertise. For example, Hulu does not allow users to skip pre-roll ads. If a user does opt out of viewing advertisements, then she forfeits watching the program at all (Learnmonth 2012).

Direct mail was preferred by research participants because it can be referred back to. According to a 2011 survey conducted by Epsilon, a multichannel marketing service, direct mail has a high response rate for the college-aged population. The high response rate is “attributed to college students being inundated with spam, making their taste for online communication more discriminating” (Dwilson 2014). In addition, direct mail has other benefits such as customization and targeting high school graduates who are college seekers. However, the greatest benefit of direct mail is physically placing a message in front of the target audience. According to the U.S. Postal Service, 98 percent of consumers bring in their mail the same day it is delivered, and 77 percent sort through the mail immediately. One participant shared her experience with mail from colleges and universities: “When I was applying to colleges, I loved receiving mail with pictures and information about the schools. I would sit for hours and imagine what life would be like there.”

The Internet is also an effective place to boost enrollment by advertising internships. It offers prospective students a fast way to search for information about virtually any institution of higher learning. According to the Pew Research Internet Project, researching potential colleges nearly always involves Googling them (Purcell et al. 2012). For this reason, university websites should be personable, inclusive, and visually oriented and should offer sought-after content. A 2009 study of college-bound high school students reported that 88 percent would drop a school from their search if its website did not have the content they were seeking (Noel-Levitz 2009).

“Being able to communicate with students who have graduated from the school within the past year or two and who share their experiences about the internship process would really gain my attention. It’s like living proof that internships will help me secure a job when I graduate,” said one participant in the current research project. Classroom visits by current and recent graduates are like social media “live and in person.” One participant explained, “There was so much going on my senior year in high school, so grasping my attention would definitely be a task. During this time in my life, I needed someone to spoon-feed me.” Colleges can enhance recruitment visits by using technology admired by today’s students. For example, iPads can be used to showcase the college’s website and can be used in place of inquiry cards to record prospective students’ contact information. The website presents information about academics and—perhaps even more important to the prospect—about where he will learn, live, and play (Hoover 2006).
DISCUSSION
In today’s competitive higher education landscape, colleges and universities will continue to vie for the attention of graduating high school students. With 4,100 colleges and universities to choose from, it is important to craft a message that will gain the attention of prospects in the places they live, learn, and communicate. The message needs not only to address the university’s brand but also to differentiate the institution from its competitors and provide compelling evidence that its students succeed. The main reason that graduating high school seniors seek a college education is to secure a good-quality career with income potential. Such a career is obtained on the basis of prior experience in a specific industry and occupation; prior experience is of critical importance to employers—perhaps even more so than education—and it can only be obtained by participating in an internship. Given that internships are vital to college graduates’ entrance into the job market, why are they not being highlighted in advertising messages designed to recruit prospective students? Higher education ads featuring graduating seniors adorned in caps and gowns do not speak with students but rather at them, saying “attend this university or you won’t graduate.” Instead, speaking with prospective students invites them to the conversation and taps into their desires, motivations, and behaviors, making a memorable impression—a impression persuasive enough to move prospective students from search to college choice.

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Better Results in Less Time: Using Assignment Algorithms to Automate First-Year Course Assignments

By Ann Minnick

It's summer at Macalester College. Students are gone; faculty are busy with their research; staff are taking much-deserved vacation. Yet amidst this slower pace is the steady hum of activity connected to the incoming class. Like many of our peers with nationally and internationally diverse student populations, Macalester's official orientation doesn't occur until just before the fall semester begins. But waiting until then to register students for courses is not desirable in terms of either enrollment management or student satisfaction. Instead, we have college staff create students' schedules according to preferences the students submit. Until recently, this time-intensive process was performed entirely by hand. But in 2009, a faculty member and an eager student research assistant made a proposal: Let's see whether mathematics can improve both the efficiency of the process and the quality of the assignments. Less than six years later, the resulting course assignment algorithm is now an integral part of how Macalester develops its first-year students' schedules. This article describes our process, highlights the benefits of the new method, and provides a lay interpretation of the time-saving mathematical tool.

### FIRST-YEAR COURSE ASSIGNMENT AT MACALESTER

The registration process for incoming students has two parts:

- The Academic Programs Office places students into a first-year seminar (we call them first-year courses, or FYCs);
- the registrar then assigns students three additional four-credit courses (a 16-credit load is the norm for first-semester freshmen).

The class assignment algorithm is applied only to FYCs because the FYC is the only course students must take in their first semester and the only one that cannot be changed once the assignment is finalized.

Macalester typically offers 35 FYCs each fall, with most departments offering at least one. During early summer, students are provided with course descriptions and are asked to rank their top four choices. Academic Programs compiles student preferences and makes assignments while respecting some modest constraints on the enrollment profile of each seminar. The goal is to place each student into a course that he ranked while also trying to maximize overall student satisfaction. Roughly speaking, this means making many first- and second-choice and far fewer third- and fourth-choice assignments.

Academic Programs also applies several constraints designed to ensure a uniform experience among classes. First, the class size of each FYC must be between ten and sixteen...
students. Second, the demographics of each class should be roughly comparable to those of the entire student body. Historically, this has meant enforcing a gender balance by reserving four seats each for men and for women. (Macal-ester’s student body is 60 percent female, so this constraint becomes relevant in a few seminars each year.) Finally, international students account for approximately 12 percent of the student body, so we’ve had to be careful at times to prevent a seminar from being populated mostly by international students. In a given year, it may not be feasible to assign each student a ranked choice while enforcing all constraints. In these situations, we forego the constraints so every student is assigned one of her top-ranked courses; the alternative—placing a student in a course she has not ranked in her top four—is not acceptable.

Prior to 2009, all of these factors were accommodated through a manual process. Students’ four preferences were listed on sheets of paper that were organized into piles—each one representing a seminar. Two staff members would then spend a week identifying beneficial “chains of swaps” to improve the overall profile of the assignment. Despite the complexity of the task, this method worked surprisingly well, with 87 percent of students being placed into their first- or second-choice seminars. However, when I joined the Academic Programs Office six years ago, I was intrigued by the offer to automate the process and was eager to collaborate with a new colleague and a student.

THE HUNGARIAN SORTING HAT

The idea for a course assignment algorithm was born in fall 2008 in a combinatorial optimization senior seminar. Macalester’s Department of Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science (MSCS) likes its seniors to identify real-world problems for their capstone projects. Andrew Beveridge, a faculty member with industry experience, nurtured Sean Cooke’s (‘09) interest in the FYC assignment problem and advised him to treat it as a consulting project.

The solution Beveridge and Cooke developed was dubbed the Hungarian sorting hat because it used the renowned Hungarian algorithm from combinatorial optimization to match students to available seminar seats. At a series of meetings with Academic Programs staff, Beveridge and Cooke discussed the requirements, constraints, and priorities associated with FYC assignment. They tested their solution using historical FYC placement data and adjusted their solution according to our feedback.

That first summer, both the manual and the sorting hat method were used. Two staff members in Academic Programs spent two weeks organizing, sorting, and swapping preferences and achieved the standard 87 percent placement in first- and second-choice seminars. In a fraction of the time, the Hungarian sorting hat placed 4.1 percent more students in their first- or second-choice seminars, and many fewer into their fourth-choice seminars. Needless to say, the Hungarian sorting hat method was adopted.

BEYOND THE SORTING HAT

Using the algorithm to assign students to FYCs is only the first step in our process. Academic Programs staff still read each student form to ensure that FYC preferences are appropriate given the student’s intended major, anticipated transfer credit, and placement. It is always the case that some manual adjustments to the “optimal” assignment are necessary. However, the amount of time spent is much less than before the algorithm was introduced and is more focused on curricular fit. In short, the benefit of the algorithm to Academic Programs is clear: better results in less time. But what about the benefits to others who are involved in the process? Why should a faculty member continue to volunteer time in the summer when scholarship reaps more rewards?

Service was a strong motivator for Beveridge, but the project also had unanticipated benefits. Beveridge and Cooke (2012) published a co-authored article about the algorithm, and Beveridge gave presentations on the topic both at Macalester and on other campuses. In addition, the project caught the attention of Stan Wagon, another MSCS faculty member, who persuaded Beveridge to collaborate on a new, more robust assignment algorithm. This implementation uses another optimization technique called integer linear programming (ILP), available via the Mathematica software application (and for which Macalester has a site license). The “ILP sorting hat” is more flexible than the Hungarian sorting hat—and flexibility is essential when our data set cannot satisfy all desired constraints. After testing the new method and comparing results, Beveridge and Wagon first used the ILP sorting hat for the 2013 cohort.

As luck would have it, it was particularly helpful to utilize a more flexible algorithm that year as the data set for
the 2013 FYC preferences was more difficult than usual: No assignment could respect either the upper enrollment limit of sixteen or the minimum-male requirement of four. The ILP sorting hat made short work of this problem by identifying the best set of twelve courses to expand as part of its assignment process. In 2014, we had the opposite situation: a particularly amenable data set. The ILP sorting hat met all constraints and placed 72.4 percent of students in their first-choice seminar, 26.1 in their second-choice seminar, and the remaining 1.5 percent in their third-choice seminar avoiding fourth-choice assignments for the first time at Macalester (Beveridge and Wagon 2014).

**CONCLUSION**

Improving the quality of first-year seminar assignments is the primary reason that Macalester College now uses an algorithm for this important task. Placing more students into their top-choice seminars while also ensuring that their FYC is a good curricular fit has contributed to an increase in student satisfaction and success. Additional benefits of utilizing this method include the opportunity for staff and faculty to collaborate on a regular basis; allowing students to work on real-world problems; applying faculty expertise to institutional projects; and efficiency. In sum, automating course assignments has proven to be a win-win for all concerned. Macalester’s sorting hat might not employ the magic found in the *Harry Potter* series’ house assignments, but it has certainly been a welcome addition on our campus.

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**About the Author**

ANN MINNICK, PH.D. is director of academic programs at Macalester College. Before joining Macalester in 2009, Dr. Minnick held positions in academic administration at SUNY-New Paltz, Michigan State University and the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. If you are interested in using these matching capabilities at your institution, email wagon@macalester.edu or abeverid@macalester.edu
In the age of globalization, the demand for multicultural educational experiences—from both scholars and the workplace—is on the rise, providing colleges and universities market-expanding opportunities both at home and abroad. Meeting these expectations requires both a solid foundation and the most up-to-date intelligence and methods in the field of international education. That's why professionals across the country rely on The AACRAO International Guide. Its latest edition, authored by proven experts in the field, is a 23-chapter reference and how-to guide containing:

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Lessons from Occupy Wall Street:
Creating Mass and Momentum to Lead the Functional and Technological Direction of Vendors

By Michael Burke

Do you remember that enhancement request you submitted to your student information system (SIS) vendor three years ago? How is that working out for you? Maybe it has moved up the priority list from number 142 to 139, but that is probably not the kind of progress or responsiveness you need or want. How can we as individual clients work together to guide the functional and technological direction of our vendors? The solution may lie with us rather than with them. If we can change the way we interact with vendors—and with one another—then perhaps we can find a more effective way to lead the direction of these systems and companies.

Consider this a call to collective action. In this article I describe how my university addressed the backlog problem internally and how the methods of Occupy Wall Street are a cautionary tale of what not to do (and which is essentially what we all have been doing).

When you think of the Occupy Wall Street movement, what comes to mind? What were they protesting—or advocating? Some might say it was a reaction to corporate greed or a call for accountability. Some were angry about loosened banking regulations while others protested the very existence of central banking oversight. Campaign finance reform and wealth redistribution were also championed. Every voice seemed to trumpet a different cause and every banner a different slogan. Occupy Wall Street was confusing, leaderless, and (perhaps) ultimately ineffectual.

Is this so different from the backlog for SIS development? Sign on to your vendor’s website, and review the list of enhancements and new feature requests. You will find duplication as well as divergent, conflicting requests. You can sort by date, module, function, and requestor, but any result will prove glacial in terms of scale and pace.

Several years ago I encountered a similar situation where I work. I am sure the scene is familiar: a large and demanding constituency, finite IT resources, a growing backlog, competing priorities and interests, and no clear lines of decision making. That could describe virtually any aspect of university administration, but when you have to wait a year or two to have text on a web form updated, it can be demoralizing. Worse, the outdated information or antiquated functionality will be attributed eventually to the registrar’s or the admissions office. Our constituents do not know and do not care about a backlog of application development. They simply wonder why we cannot solve seemingly minor problems.

When I started in my current position, I began attending an IT prioritization meeting at which two or three dozen attendees would review a list of approximately 75 prospective projects, debate their urgency, and review the progress of each. It was a daunting task, and it was often difficult to determine who was a stakeholder in each project. The meeting was a weekly event, but we sometimes had to wait months or even years before decisions were implemented. It was frustrating and demoralizing for everyone involved.

In the age of globalization, the demand for multicultural educational experiences—from both scholars and the workplace—is on the rise, providing colleges and universities market-expanding opportunities both at home and abroad. Meeting these expectations requires both a solid foundation and the most up-to-date intelligence and methods in the field of international education. That’s why professionals across the country rely on The AACRAO International Guide. Its latest edition, authored by proven experts in the field, is a 23-chapter reference and how-to guide containing:

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of work already under way. Instead of Occupy Wall Street’s slogans of corporate greed and wealth redistribution, we had departments advocating for better workflow, intelligent reporting, and bug fixes. Worse, it was common for people within the same department to argue against each other about priorities. It was like a scene from Occupy Wall Street—and similarly ineffective. Like many university committees, Occupy Wall Street was intentionally anti-hierarchical. It voted on all aspects of the campaign. Idealized democracy seems reasonable for a movement protesting oligarchy. One could even argue that “all voices represented equally” aligns with the collegial foundations of a university. However, it also means that all voices may exercise a veto, and it belies a sense of equal priority. If regulators or Wall Street executives were even inclined to listen to the demands of the protestors, which ones would they hear, and whose causes would they support? Likewise, in a room of 20 to 30 university administrators, whose voices would the IT department hear? How would the department score and prioritize projects and allocate its developers’ time? We were making it extraordinarily difficult for IT to make headway and were competing needlessly among ourselves.

I realized that all of the non-IT staff on the committee reported to one of only three individuals (myself and two others) who also attended the meeting. I met with the other two and proposed that we strip the committee membership down to the three of us. Our staffs could prioritize their units’ work and share the outcome with their manager. Then we (the three remaining committee members) would negotiate and prioritize together before taking our list to IT. By doing this, we each gained a good sense of what was important not only for our own units separately but also for what was most urgent for the school. This worked well because the three of us had already established a good, trusting relationship and had the blessing of the dean to lead in this way. Predictably, this revised approach elicited some grumbling from people who had participated previously in the IT prioritization meetings. These were often fairly senior administrators who were accustomed to exercising influence. The three of us likely addressed these concerns in different ways, but I demonstrated to my staff how ineffectual the process had been and encouraged them to trust me to advance our needs in a smaller group. For me to represent their interests, they had to work together to agree on priorities.

The next step was to clear the backlog of approximately 75 projects in order to select three for IT to work on. When we reconvened with IT leadership, we presented a unified front with a single, small list of projects to be developed. We told them to forget for the moment any project not already in progress, and together we scoped out the next three months of developer time. We assured them that nothing would be added to the list until something came off it in the form of a completed project. Though perhaps skeptical at first, the IT department was relieved and energized by the clear sense of direction and the clear lines of decision making. We have worked with IT in this way for the past few years and have netted great results. We could finally see the most important projects not only being taken on by IT but also being completed. This approach—focusing on a small number of projects—resulted in measurable gains in what once was an unmoving backlog of projects; it also served to improve IT’s reputation. In fact, it even enhanced the school’s reputation with IT by demonstrating the value of decisiveness, collaboration, and leadership.

So how do we scale this up from one school’s experience with an IT department to a multi-client environment with third-party vendors? In some ways, the IT department at my university is like a third-party vendor: It does not report to the school’s leadership, and it has many other clients who need development work. As if competing with other schools and units at the university for IT development were not challenging enough, we were competing among ourselves over the priorities. IT could devote a certain number of resources to our school, and our ineffective approach meant that we made no headway. By aligning our efforts, we were able to maximize the benefit of the resources allocated to us.

I propose that as SIS clients, we can band together to clear the backlog, prioritize the most critical work for the vendor, and then let the vendor demonstrate how it can deliver. This is no easy task, but I believe it is achievable. Let us learn from Occupy Wall Street and from the experience with our IT department that a thousand voices can either amplify a message or drown out a thousand messages. Meeting this challenge requires leadership, collaboration, and trust.

Leadership in this context means dedicating oneself to serving the interests of the group but also being willing
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to devote time and energy to this cause. Serving others will ultimately serve the leader’s own interests, especially once vendors begin to make measurable progress toward directed priorities. At this point, you may be thinking that vendors already have advisory boards made up of clients. Why not call on them to provide this leadership? Perhaps they are the natural group to take this up, but I think another solution exists. Advisory boards serve an important role in vendor-client relations, but their agendas and activity are often framed by the vendors’ interests. Boards are often reactive, responding to vendor initiatives or emerging business conditions. They are not focused singly on improving the product through development work. What we need is someone willing to review and analyze the backlog, to reach out to those who submitted the requests, and to begin to build consensus and momentum. This is where collaboration and trust—both critically important requirements—come in.

The person who takes on this leadership role must be committed to collegially serving the needs of all clients and the vendor by focusing on maximizing impact and identifying achievable goals. Collaboration is key. Even more important than knowing what is feasible technologically is devoting time to communicating with other clients and understanding the importance, impact, and scale of each request. It also means working to persuade fellow clients that the best way to make progress may be to withdraw some requests temporarily. We found at my university that by working together in smaller numbers to clear the backlog, we could get our vendor (i.e., IT) to focus on a small number of achievable goals. It was in a spirit of collaboration that several departments banded together to unify our plan for IT. We recognized that only by working together would we gain the influence necessary to begin directing the work in an effective way. This collaboration required trust in one another’s motives and a commitment to serving the school’s overall interests ahead of any individual department’s.

Trust can be difficult. After all, the current system is essentially a competitive one in which each request competes for attention at the expense of others. We must choose to trust one another. We all are in the business not of trying to maximize market share or create competitive advantage but of serving the needs of teaching and learning at our institutions. We all are committed to using these systems for the benefit of our constituencies, and we need to recognize that our voices can be amplified by speaking together loudly and with a single message. Are you ready to answer this call?

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MIKE BURKE is the Registrar of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University where he oversees course enrollment, student records, alumni credentials, classroom scheduling, the course catalogue, student billing, and other areas. Prior to this role, Mike was the director of admissions and registrar at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. He received a master’s degree in higher education administration from Harvard and a B.A. in political science from Syracuse University. Mike also served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Nkayi, Zimbabwe.
The Student and Exchange Visitor Program and the Academic Community: A Partnership to Protect National Security

By Lou Farrell

The international student community in the United States is vast. On average, one million international students (F and M visa holders) pursue academic or vocational studies in the United States each school term. Nearly 9,000 schools and programs have been certified by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) to enroll international students. Given the vast number of international students studying in the United States each year, schools play an integral role in national security.

SEVP, part of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), ensures that only legitimate international students and exchange visitors gain entry into the United States. The program also certifies educational institutions to enroll international students and monitors them for compliance with federal rules and regulations.

In order to accept international students, all U.S. schools and educational programs must be SEVP certified. Schools must be operational, possess the necessary facilities and instructors, and provide course instruction prior to requesting SEVP certification.

School certification results from a formal adjudication process. The process includes a review of the school’s Form I-17, “Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by Nonimmigrant Student,” application; application fee payment; a site visit; submission of supporting documentation; research; and finally, adjudication. Once certified, schools may issue the Form I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status,” to prospective international students after admitting them for a course of study.

Schools are recertified on a rolling basis. During this process, SEVP reviews the school’s recordkeeping to verify that it is a bona fide school and that it remains compliant with regulations.

SEVP, along with its certified schools, uses the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), a web-based platform, to monitor F and M students in the United States. School officials with responsibility for inputting information into SEVIS help maintain the integrity of SEVIS data. Government agencies and law enforcement officials use SEVIS data when necessary for immigration enforcement efforts as well as criminal investigations.

Since 2003, when SEVIS was introduced, SEVP has made continuous improvements to the system to close security vulnerabilities and make it more user-friendly. In recent and upcoming releases, SEVIS will include name standardization requirements, additional fields for accreditation and recognition information, improved password security, and more.
School officials with questions about SEVP should contact the SEVP Response Center at (703) 603–3400 or sevp@ice.dhs.gov. The SEVIS Help Desk is available to respond to technical, SEVIS-related inquiries; email SEVISHelpdesk@ice.dhs.gov or call (800) 892–4819.

For more information about SEVP, visit Study in the States at studyinthestates.dhs.gov or follow Study in the States on Twitter and Facebook.

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LOU FARRELL is the director of ICE’s Student and Exchange Visitor Program.

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STRATEGIC ENROLLMENT = ADMISSIONS = INTERNATIONAL ED = LEGAL = NEW TECHNOLOGIES = RECRUITMENT = AND MORE...
Higher education institutions of all kinds rely to some degree on direct marketing outreach as part of a comprehensive undergraduate student recruitment program. From the most prestigious and selective universities to community colleges with open admissions, and representing an incredible diversity of missions, sizes, and programs, this effort—known generically as “student search” (originally from the College Board’s Student Search Service) is one of the largest and most expensive annual recruitment activities.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, student search expanded rapidly in popularity, and searches multiplied in size as institutions purchased larger and larger lists of prospective students. The competitive pressures of college rankings, impending demographic changes, “stealth applications,” and a host of other issues impacting college admissions fueled the surge. The compounding scale of these efforts during this period did a great deal to bolster inquiry and applicant pools and, in some cases, to support enrollment growth. However, it did so at a cost measured not merely in dollars.

In exchange for the increase in volume, student search budgets grew disproportionally. Part of the bargain for the boost was an approach that sacrificed quality for quantity, authenticity for the appearance of popularity. Many seasoned professionals found themselves somewhat detached from their own prospect outreach efforts, uneasy about the manner in which their letterhead careened around the country. Given this context, the landscape of student search became a little uncomfortable, unsatisfying, and even unpleasant.

One bright spot in the darkness of the recession and subsequent slow economic recovery, though, has been the imperative to rethink every aspect of what we do and to ensure that each facet is optimally effective, both in producing the right outcomes and in representing the best interests of each institution. In the past few years, a resurgence of the student search philosophy that is at the core of our profession has begun. There is a promising return to the ethos that permeates countless successful admissions and enrollment offices: to share distinctive messages and judiciously steward campus resources. With the return of this ethos, some great news has come to light: the ethical and the optimal approaches are actually one and the same.

An admissions highpoint in the economic downturn of recent years is a burgeoning restoration—a marketing correction.
THE PRICE WE PAID
Recruiting prospective students has always been difficult. It has become even more so as students and families are now flooded with dozens of nearly identical letters and e-mails pitching college after college. Offered a mountain of indistinguishable tips for getting into college, choosing a major, and visiting a campus, it is no wonder that some families—and some professionals—have become jaded by the process.

It’s an open secret that student search is the one component of many recruitment processes that too often escaped the careful eye of consistency under which all other marketing and communications efforts passed. The price we began to pay, in part due to this approach, was a small—and reversible, we hope—erosion of the special place that higher education occupies in the hearts and minds of the American public. People expect a certain amount of integrity in communications, marketing, and student outreach, in particular. To some extent, we risked violating that trust by permitting ourselves to conduct our student search as though it were just another kind of direct mail sale.

Yet recruiting students is not like other direct mail efforts, where all that matters is maximizing the response. Entering a higher education community is a life decision, and the solicitation of interest in a particular college or university ought to reflect the values, the uniqueness, and the voice of the particular institution. For several years now, it’s been clear that the upcoming generation of students—increasingly, the children of Generation X parents—aggressively seeks authenticity and will scour websites and Twitter feeds in order to uncover the “real” story about schools in which they take an interest.

Colleges and universities recognize this and have responded by adding student videos, profiles, and blogs to their websites and de-emphasizing large, glossy viewbooks. The tide is beginning to turn from the old ways of thinking.

INFLECTION POINT
During the decline and bottoming out of the U.S. economy late in 2008, some commentators made dire predictions about higher education in general and enrollment results in particular. They suggested in no uncertain terms that past experiences didn’t matter and that in order to merely survive, colleges and universities’ only options for maintaining enrollments were significant spending and far-flung name buys of cold leads. They posited that staying afloat through the fall 2010 admission cycle and beyond would require dramatically increasing sophomore and junior search efforts. While those arguments were misguided from the beginning, they were also rather quickly proven wrong.

In “The Missing Enrollment Meltdown” (Epstein 2009), I reiterated a point made by way of market analysis in February 2009: The lessons of history make clear that while a terrible recession feels like the end of the world, it isn’t. And for most families, the goal of sending their children to college is far bigger than even the worst recession: it’s a doorway to a lifetime of opportunity. The economic downturn would not and could not destroy higher education enrollment. Yet it would force a redoubling of the ongoing effort in admissions offices to understand recent historical data and make evidence-based recruitment decisions going forward.

In summer 2009, when the terrifying enrollment cycle concluded, there was a particularly interesting inflection point: The majority of institutions reached their first-year enrollment targets, albeit with a great deal more effort and noticeably higher financial aid costs than in prior years. Many enrollment leaders had a surge in confidence—one that only grew in 2010 as another difficult year with similar challenges came and went with more hard-earned enrollment success.

Admissions professionals across the country, though shocked by the events, were buoyed by their ability to endure and achieve even in the most difficult of circumstances. With that assurance, many began to reassert their expertise in all facets of student recruitment. The economic crisis provided a long-awaited impetus for change.

AUTHENTICITY ASCENDS
Much of the frenzy surrounding student search in recent years has stemmed from the skyrocketing intensity of competition among colleges and universities. (Indeed, many love the challenge of our profession and embrace healthy competition.) Ironically, the approach that some had pursued in order to compete was counterproductive over the long term not merely for the marketplace as a whole but also for individual institutions.
For example, a large number of search initiatives had offered students tips for thinking about college, visiting campuses, or choosing majors as well as "quizzes" about their college preferences—that is, they had offered little that had to do with the institution itself. Some even offered baseball hats or flash drives (remember those?) to the first 500 students who sent back their replies. These tactics laid claim to the highest possible "response."

You can guess what continued to happen, year after year: Many students replied not because they were interested in the institution but because of the incentive structure that had been created. Any who have struggled to convert so many thousands of search "responders" into relatively few applicants know this well (never mind trying to complete those applications, admit those students, and make it desirable and affordable for them to enroll).

It took years to realize that we were counting the wrong things and seeing only one part of the cost picture. Yet we feared doing anything differently. Worse, the fear was based on a faulty premise.

So what is happening now? As overall recruitment efforts continue down the path toward providing distinctive, personal glimpses into each institution's unique character (because that is what prospective students actually want), it has become evident that it makes sense and is more consistent for student search to align and even combine with those overall strategies.

Many institutions have started to make their own marketing corrections, debunking the myths that more is always better and that every "response" is a good one. There is a return to evidence-based list purchases, not merely buying up every town where the graduating high school student population is growing. Progressively, enrollment leaders are discovering that more isn't always better—that in fact, more is often less and that sometimes (gasp) less can even be more.

**BIGGER OR BETTER**

In the current enrollment climate, enrollment leaders have to contend with endlessly rising tuition, persistently high nationwide unemployment, and the declining predictability of enrollment yield. These issues, among others, make it ever more complex to communicate with families about the value of higher education. What can result is a perpetual spending cycle.

But when you carefully examine your student search objectives and historical results by analyzing institutional recruitment data alongside directly applicable consumer data, you're apt to see clearly why bigger isn't always better. Consider this: *The authentic approach to student search is actually the most effective and efficient. Rather than always focusing on the most responses, the most beneficial goal is to generate and cultivate as many real responses as possible—that is, those students who engage with and respond to a true and rich representation of the institution.*

Trying to be all things to all people leads to endless softening and overflowing of the inquiry pool—students to call, to send mailings to, and on whom you continue to spend money, even if they had never heard of (let alone been interested in) your institution. This approach isn't merely inefficient; it is unsustainable. That is why welcoming the genuine "no" as warmly as the genuine "yes" is a skill that more and more institutions have begun to realize is in everyone's best interest.

**MISUNDERSTOOD METRICS**

Having worked with every kind of enrollment and student search data you can imagine, I know too well how confusing it can be when statistics are unfamiliar, ill defined, or speciously linked with others. But it is certainly possible to analyze the results from student search efforts in a way that avoids the big mistakes.

For example, if "response rate" is your north star, you have already steered off course. Without a doubt, "response rate" is an important element. But it's equally—if not more—important to understand how many true search-generated inquiries have genuine initial interest and then to take additional steps—including subsequent contacts—toward student search's pay-dirt metric: application submissions. For some institutions, too high a response rate is a sign of a detrimental approach, not of success.

This may come as a shock, but while search can do a great deal for institutions in terms of reaching out to a wide variety of students who might be a good fit, including carefully selected students in different demographic groups or geographic regions, search by itself cannot enroll students.

Strategic list purchases can aid in the identification of good candidates, and powerful messages can spark genuine interest in a college or university. But search is
the trailer, not the movie. It can't replace a great campus visit. It can't replace a phone call with a faculty member. And it's no substitute for a strong financial aid package. It's a jumpstart, not a deal closer. Organized and strategic efforts toward generating and completing applications, optimizing financial aid awards, and engaging students to and through the point of deposit should follow.

That is why the gateway has to provide more than a generic sales pitch, a freebie, or a deadline if it is to serve its best purpose.

MAKE YOUR MARKETING CORRECTION

So here are four suggestions for putting good ideas to work—essential elements of a “new” kind of student search effort:

- **Customization.** Don’t accept templates. Make sure that every aspect of your outreach project—design, messaging, strategy, and audience—is customized. Create search campaigns that are authentic and personalized to the needs and interests of individual students.

- **Collaboration.** Include key internal constituencies. Be sure to work side by side with all the right people, including admissions, marketing, financial aid, and anyone else who needs to provide input or content. It’s worth getting all the material—and all the buy-in.

- **Adaptation.** Be willing to adapt what you’ve done in the past. Be open to trying something new, but be certain to evaluate it carefully. And think carefully before assuming that more names is the answer to an uncertain question.

- **Evaluation.** Establish clear definitions. It’s essential to set tangible goals in order to evaluate the success of your efforts. And determine what behaviors you wish to track—e.g., opening an email message, clicking through, engaging in a personalized microsite, or returning or submitting a form—so you are prepared to monitor how students react to various messages.

WHAT NEXT?

Admissions officers often serve as the public face of colleges and universities. That is not an insignificant role in our culture. Because we recognize and respect it, we know that large-scale direct marketing—like every tactical component of student recruitment—has the potential to work against us if it is misused. It is true that student search hasn’t always been what it should. The admissions profession has paid a price for that in market perception and reaction. We’ve all seen the Twitter photos of students with their giant piles of search mail; too often, they are punctuated by a sarcastic comment.

The good news is that we don’t need to shun the tactic or the tool. We must only reconsider how some have wielded it. Outreach to introduce hundreds of thousands of talented and interesting students around the country to the excitement of higher education at a wealth of colleges and universities is a meaningful opportunity for everyone involved. It can become that again. The rebirth of student search has already begun.

REFERENCES


About the Author

**JONATHAN P. EPSTEIN, M.ED.** is Vice President of Enrollment Strategies at Whiteboard Higher Education.
Many universities throughout the United States and Canada are examining various incentive programs to encourage students to develop habits that will lead to better grades, learning, and, thus, success (especially as measured by retention and graduation). We surveyed the literature in order to facilitate the building of an incentive program and the choosing of specific program activities and requirements by a regional public university. This particular institution sought to jumpstart students who were beginning their freshman year on probation because of their borderline academic skills. The program also would promote academic success by targeting other demographics via incentives and various existing and new programs offered through the university’s math and writing centers.

In an effort to develop robust recommendations, we conducted a literature review of similar programs and various incentives at other universities. Our review of the literature was not exhaustive, but we examined a sufficient variety of programs to make thoughtful and actionable recommendations. We based our recommendations on documented successes as well as our knowledge of our client’s students.

We restricted our literature review to programs at colleges and universities. A number of high school incentive programs have been established and are well documented; Rodriguez-Planas (2012) summarizes results primarily from high schools. In fact, considerable work has been completed on the use of incentives at high schools in primarily urban-poor communities.

We believe that the students targeted at our client’s institution are much more similar to other college and university students than to high school students. Age, the nature of the classes they take, and financial resources are just a few of the characteristics that differentiate high school from college students.

**DISCUSSION OF SEVERAL STUDIES**

The studies we examined are in two groups: programs that do not include support services along with financial incentives (see Table 1) and programs that include financial incentives as well as support services (see Table 2). The programs in both groups have had a generally beneficial impact on grades, credit completion, and graduation rates. A few of these programs are discussed here in more detail because they provide additional insights.

Angrist, Lang, and P. Oreopoulos (2009) tested three different groups of students in the STAR program at a Canadian university, including a group that received financial incentives, a group that received academic support, and a group that received both. They found some
increase in academic success for the group that received financial incentives, but the increase was not statistically significant. The group that realized the greatest gains received both financial incentives and academic support.

Across the studies, while there is evidence that the improvements could have resulted either from alleviating financial hardship or providing incentives, the preponderance of evidence is in support of the latter hypothesis. However, if a program is not designed carefully, then any incentives in fact may be negative. For example, Cornwell, Lee, and Mustard (2005) found that the Georgia HOPE program creates an incentive to students to enroll in fewer credits per semester as part of an effort to maintain grade point averages that ensure the students’ continued receipt of scholarships. They suggest further—but do not present evidence—that students will even choose easier majors in order to maintain higher GPAs. Barrow et al. (2014) conclude that students do not earn more credits in easier courses in order to remain in academic programs, but they do present evidence that students who are eligible for the program are more likely to register for easier classes.

Evidence is mixed as to whether incentive programs are more successful for women than for men. Angrist, Lang, and Oreopoulos (2009) found that women netted most of the positive effects, with a .28 average increase in their GPAs compared to an insignificant .09 average increase for

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**Table 1.**

*Summary Table for Programs Without Additional Campus Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Means Testing</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Assistance Given</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Hope</td>
<td>Cornwell, Lee, and Mustard 2005; Dynarski 2008</td>
<td>No (originally had a high maximum family income but was eliminated in second year of program)</td>
<td>3.0 high school GPA; 3.0 college GPA</td>
<td>Full scholarship (150 credits maximum)</td>
<td>Greater persistence; higher graduation rates; fewer credits taken; more summer classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia PROMISE</td>
<td>Scott-Clayton 2011</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>21 ACT or 1000 SAT; 3.0 high school GPA; 2.75 first-year college GPA; 3.0 college GPA thereafter; 30+credits/year</td>
<td>$2,900/year, maximum of four years</td>
<td>Increased five-year graduation rate; 25% increase in the number of students completing 30 credits in their first year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Calabria Experiment (Italy)</td>
<td>De Paola et al. 2012</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>30 best-performing students (~top 20%)</td>
<td>€700 or €250 reward</td>
<td>Better grades; more credits earned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin Scholars Grant</td>
<td>Goldbrick-Rab et al. 2011</td>
<td>Yes: Pell-eligible</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>$1,750/semester Maximum of $7,500</td>
<td>Small increases in enrollment and in number of credits earned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMART (Ohio)</td>
<td>Evans 2013</td>
<td>Yes: Pell-eligible</td>
<td>3.0 college GPA; STEM or foreign-language major</td>
<td>$4,000/year; juniors and seniors only</td>
<td>No impact on STEM enrollments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Dynarski 2008</td>
<td>Yes: fairly high maximum income levels</td>
<td>2.5 high school GPA; 2.5 college GPA; 24 credits/year</td>
<td>$2,500/year + $500 for GPA of 3.0 or better; four years maximum</td>
<td>Greater persistence; higher graduation rates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The SMART program is national, but Evans (2013) only examines Ohio.*
men in the “combined-effect” group. Conversely, Denny et al. (2014) find no differences by gender.

While most of the programs suggest that the impact of incentive programs is positive, not all of them do. Goldbrick-Rab et al. (2011) suggest that one potential problem is that financial rewards might not provide any marginal addition to students’ aid packages. The effect of other elements of the incentive package might be diminished by a portion (or even the entirety) of any additional financial award. U.S. federal aid policies require that financial aid be reevaluated when scholarship aid is added to an existing package, so adjustments will be a common problem with any marginal financial incentives.

On the basis of the information discussed here and presented in Tables 1 and 2, we offer a number of recommendations with regard to program design and posterior analysis.

**PROGRAM DESIGN**

- Design a program so its effectiveness can be tested. Just because a certain type of program has been successful at other universities does not mean it will be at yours.
- Establish a control group, and keep detailed records. Be aware that ethical issues could arise as a consequence of some students receiving benefits while others do not. The STAR program in Canada did not appear to be concerned about such issues. However, helping some students but not others can be suspect and problematic. Discuss and consider this thoroughly.

  - Be sure that the program provides incentives for the kinds of behaviors that are intended. An incentive could alter a student’s academic and career path even though that is not the goal. The incentives cannot have such a high opportunity cost that a student will study anything “that keeps the money flowing.” Incentives need to be meaningful and perhaps even fun. In short, the incentive program should seek to avoid outcomes such as those fostered by the Georgia HOPE program—that is, appearing to encourage students to make their college studies easier. This could be accomplished by not defining success at such a high threshold. Alternatively, finishing in any field of study may be better than not finishing at all. An institution needs to thoroughly discuss its policy and the full range of possible outcomes.

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**Table 2. Summary Table for Programs With Additional Campus Support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Means Testing</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Assistance Given</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana Opening Doors (community college)</td>
<td>Brock &amp; Richburg-Hayes 2006; Barrow et al. 2014</td>
<td>Yes: Income less than 200% of the poverty level</td>
<td>2.0 GPA; half-time at least; parent of one dependent child</td>
<td>$1,000/semester</td>
<td>Higher full-time enrollment; higher pass rate; more credits completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access Program at University College Dublin (Ireland)</td>
<td>Denny et al. 2014</td>
<td>Yes: Unspecified.</td>
<td>First-generation; from a “disadvantaged” high school</td>
<td>€2,200-3,400/year</td>
<td>Increased graduation rate; higher probability of honors; fewer drop-outs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAR (Canada)</td>
<td>Angrist, Lang, and Oreopoulos 2009</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Four courses/semester; not upper quartile in high school; GPA requirements</td>
<td>$5,000 for 3.0+ or 3.3+ college GPA depending on high school quartile; $1,000 for 2.3+ or 2.6+ college GPA depending on high school quartile</td>
<td>Higher GPAs for groups with both financial aid and support services; little evidence of impact on enrollment in courses on the basis of their difficulty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Numerical program renewal requirements should be neither too high nor too low. The literature supports the idea that many students will just meet the required threshold. Without conducting a specific study of the client university in order to determine the optimal threshold, the literature suggests an overall GPA of 2.75 or 3.0. The right bar for success needs to be determined carefully. In fact, a bar for each semester allowing continuation with or without probation of some sort should be discussed, and a cumulative bar should be determined as well. A 2.75 GPA allows for a less successful semester or two; a minimum 3.0 GPA suggests academic merit. An additional consideration is that a lower GPA is more appropriate for students who begin college having had lower levels of academic achievement in high school. Finally, establishing a lower threshold for academic success may communicate to students that the college environment is tolerant of a certain degree of risk, for example, encouraging exploration and attempts to pursue a more rigorous curriculum. These are not easy decisions.

The incentives need to be available to everyone or to a pre-selected random group; they should not be provided on a first-come, first-served basis. (For any posterior analysis to be valid, a random sample—not a self-selected group—is required.) Otherwise, the program will be subject to intense self-selection biases at least in part because the best and more motivated students will sign up first. Yet those who might benefit the most might not be the most enthusiastic about “yet another program.” (We suspect that many students who are or have been on the academic margins experience program, incentive, and “come on, you can do it” fatigue.) Many students on the margin (data-wise) are there for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with their intellect or their ability to learn.

The program should not be restricted along demographic lines. The evidence on gender differences is mixed, and the two primary studies that address this issue are international. We cannot assume that the program would be more successful with women than men or vice versa. However, demographic differences should be considered in the initial experimental design so that any results can be assessed. To adequately assess incentive programs, they must be offered to all students in order to determine whether the target populations are responding to the incentive or to requirements. A robust outcome assessment may be inhibited by the inability to obtain sufficient variation in entering academic achievement levels. Nevertheless, we suspect that monetary incentives can change participation behaviors across all achievement levels.

Design the program so that any financial incentives do not decrease other aid students receive. Failing to do so will diminish the impact of the money spent and will prove to be nothing more than a budgetary shell game. This may not be possible if cash is used for the incentive, but be sure to calculate incentives on the margin for each specific student.

Combine financial incentives with support services. The results on this design trait appear quite strong. However, no previous studies seem to exist of programs that required the utilization of support programs in order to receive financial incentives. (The only studies we found made support services available but did not require that students utilize them.) The literature suggests that a requirement that students make use of support services in order to receive aid might be quite successful.

Ensure that competent staff who have received extensive training are available to work with students. Consistency is paramount, and those in charge, that is, those helping, need to be clearly and absolutely knowledgeable, not peers helping peers. The quality of mentors can vary widely. Moreover, scheduling can be challenging: Some hours of the day may be quite busy and others quite slow. Students participate when they have free time and when high-quality mentors participate. There may be many other times when a participant may want to seek help but chooses not to, perhaps because the rumor is that the mentor on Tuesday between 3 and 5 p.m. is “no use.” Thus, variation in the quality of support available to students over the course of a day can make any outcome assessment meaningless. If students do not perceive that there is value, then no matter what the incentive, or requirement, or program, they will not participate. Keep mentor quality consistent and high.

We are not saying that peer interaction is not useful; rather, we suggest that anyone hired to help should help immediately, quickly, and well. Study tables need to be structured and scripted and should feel a lot like work,
not “club night.” Programs do not often fail because of design and their potential impact. Rather, they fail in their implementation, day-to-day execution, mid-level management, and rigorous data collection and assessment protocols.

**POSTERIOR-ANALYSIS RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A program’s impacts should be examined thoroughly at multiple points after implementation. A one-year examination will provide some insight into whether the program is effective, and follow-up examinations should be required through students’ graduation. This is a long-term effort. Too often we forget when we are designing programs that the lifecycle for funding and implementation is four to six years. Any worthwhile change requires persistence. Be patient: Do not expect programs to change the world—or students’ lives—overnight.
- Any studies that are conducted should be rigorous. Many of those described above relied on advanced statistical analysis to deal with potential problems, such as self-selection and confounding effects. This review focuses only on those problems that must be addressed during the design step, but they will reappear during the statistical analysis.

**SUMMARY**

We urge you to read all of the literature referenced in this article before beginning to design an incentive project. Encourage your boss’s boss to read some of the literature too. Starting with one or two of the most applicable articles may help you address the problems of short funding cycles and success requirements. As all student success programs become more complex and rely on higher-order statistics to assess outcomes, short-term assessment becomes increasingly meaningless. A long-term assessable plan is necessary.

The complexity of this process requires patience, time, great data collection and experimental design, and outcome assessment. If you are not prepared to (or cannot, for any of a variety of controllable and uncontrollable
reasons) use rigorous statistical protocols, then simplify your strategy and serve as many students as possible with a broader, far less targeted program or set of programs. It is always much more difficult to work on the margins than in the middle.

Remember that if you cannot or do not measure it, you cannot manage it. Collect, assess, and follow the path provided by the data and your intuition. Poor statistics lend themselves to abuse and blunder—never mind the inefficient use of resources.

We hope this article provides you with a starting point for the development, or simply an examination of, paid student success incentive programs. Good luck!

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About the Authors

MICHAEL C. DAVIS, PH.D., is Associate Professor in the Department of Economics at the Missouri University of Science and Technology. He received his Ph.D. in economics from the University of California, San Diego. Davis has studied and modeled numerous data sets, being very careful to build models based on behaviors rather than on data mining, fitting, and simple regression. In addition to his Ph.D., Davis received an M.A. in economics from UCSD in 1999 and a B.S. in mathematics from the College of William and Mary in 1995.

KARL E. BURGHER, PH.D., P.E., is a Principal in Sunshine Valley Communications, a non-profit specializing in management consulting and economic development. In his former position as chief strategy officer and professor at Indiana State University (ISU), he managed the start and implementation of ISU’s 2009 strategic plan, overseeing 45 teams and more than 300 specifically defined projects in a PM-like matrix fashion. Burgher learned PM techniques while working for ten years as an explosives engineer in the construction industry and as a contractor for the U.S. Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency. He has managed many federal research and education projects as a center director and vice president of research. Burgher earned a B.S. and an M.S. in mining engineering from Michigan Technological University and a B.S. in economics and a Ph.D. in mining engineering from the former University of Missouri-Rolla (now Missouri University of Science and Technology).

Drs. Davis and Burgher have been using structural equation techniques to model a wide variety of questions since 2003, when Burgher was Interim Chair of his Department of Economics. Their work spans research value assessment, environmental design and innovative technology assessment, and higher education management, including tuition discounting and a wide variety of student success issues.
In *Degrees of Inequality*, Suzanne Mettler posits that U.S. public policies regarding higher education have veered off course. Specifically, Mettler states, “Over the past 30 years, our system of higher education has gone from facilitating upward mobility to exacerbating social inequality” (p. 5). Although previous policies cleared pathways for an increasingly diverse student body (e.g., the G.I. Bill, Pell Grants, Title IX), they have failed to keep pace with today’s economic realities.

Mettler identifies three primary factors that have contributed to this growing problem: (1) Pell grants (federal financial aid awards) have failed to keep pace as the cost of tuition has escalated; (2) state governments have reduced financial support for higher education even as institutions’ operating costs have increased; and (3) the for-profit education sector has captured a significant portion of federal student aid funds. Mettler asserts, “These three sets of policy developments, in combination, have transformed the U.S. system of education from one that provides access and opportunity to one that widens economic inequality and fosters social division” (p. 12).

At present, middle- to low-income students are borrowing more in student loans and increasingly are attending institutions which “invest far less in students and typically leave them heavily in debt” (p. 13). In addition, students are working longer hours in order to pay for school and thus are increasing their time to degree and diminishing their ability to finish their education. According to Derek Bok (2013), “A significant fraction of the students who drop out prior to completion eventually default on repaying the federally guaranteed loans they have accumulated in the course of their unsuccessful effort to earn a degree” (p. 102). Consistent with findings by Armstrong and Hamilton (2013), Mettler notes that the policies originally established to help students gain access to college now amplify financial disparity and reinforce class differences.

**Increasing Inequality**

Despite the fact that students are entering college in greater numbers than in years past, graduation rates remain significantly lower for students on the bottom rung of the economic ladder than for their more affluent peers. Further, students with greater economic means overwhelmingly attend private, nonprofit institutions and flagship public institutions whereas students of lower socioeconomic status typically attend comprehensive universities, community colleges, and for-profit institutions.
This distinction is important. Mettler notes, “Today, it matters increasingly not only whether you go to college, but also what type of college you attend” (p. 8).

Private, nonprofit institutions and flagship public universities are heavily subsidized by alumni support, interest from endowments, and research dollars and therefore provide students with greater levels of financial support and institutional resources. On the other hand, colleges and universities that are subjected to dwindling state allocations and that are focused on bottom-line results offer far less to students and families, thereby further widening the disparity among social classes. Mettler asserts, “[F]or students at the bottom half of the [income] spectrum, their greatest obstacle to completing a four-year degree is not lack of ability or motivation, but insufficient financial support” (p. 28).

Driving Forces Behind Policy Deterioration

Since the mid-1940s, higher education policies in the United States have been designed to facilitate access by students throughout the economic spectrum. Despite differences of opinion in Congress, these policies have been largely bipartisan. However, two recent trends in Congress have derailed the policymaking process: political polarization and the rise of special interest groups.

Political Polarization. In 1980, the United States ushered in a new era of political and fiscal conservatism as well as a heightened sense of political polarization. According to Mettler, “Reagan’s election to the presidency signaled the ascendance of a new public philosophy that espoused more limited government and unfettered markets” (p. 65). In 1981, Reagan proposed—and Congress passed—substantial cuts in federal financial aid.

From a historical perspective, the federal government first introduced “basic grants” (later named Pell grants) to enable low-income students to attend college; these grants covered not only the cost of tuition but also a portion of room and board. Over time, however, Pell grants failed to keep pace with rising costs; one consequence was a dramatic increase in the use of student loans to meet college costs.

Under the financially austere Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations, Republican lawmakers attempted to scale back Pell grant funding. Democrats, on the other hand, sought to make Pell grants an entitlement, like Social Security, and to tie rates to the Consumer Price Index so they would increase automatically with inflation. However, instead of tackling the more difficult issues of policy reform, lawmakers “found common ground on the expansion of student loans because that only required them to lift borrowing limits and waive restrictions on who could borrow” (p. 67). As the author notes, this “path of least resistance” represented a dramatic change in U.S. higher education policy and effectively shifted the financial burden away from the federal government and toward students and their families. Further, it resulted in greater divisiveness, policy neglect, and the rise of special interest groups.

Special Interest Groups. By the early 1990s, banks began to wield significant control over public policies regarding higher education financing, including decimating legislation to provide direct lending to colleges and universities through the U.S. Treasury. At the same time, GOP leaders reversed their previous stance and “aggressively cultivated as political allies interest groups whom they defend and whose financial assistance they seek” (p. 75). According to Mettler, the only bipartisan legislation to pass through a deeply divided Congress between 1995 and 2008 was that which represented moneyed interests.

Examples of protected interests include (a) the stipulation in the 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that individuals who declare bankruptcy can no longer discharge their student loan debt (p. 77); (b) the college tuition tax credit, which allows families to deduct annually from their taxes a portion of the cost of college per eligible student (p. 80); and (c) § 529 college savings plans, which are not subject to income tax. Mettler states, “These new innovations in student aid policy not only fail to expand access to higher education, but they shower extra benefits on the affluent” (p. 82).

As recently as June 2014, President Obama announced plans to expand a program called Pay as You Earn, which would limit borrowers’ monthly debt payments to 10 percent of their discretionary income and forgive loans after 20 years (ten years if the individual works in a public service position). Even though the program has been around since 2012, Kamenset (2014) notes that a limited number of borrowers have heard of it; those who are familiar with it have “run into obstacles and obfuscation from the companies that service their loans” (para. 7). Kamenset continues, “[I]t’s not in their [lenders’] short-term business interests to lower monthly payments. Even if borrowers...
fall behind on those payments—or go into default—servicers still get paid handsomely” (para. 9) because these loans are guaranteed by the U.S. government. The circumstances surrounding this program continue the legacy of a dysfunctional and highly polarized government that favors lenders over students.

**For-Profit Institutions**

One of the most disconcerting trends in higher education has been the rapid expansion of the for-profit sector, which tends to operate based on the volume of students rather than the quality of education. According to Mettler, “For-profit institutions typically charge much higher tuition than the cost of comparable programs at public sector colleges, vastly surpassing what students can repay after acquiring their degree” (p. 35). Further, independent investigators have repeatedly shown that for-profit institutions have used deceptive practices to misrepresent their program offerings and promises for future employment. As a result, students frequently graduate from for-profit institutions with limited job prospects and enormous debt, which makes them “even more unequal than before” (p. 38).

The author notes that in the mid-1990s, at the height of political polarization and the rise of special interest groups, for-profit institutions dominated the political landscape and reaped enormous profits through federal financial aid. Republicans supported for-profit higher education institutions because they viewed them as businesses that should be protected. Meanwhile, Democrats saw for-profit institutions as points of access for lower-income students. Regardless of political philosophy, “for-profits proved masterful at winning support on both sides of the aisle” by distributing generous campaign contributions to members of both parties (p. 103) and effectively protected their self-interests through the expansion and defense of favorable education policies.

**Competing Interests**

Further exacerbating disparities among students, state financial support for nonprofit colleges and universities has decreased steadily since the 1980s as a result of competing priorities that involve mandatory state spending on such initiatives as Medicaid, K–12 education, and corrections. According to Mettler, “States are obligated by law to provide funds to cover costs”; but because higher education is the single largest discretionary item in state budgets, it is also the most vulnerable to budget cuts (p. 126). A limited number of states have raised taxes in order to pay for all of their priority areas, but the majority of state lawmakers are “more willing to force tuition increases on students in public universities than [to] raise taxes on those with higher incomes” (p. 128). As a result, higher education is increasingly limited to those who can afford its rising costs.

**Driving Forces Behind Policy Improvement**

In the 1980s and 1990s, higher education policies became entrenched in political gridlock, and bank-based lending ran amok. Under tremendous political pressure, and out of step with his own political party, President George W. Bush signed into law the College Cost Containment and Access Act in 2007; the law reduced lending subsidies and used savings to increase student financial aid.

Between 2007 and 2010, President Obama and Congress enacted the most sweeping higher education policy reforms in two decades. Mettler identifies the following particular accomplishments:

- Adoption of the generous and inclusive Post-9/11 G.I. Bill;
- Increases in Pell grants and a formula to ensure that the benefits would not lag behind as they had in the past;
- Replacement of bank-based lending with direct lending;
- Simplification of the financial aid application process; and
- Investments in community colleges (p. 158).

Yet the primary driving force behind these policy reforms was not cross-party collaboration. Rather, it was the financial crisis of 2008 that exposed egregious excesses in the student aid system and “made it apparent even to the system’s staunchest allies that it no longer remained feasible” (p. 159).

Despite these significant legislative actions, political polarization and partisan bickering led to policy reforms that were less effective than they could have been. Without the benefit of a robust, two-party debate, the policies that were implemented had some unintended consequences, including, for example, the rapid increase in Pell grant money that was funneled directly into the for-profit sector (p. 160). The author suggests that the for-profit industry,
in particular, has used its resources strategically to build a strong base of partisan support that has allowed it to prosper even during periods of economic decline (p. 175).

Summary

*Degrees of Inequality* is a well-written and insightful account of the policies that have shaped financial aid programs supporting U.S. higher education over the past two centuries. Through her research, Mettler demonstrates how politics and education have intersected and the ways in which special interest groups, such as lenders and for-profit institutions, have influenced policies to benefit their bottom line—all at the expense of students and taxpayers. *Degrees of Inequality* should have broad appeal to a wide audience of readers, especially those interested in policy reform and the future of higher education in the United States.

Mettler’s research is well documented, and the text is organized in a way that conveys to the reader both the context of previous policy decisions as well as the political environments in which they were made. The author does an admirable job of depicting Democrats and Republicans as both advocates and opponents of higher education reform at various points in history and offers a unique perspective regarding the impact of current policies on access and affordability.

Mettler concludes with a persuasive call to action regarding how the United States can effectively expand opportunities for low- to middle-income Americans. She recommends that we redirect resources and invest in institutions and policies that promise to be most effective. Mettler provides the following set of guiding principles to begin the process: (1) eliminate ineffective forms of student aid in order to make better use of available resources, (2) terminate aid to institutions that serve students poorly, and (3) revitalize the historic partnership among the federal government, state governments, and private nonprofit institutions (p. 193). Mettler notes, however, that significant changes can occur only if federal lawmakers, states, and the private sector act as responsible partners in higher education financing and restrain for-profit institutions from abusing the system (p. 196).

The U.S. higher education system has long held prominence on the world stage. Nevertheless, if the system is to remain viable, the United States must make the necessary policy adjustments to ensure that financial support is available to all U.S. students so they can successfully complete the degrees they seek.

**REFERENCES**


**About the Author**

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**HOW TO GET IN, GET OUT, AND GET A JOB: 100 QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT COLLEGE**


Reviewed by Matthew Fifolt, PhD

In How to Get In, Get Out, and Get a Job, Marguerite Dennis examines obstacles that students and parents frequently encounter in navigating the treacherous and often unfamiliar terrain of college admission and enrollment. Drawing upon years of professional experience as an admissions and financial aid director, as well as personal experiences as a parent, Dennis utilizes a simple, easy-to-follow template to share insights regarding college admission and enrollment processes. Specifically, she poses 100 questions that students and parents may want to ask about college. Dennis divides these questions into three separate stages: (a) pre-application, (b) post-acceptance, and (c) post-graduation.

Dennis identifies the following five key assumptions to support her claims throughout the book:

- There is a college or university for every student who wants to enroll.
- There is a college or university that you can afford to attend.
- You can graduate in four years.
- You can graduate with manageable debt.
- You can position yourself in college to get a job after graduation (pp. 3–4).
Further, she asserts that the processes of college admission, enrollment, and graduation are not easy; therefore, students must be prepared to invest the time and energy needed to thoroughly investigate colleges and universities and be open to the process of self-discovery.

Dennis highlights a number of interesting and salient points for students and parents to consider during the college search process. For example, she notes that average class size is typically an average of class sizes over four years of college. For a truer measure of class size, students should ask admissions representatives and college officials about the average class size of all first-year courses. This is a critical distinction that prospective students and parents might otherwise overlook.

Although class size is certainly an important consideration, Chambliss and Takacs (2014) state, “The most reliable educational tool isn’t really small classes; it’s good classes—interesting, motivating, rigorous—that lots of students are actually enrolled in” (p. 77). Therefore, in addition to determining class size, Dennis recommends that students sit in on at least one first-year course and one advanced course at each college they are considering in order to get a firsthand look at the level of engagement between faculty members and students.

Dennis utilizes a globe icon throughout the book to denote information that may be especially relevant to international students and their parents. Considering the globalization of higher education as well as the incentive for colleges and universities to recruit international students in order to reap the benefit of their non-exempt tuition dollars, it is imperative that this population of students have as much information as possible to make informed decisions (Lewin 2012). Further, Dennis advises all students (i.e., domestic and international) to identify the college and university resources available to support their success, such as career counseling, academic advising, international student services, and more.

With regard to college affordability, Dennis recommends that college applicants work with a financial aid representative prior to the application process in order to determine award eligibility. She discourages students from eliminating schools solely on the basis of cost. Dennis writes, “Remember that the published tuition is not what the majority of families pay.... If you do your homework, you may discover that you can afford a school that once seemed unaffordable” (p. 33). This may be especially true of certain types of institutions (e.g., private, nonprofit, and flagship public institutions) that are heavily subsidized through alumni support, interest from endowments, and research dollars (Mettler 2014).

Dennis addresses practical questions related to annual tuition increases, loan forgiveness options, and the ratio of grants and loans beyond the first year of a student's enrollment. She notes that students and parents should spend time calculating the costs of college and determining what amount of student and family debt they can reasonably afford. Given increasing default rates on student loans and the long-term consequences of loan repayment, answers to these questions seem particularly relevant at the earliest stage in the college admission process (Selingo 2013). The depth of the author’s responses demonstrates her expertise in the areas of admissions and financial aid.

In addition to key concepts related to the pre-enrollment stage, Dennis explores topics relevant to currently enrolled college students as well as to those who either have graduated or soon will graduate from college. Topics are broad in scope, and Dennis offers real-world answers to questions that students and parents frequently ask about college life. The following is a sampling of questions and responses from the latter sections of the book as well as details and clarifications that may be of interest:

**Academic Major.** Dennis poses the following question on behalf of prospective students: “What are the most popular majors?” While she appropriately directs students to the admissions office to learn more about an institution's exceptional programs, students and parents should also ask about the graduation and placement rates of current students in academic programs of interest. (Dennis discusses these topics further in a separate question later in the text.)

**Navigating the System.** The author wisely encourages students and parents to develop a list of key contacts (e.g., financial aid office, first-year advisor) at each institution in which they are interested; in addition, she writes, “You should probably have the name and contact information for the school’s president just in case you need it” (p. 72). In reality, there should never be an occasion in which students and parents need to call the president’s office. Institutional reporting structures exist so concerns can be addressed at the point of contact. Therefore, students and parents
should identify the most appropriate person(s) to handle academic and non-academic concerns and work their way up the chain of command as necessary and appropriate.

Cooperative Education. Contrary to her proposition that students should graduate in four years, Dennis recommends that students seek out opportunities to participate in a cooperative education program as a cost-saving measure. Traditionally, students who participate in cooperative education alternate semesters of work and school and plan to graduate in five years instead of four (Weston 1986). Despite the delay in graduation, cooperative education yields numerous benefits, including experience in the field, a salary and benefits, and job prospects prior to graduation. Thus, the long-term benefits frequently outweigh the short-term costs.

Student Experience. In response to the question “Will I have a good time?” Dennis references “party schools” and encourages students to consider institutions’ alcohol, drug, and smoking policies with their crime rates. While party schools can be problematic for students (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013), they do not have to define a student’s college experience.

In a separate question, Dennis describes opportunities for students to get involved on campus. Her response to this later question constitutes a more positive approach to addressing the question of whether a student will have a good time in college.

Summary
Helping students transition successfully to college is an important topic—one that deserves care and attention. For that reason, How to Get In, Get Out, and Get a Job should be considered a preface to a much larger conversation about higher education for prospective students and parents. Given that today’s students are tech savvy and prefer to find information online, it may be worthwhile for them to use the headings and key words in this book to conduct their own web searches (Black 2010, Spanier 2010). Dennis provides a comprehensive chart at the end of the book that links all 100 questions with topics and answers, but the lack of online references might deter some readers.

How to Get In, Get Out, and Get a Job is a quick and easy read for individuals seeking practical advice about college admission, enrollment, and graduation. While readers would be well-served to seek additional information and alternative perspectives about the college experience, How to Get In, Get Out, and Get a Job may be a reasonable starting point for important discussions about college at the pre-application, post-acceptance, and post-graduation stages.

References

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TRANSFORMING STUDENTS: FULFILLING THE PROMISE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

JOHANSSON, C., AND FELTEN, P. 2014. BALTIMORE: JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS. 114 PP.
 Reviewed by Matthew Fifolt, Ph.D.

In Transforming Students, Johansson and Felten describe the phenomenon of transformative learning as “preparing students to navigate our complex and rapidly evolving world” (p. 2). To affect transformative learning in higher education, the authors suggest that college and university faculty, staff, and administrators should create situations in which students are compelled to examine their assumptions and reconcile their actions and beliefs with an emerging sense of self. Even as postsecondary education faces radical changes (e.g., demands for accountability, shifting student demographics, emerging technologies), Johansson and Felten argue that the primary mission of undergraduate education remains unchanged: to foster student learning in deep and meaningful ways.
The authors offer compelling evidence that today’s students need to develop broad skill sets in order to live and work effectively in a diverse society and to navigate a complex world filled with competing priorities. Transformative learning experiences are designed to prepare students to be reflective, resilient, and innovative in their thinking—and, therefore, proficient in assessing situations and making sense of the world. In short, the authors write:

To fulfill the promise of undergraduate education, colleges and universities need to help students become aware of the liminal nature of their position, to become competent, if not comfortable, while balancing in the space between their former and future selves. (p. 12)

For this investigation, the authors interview “scores” of students, faculty, staff, and alumni in an effort to explore the principles of transformative learning (Mezirow 1991) in the context of the undergraduate experiences of traditional-aged college students attending Elon University, a private, residential institution in North Carolina. They note that transformative learning begins with a disruption of a previous way of looking at the world that is followed by reflective analysis of one’s underlying assumptions; verification and action based on these new understandings; and integration of these new ways of being into everyday life (p. 3). Consistent with the findings of Chambliss and Takacs (2014), Johansson and Felten demonstrate that curricular and co-curricular activities can provide students with “multiple opportunities to act on their own values and test their commitments in complex situations” (p. 2).

The authors portray the transformative learning process as one that is unique to each individual student. Transformative learning helps students build an identity rooted in their individual sense of purpose rather than on unexamined assumptions. The goal of transformative learning is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and commitments—as well as a sense of agency and urgency—to critically examine closely held values, assumptions, and beliefs (p. 6, 39).
High-Impact Practices

The authors state, “We cannot plan transformation. But we can plan for transformation by creating an environment that is conducive to it” (p. 21). Specifically, they advocate for opportunities that (1) permeate all aspects of college life, (2) occur throughout the college experience, and (3) challenge students to examine their closely held convictions with an open mind. To ensure that transformative learning opportunities are authentic, intentional, and guided, Johansson and Felten recommend that these activities be designed to reflect high-impact practices, which they define as practices that require significant commitments of time and substantive interactions with faculty members and peers and that provide students with frequent feedback on their learning. Kuh (2008) adds that high-impact practices should help students make meaningful connections between personal and academic experiences in a variety of contexts.

A Safe Haven

Johansson and Felten suggest that true transformation is neither easy nor comfortable. This is consistent with the writings of Erikson (1968), who proposed that individuals come to understand themselves through a series of crises and resolutions. According to Johansson and Felton, it is the job of faculty and staff members to “help students experience the appropriate amount of challenge at the appropriate time...stretching the student into discomfort without tearing him [or her] apart” (p. 21). Further, students will be more inclined to move outside of their comfort zones if they feel they are in a safe place where personal growth is nurtured and supported. Paradoxically, then, the stability of the learning environment affords students a sense of safety even as they enter into a state of instability in questioning their previously unexamined assumptions and beliefs. The authors describe this stability, built into the higher education learning environment, as essential to the transformative learning process (p. 40).

Failure is an Option. Johansson and Felten suggest that safe learning environments allow students to try new things, fail, and recover without losing status. Similarly, Chambliss and Takacs (2014) note that students achieve self-efficacy by engaging in new experiences within the relatively low-risk setting of college. Johansson and Felten write, “The art of contextualizing failure is redefining success as a measure of internal growth rather than as simply external awards and achievements” (p. 32). That is, in order for failure to be productive, faculty and staff must help students recognize and respond to new and challenging learning situations.

Preparing for Change. The authors identify study abroad as a particularly robust transformative learning experience that is frequently cited in the literature. They note, however, that the outcomes of study abroad “are not uniformly as powerful as individual stories might suggest” (p. 51). Without adequate preparation for the experience of being immersed in a different culture, study abroad participants may not fully understand or appreciate the implications of the experience. Therefore, to provide students with the “intellectual scaffolding” needed to process this experience, Elon University requires students to complete a one-credit preparatory course that addresses the academic and emotional aspects of studying abroad and thereby primes them for “ongoing reflection and comparative thinking” (p. 52).

Critical Reflection

According to Johansson and Felten, educators cannot assume that transformative learning will occur if students simply participate in a given experience. In order for transformation to take root, students must process the experience through critical reflection. The authors write, “In transformation, the process is inextricable from the product, and going deep makes going forward perhaps a little less rapid” (p. 58).

The authors describe critical reflection as intentionally structured opportunities for students to go beneath the surface and mine their deeply held assumptions and beliefs. They suggest that all students can develop these skills given instruction and encouragement to do so. Critical reflection can occur in a variety of contexts and settings and typically manifests itself in dialogue that is either external (e.g., questioning, receiving feedback) or internal (e.g., journaling, meditation, quiet reflection). Ultimately, the goal of critical reflection is to help students gain a new and richer understanding of their internal selves as well as of their selves in relation to others.

Commitment to Action. In addition to developing critical habits of mind, reflective activities should lead students “to take action in response to a new understanding or a new commitment” (p. 64). That is, faculty and staff can
help students translate experiences and insights into purposeful and sustained change through specific and guided actions. Johansson and Felten note, “The institution that creates challenging and inspiring experiences for its students must also make a place for ‘changed’ students to re-engage, to plug back in, and to move forward” (p. 75).

Relational Learning

On the basis of their interviews with undergraduate students at Elon University, Johansson and Felten report that relationships are the primary contributors to student growth. The authors suggest that relationships among peers as well as between students and faculty can result in new discoveries of self. Johansson and Felten state that the interplay between individual growth and social interactions fosters the most positive change among students. Chambliss and Takacs (2014) also note that academic learning can only begin in earnest once students have established interpersonal relationships and integrated into the college community.

Educational Environment

One of the obstacles to transformative learning in higher education is the professor-driven, “teaching as telling” style of instruction. In a lecture-based framework, students expect faculty members to “profess” their knowledge while they (students) remain passive recipients of collective wisdom (Cox 2009). Conversely, Johansson and Felten recommend that pedagogy shift in such a way that students become active participants in their own learning and recognize their unique contributions to the larger community of scholars. The authors identify the following practical steps that faculty and administrators can take to make classroom and out-of-class experiences more transformative:

- Expose students to situations and conditions that disrupt their current worldviews.
- Guide students with deep and provocative questions.
- Provide candid feedback and opportunities for shared dialogue.
- Nurture the development of skills and confidence consistent with students’ newly acquired knowledge.
- Create opportunities for students to engage in problem-solving activities and to observe problem-solving among their peers.

Johansson and Felten conclude, “A university cannot compel or guarantee transformative learning for its students or for its faculty and staff. But leaders in higher education can provide a fertile environment for meaningful transformation” (p. 102). Over time, the institution develops a social norm of transformative learning, and building momentum in that direction becomes a “self-perpetuating force” (p. 94).

Summary

Transforming Students is a well-written and well-organized account of how one institution has defined its organizational culture on the basis of the principles of transformative learning. In addition to describing the ethos of Elon University, Johansson and Felten provide examples of how a number of institutions have incorporated the best practices of transformative learning as part of their efforts to promote student growth and development. The authors frame their discussion with relevant studies based on engagement theory and experiential education. This book is well-suited for college and university administrators who aspire to challenge the status quo as well as for faculty and staff members who are interested in structuring curricular and co-curricular activities in such a way as to promote reflection and dialogue both inside and outside the classroom.

One of the potential challenges of designing transformative experiences is that changes among individual students may not be evident for years to come. While colleges and universities excel at counting the numbers of engagement activities they offer, they are frequently less prepared to assess the real and long-term outcomes of such experiences. Cox (2009) suggests that to truly address student learning, educators must adopt a more sophisticated vision that engages students and addresses academic content as well as self-knowledge. This approach, however, would represent a radical shift in how the majority of colleges and universities measure success.

As noted above, the focus of this book is the transformative learning experiences of traditional-aged undergraduate students on a residential campus. Although the authors suggest that the principles of transformative learning are “undoubtedly relevant” to other settings and populations (e.g., older students, non-residential settings, online learning), they provide little evidence to support this claim.
Further, given that the majority of undergraduate students in the United States do not live on campus (National Survey of Student Engagement 2013), the authors would be well-advised to invite fellow researchers to test these assumptions with a more diverse student population.

Finally, the Elon University community (students, staff, faculty, administrators) appears to have fully embraced the concept of transformative learning and to have developed the infrastructure to support it. For example, all Elon students are required to complete an experiential learning requirement that the authors describe as a combination of mentored activities including leadership, study abroad, undergraduate research, service-learning, and internships. As such, Elon University has intentionally designed an environment in which transformative learning is normative. While the authors reference conversations regarding “old Elon” and “new Elon,” additional details about how this transition occurred may have strengthened an otherwise compelling narrative.

References

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GENERATION ON A TIGHTROPE:
A PORTRAIT OF TODAY’S COLLEGE STUDENT

Reviewed by Matthew Fifolt, Ph.D.

In Generation on a Tightrope, authors Levine and Dean describe the current cohort of students—namely, U.S. undergraduates enrolled in college between the years 2006 and 2011—as the first generation that was born into the “global, digital, and information economy” but one that must navigate a world filled with the structures and systems of its “analog, national, and industrial” predecessors (p.xv). The authors note that these students are the products as well as the builders of the third great revolution in human history: the postmodern and transformative equivalent of the agricultural and industrial revolutions. Despite this new reality, the authors state, “Higher education lags far behind its students technologically and pedagogically and must transform itself if it is to educate current undergraduates for the world in which they live” (p.xii).

While this current generation of students shares a significant number of attributes with previous generations (e.g., optimism about their personal futures, pessimism about the nation’s future, disenchantment with politics and government), it differs from previous generations in that its members are adept at functioning in a world filled with unrelenting and profound change. Levine and Dean assert that in order to remain relevant, colleges and universities must provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be competitive in the 21st century—specifically, the capacities to think critically, maximize creativity, and engage in continual learning.

Data for this investigation were gathered through multiple channels, including nationally distributed surveys of undergraduate students and student affairs administrators, focus groups of students, and purposeful site visits of selected two- and four-year college and university campuses. Based on the findings of their research, the authors chronicle the prevailing attitudes, values, and experiences of students between the years 2006 and 2011 and the significant world events that have shaped their generation.

Technology

According to Levine and Dean, digital technology is the single greatest influence on the lives of these students. With respect to education, digital technology represents a shift in mindset—from static pedagogy based on fixed schedules and permanent locations (i.e., traditional university approaches) to dynamic learning that is available on demand and in any setting. The authors regard the advent of digital technology as the phenomenon that will have the most significant impact on higher education.
The authors describe the relationship of the current generation of students with college as "much like the relationships they have with all of the other service providers in their lives" (p. 9): They seek convenience, service, quality, and lower prices and are not afraid to take their business elsewhere if they perceive the alternative to be better. Notably, as many as one in three college students now transfers from one college to another before earning a degree; approximately one-quarter of students transfer more than once (Selingo 2013).

According to the Undergraduate Survey (2009), today's students are increasingly interested in greater use of technology in the classroom (78%), blended instruction (52%), and course offerings that are completely online (33%) (p. 47). Further, the survey revealed that students' preferences for online and hybrid courses and colleges and universities' efforts to provide such options are consistent with the observation that a pedagogical shift in educational platforms is not a question of if but rather when (Selingo 2013).

Despite the fact that a majority of students perceived increased use of technology in the classroom as an enhancement to the educational process, the authors also identify numerous drawbacks to the increased use of personal technologies by today's college students. For example, student affairs administrators reported increases in the number of incidents of plagiarism as well as inappropriate or disruptive technology-related behaviors in the classroom (e.g., texting, vibrating or ringing cell phones, instant messaging). Administrators also asserted that the biggest difference between current students and previous generations is that they "truly do not know the rules by which adults are expected to live their lives and by which their colleges work" (p. 52).

Social Media. The authors suggest that social media sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn have encouraged students to build their own "tribes" of friends with whom they communicate quickly and from anywhere. Consequently, the more connected students are to their tribes, the less interested they seem to be in developing relationships on campus. Ironically, the more proficient students become at interacting through the use of technology, the less proficient they seem to be at interacting face to face. In addition, today's students do not seem to recognize the boundaries associated with social media. The authors describe this as students' naïve belief that "communication within the tribe stays within the tribe" (76–7).

Alcohol, Drugs, and Sex
The authors report alarming statistics from the Undergraduate Survey (2009) regarding students' use of alcohol and drugs as well as their sexual behaviors and practices. Levine and Dean note that college administrators expressed concern with both the frequency of students' alcohol consumption as well as the quantity of alcohol they consumed in a single sitting. Discussions with students and administrators suggested an escalation of binge drinking among college students. In fact, of the college seniors who were surveyed, "more than one-quarter of them report(ed) they drank alcohol heavily with the goal of passing out (29%)" (p. 59).

Student affairs administrators also identified an increase in prescription drug abuse and attributed this to the reality that more students have diagnoses that require prescription medications. Consequently, the variety and availability of prescription drugs is greater than ever before. Finally, the authors describe this generation of students as sexually active, sexually explicit, and "more interested in (casual) encounters than continuing relationships" (p. 67). Students themselves reported that "hook-ups" have largely replaced traditional dating on college campuses.

Parents
According to the authors, students now identify and claim parents as important members of their tribes. In fact, “[B]etween 2001 and 2008, three-quarters of all colleges and universities surveyed reported increases in the frequency of parental involvement and intervention” (p. 80). Many of these activities were based on daily contact with students and were facilitated, in part, by access to students through multiple forms of digital technology, including e-mail, text, social media. Furthermore, students regularly asked their parents for advice about courses, assignments, and majors and more frequently asked their parents to intervene on their behalf with college professors and administrators. Levine and Dean suggest that these students have been "protected" their whole lives and thus have not developed the skills necessary to manage their own problems. Students continue to rely on their parents to help resolve challenges when they arise.
Significant Events and Priorities
Unlike previous generations, the cohort of students enrolled between 2006 and 2011 was in agreement about the key events that had shaped their lives: digital technology, the poor economy, the election of Barack Obama to the presidency, and the events of September 11, 2001. According to the authors, “The only difference was the order in which they (students) cited these events” (p. 108). Levine and Dean also note that the student cohort that is currently enrolled in higher education is the most diverse of any generation, and topics that once were polarizing on college campuses have largely given way to issues that “cross racial, ethnic, and gender boundaries” (p. 114). For example, today’s students have progressively shifted their attention away from multicultural concerns rooted in race and toward those related to issues of gay rights and sexual orientation.

One of the greatest concerns expressed by the current generation of college students was the economy. For a large number of students, the international economic recession had direct consequences for “whether, where, and how students attend college” (p. 25). Students’ families experienced job loss, foreclosures, and bankruptcies that required many students to work more, live at home, take fewer credit hours, or drop out of college. Consequently, student affairs administrators noted dramatic increases in student requests for financial assistance as well as an increased use of psychological counseling services in order to help them deal with high levels of stress and anxiety.

Student respondents frequently expressed contradictory and even conflicting perspectives on their lives and futures. Students tended to be motivated by material wealth, with 83 percent indicating that “it is very important to them to become very well off financially” (p. 149). And while students recognized that there are significant challenges in the current job market, they overwhelmingly expressed the belief that they could succeed if they tried hard enough. In addition, students cited their families and support from their tribes as keys to success. According to Levine and Dean, it is not yet clear whether this unbridled sense of optimism will prove over the long run to be an asset or a liability.

Implications
In Generation on a Tightrope, Levine and Dean suggest that colleges and students are at a generational crossroads. Higher education still operates under a provider-driven model in which the faculty determines the curriculum, the content, the instructional methods, the study materials, and class schedules. Today’s students, however, tend to be consumer-driven. They prefer to choose their own instructional methods, the materials they use to support their learning, and the schedule that best fits their needs. Levine and Dean confirm that the purposes of higher education have not changed, but they also recognize that “the digital revolution is not a passing fad, and students are not going to change, so their colleges must” (p. 168).

In order to realign the interests of students and institutions, Levine and Dean base the following five education reforms on the realities of the 21st century learner:

* Educate students to live in a time of profound change.
* Educate students for life in a digital society.
* Educate students for life in a diverse, global society.
* Educate students for life in an evolving information economy.
* Educate students for civic engagement.

For each proposed reform, the authors provide a set of practical recommendations that either enhance student strengths or remediate deficiencies. For example, the authors advocate for revisions to “enriched” academic majors across all disciplines rather than just profession-driven majors (e.g., engineering, nursing, business). Majors would be more interdisciplinary in nature; would combine classroom knowledge with practical experiences; and would emphasize continuous learning and professional development. The authors acknowledge that updating curricula and transitioning to new educational delivery methods is not easy. However, the success or failure of American colleges in the coming generation will depend in no small measure on how well faculties adapt their teaching to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse study body (Bok 2013).

Summary
Generation on a Tightrope is a concise, well-written, and thought-provoking investigation of the current generation of college students. Levine and Dean acknowledge the difficulty of encapsulating an entire generation of students in one text due to its constantly shifting attitudes, values, and experiences and deliberately avoid assigning a label to the current generation. According to the authors,
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reducing a generation of students to a key attribute or characteristic masks the diversity within the group. The authors state: names “conceal more than they reveal” (p. 6). Levine and Dean do a commendable job presenting a comprehensive overview of this complex and multifaceted cohort of students.

The majority of *Generation on a Tightrope* is focused on the changes college and university faculty and administrators must make in order to address the needs of the current generation of students. Levine and Dean also recommend steps that parents and future employers can take to establish open lines of communication and clarify expectations with today’s college students. Yet the authors make no mention of the actions and behaviors students themselves must exhibit in order to be successful upon matriculation. A more balanced discussion regarding this generational “changing of the guard” would better articulate the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved.

*Generation on a Tightrope* is content rich; Levine and Dean make excellent use of tables to convey large amounts of data pertaining to students enrolled at two- and four-year institutions as well as to current versus past generations of students. Presenting information in tables enables the authors to show the full range of responses and to highlight the nuances of subgroups that otherwise might get lost in the narrative. This approach reinforces the authors’ commitment to communicating the multiple and differential perspectives of a single generation of students.

The authors also include a chronology of world events that denotes the approximate age of members of the college class of 2012 when each event occurred. The chronology provides relevant details about significant historical events in the lives of these students. In turn, these details contextualize the students’ story and make it especially compelling. This book should be of great interest to current and future college administrators, faculty members, and others interested in higher education reform.

**References**


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**The First 90 Days: Proven Strategies for Getting Up to Speed Faster and Smarter**

(WATKINS, M. W. 2013. BOSTON: HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL PUBLISHING.)

Reviewed by Jerry P. Ross

The first few months are often the most crucial for a new registrar (or, really, for any new leader). It is the time to learn the campus community and its culture, but it is also the time to integrate oneself into the new office and to begin to set expectations. Every new registrar encounters a different situation when he undertakes a new position. Some are hired from outside the institution and are given explicit directions to change the culture whereas others are promoted from within in order to maintain continuity. Regardless, every registrar encounters challenges during the transition into the new role. Transitions are difficult under the best of circumstances, and organizational dysfunction makes the challenges even greater. Every day, new leaders are faced with trials from both inside and outside their organization. They often have to balance the expectations set when they were hired against the inner needs of the office even as they rely on their own experiences and instincts to lead.

There is no playbook to guide new registrars through each step of their transition to a new role, but *The First 90 Days* is a valuable resource for this most crucial time. In its ten chapters, the book covers topics such as accelerating one’s learning, conversations with one’s boss, building one’s team, and creating alliances. The goal of the book is to help new leaders get up to speed faster and smarter in order to make the transition more successfully. And although the focus of the book is on the business world, it has applications for higher education as well. The thesis of the book is that transitions must be intentional and thoughtful. The transition really begins when one is interviewing for the job: that is the first opportunity to communicate a vision for the organization.

Each chapter of *The First 90 Days* is structured in much the same way and begins by articulating the chapter’s key concepts. Other features are tools and a checklist for ap-
plying the concepts to one’s own situation. Finally, there are questions related to each topic, templates (such as the learning plan template), risk assessments, milestones, and models.

The author outlines some important challenges and strategies related to the type of situation in which a new leader may find herself. For example, Watkins lists five core concerns that arise when a new leader is promoted from within the organization: broader impact horizon, greater complexity, more challenging organizational politics, being further from the front lines, and increased scrutiny. He also describes how to navigate each of these concerns.

For leaders who are hired from outside of the organization, there are other unique challenges, even though some promotional issues may also be present. Watkins likens going to a new organization to being the new organ in organ transplant surgery: “If you’re not thoughtful in adapting to the new situation, you could end up being attacked by the organizational immune system and rejected” (27–28). Among the challenges in joining a new university are not knowing the informal networks of decision making and information, learning the culture, establishing credibility, and competing expectations.

A key element of The First 90 Days is the STARS model. Although this is largely related to the for-profit sector, it also applies to higher education. In beginning a new leadership role, the situation and circumstances can vary greatly. The five components of the STARS model can be used to categorize the type of situation the new leader finds herself in; they include start-up, turnaround, accelerated growth, realignment, and sustaining success (p. 72). For example, a “turnaround” situation is one in which a new leader is hired to save an organization or initiative that is considered to be in serious trouble. Some challenges in this kind of environment are reenergizing demoralized team members, making effective decisions to get the project or organization back on track, and working through difficult choices. This type of situation offers important opportunities because there at least is a recognition of the need to change (if only at higher levels), and each success can seem like a huge victory.

One of the most important elements in any transition is how the new leader relates to her new boss. The author also outlines some key conversations to have in order to make the transition more successful (p. 93). Even as Watkins describes dialogue as the most important element of the relationship with a new boss, he cites five important conversations: situational diagnosis, expectations, resources, style, and personal development. Ideally, conversations about many of these will have begun before the leader completes his first 90 days in office; some may have even begun at the leader’s interview. The author provides guidance on how to have each of these conversations and how to adapt to the boss’s expectations.

Another important element of one’s success as a leader is the leadership team. Teams are typically inherited, and it is up to the leader to determine how to leverage the resources he has in order to meet organizational expectations and goals. Watkins lists several crucial steps in building a successful team (p. 170): First, assess the existing team in order to determine expertise, teamwork, criticality of positions, capabilities, and judgment. Second, force the team to evolve. Regardless of where the organization is on the STARS scale, changes will need to be made. This will require hard decisions as to whether people can remain in place or should be moved to a different position; whether talent can be developed further; or whether some members of the team should be replaced. Last, the team needs to be aligned in order to meet the new goals and objectives. This is complicated when an organization that has been doing things a certain way for some time is asked to suddenly do something in a different way. Watkins recommends a blend of “push” tools (e.g., incentives, changes to the reporting structure, planning, procedure, and mission) and “pull” tools (e.g., vision and teamwork). He also lists some traps to avoid in building the team, including criticizing the previous leadership, keeping the existing team too long, not balancing stability and change, avoiding organizational alignment, and trying to do everything oneself.

As the new leader builds his team, he also has to think about building coalitions for success. According to Watkins, the higher one goes in the organizational chart, the more important coalitions are. Very often, a leader’s success is defined by how he influences others outside of the organizational structure. The first step in securing alliances is to define influence objectives—in other words, identify how coalitions can help secure some early wins and set the stage for long-term success. Think beyond who has positional power in the organization and look also to those who are influential regardless of their position. For
this effort to be successful, the leader must understand what motivates others, what their agendas are, what the situation is, and who might oppose his efforts.

One of the most important chapters in The First 90 Days is about how to accelerate one’s own learning in order to successfully lead one’s new organization. How quickly a new leader comes to terms with the environment on campus and in his office will help determine whether he is or is not successful. Watkins writes, “Early in your transition you inevitably feel as if you are drinking from a fire hose” (p. 47). The faster the new leader learns, the less this will be the case. To help ease this part of the transition, the author recommends defining a learning agenda. This enables the new leader to ask and answer questions about the past, present, and future. The answers to these questions will serve as a guide through all the ensuing steps of the transition. The learning agenda helps define what the leader wants and needs to learn in order to be successful. From there, he can develop a plan as to how to accomplish these goals. The learning plan is divided into phases: before entry, soon after entry, and by the end of the first month. Within my own first 45 days as a new registrar, I had met with representatives from every school and college as well as all the main offices with which the Office of the Registrar works on a regular basis. While this was an important step in relationship building, its most important benefit was aiding my learning plan: It helped me define the past and present so I could map out the future.

Conclusion
Presidencies are typically defined by their first 100 days. Watkins argues that in today’s landscape, new leaders are not afforded that long to start making progress toward success. The First 90 Days is an important and worthwhile text for any new leader—and particularly for any who are moving from one institution to another. Any leader has invested a lot in order to attain his position and certainly wants to be successful. At the same time, the institution places its faith in the new leader to help it advance to its next phase. The First 90 Days has been called the “on-boarding bible.” Even though its focus is on business, the concepts are highly applicable to higher education. The book sets the stage for success during this critical time in large part because it does not try to answer every question but rather pushes the leader to ask the right questions of herself and her new organization.

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Helping Veterans Succeed: A Handbook for Higher Education Administrators is AACRAO’s first comprehensive guide to address the unique needs of student veterans on campus. Through 16 chapters, this handbook gives campus administrators the tools to effectively help veterans achieve their academic goals and transition successfully into the workforce. Written by experts in the field, it covers transfer of credit and prior learning credits, campus communication strategies, certification, orientation efforts, implementing a Yellow Ribbon Program, and helping veterans transition from the classroom to the workforce. In addition, case studies and appendices offer relevant tips and resources for higher education professionals serving student veterans.

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