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   - **SEM Conference capstone experience**
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A short paper demonstrating comprehension of SEM concepts and how they relate to various types of institutions. In addition, 3-5 goals which summarize how the participant may further her/his own SEM career.

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MULTIPLE FACTORS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS RELATED TO SPECIAL ADMISSIONS FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES WERE EXAMINED BASED UPON TYPICAL INFORMATION PROVIDED TO ADMISSIONS COMMITTEES. FOLLOWING APPROVAL OF SELECTED STUDENT-ATHLETES, A TEST OF BASIC ACADEMIC SKILL LEVEL WAS ADMINISTERED, REVEALING A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN READING SKILL LEVEL BELOW A GIVEN THRESHOLD OF STANDARDIZED TEST SCORE.
When considering any type of alternative or special admission processes for incoming students, the university is charged with taking into account traditional admissions criteria such as high school grade point average (GPA) and standardized test scores as well as other attributes. These “other attributes” frequently include pressure to admit students who are athletically gifted but academically underprepared. The potential glory of a university on the athletic field can become a key consideration in the decision whether to admit certain applicants. The present study examines the decision-making process relating to special admissions for student-athletes. The study’s four main considerations include concerns regarding the use of high school GPA and standardized test score as admissions criteria for prospective student-athletes; pressure on the admissions committee to avoid competitive disadvantage by effectively sending talented recruits to a competitor; the admissions committee’s desire to admit students believed to be academically prepared; and the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA’s) changes to initial eligibility criteria—changes which allow universities to make admissions decisions independently.

The NCAA’s initial eligibility standards require that prospective student-athletes gain qualifier status by earning a minimum high school grade point average coupled with a standardized test score on a sliding scale. Issues related to the sliding scale (such as high school grade inflation and the reporting of outlier standardized test scores) were the impetus for one university to perform additional assessment on the academic skill level of this group of in-coming students.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since 1965, the NCAA has struggled to determine the best formula for ensuring the academic preparedness of incoming student-athletes. In 1973 and 1986, the NCAA set a minimum high school GPA, designated a required core course curriculum, and identified a minimum standardized test score; prospective student-athletes were expected to meet all of these criteria (Crowley 2006). However, in a 1996 class-action lawsuit, Cureton v. NCAA, the plaintiffs claimed that requiring a minimum standardized test score was inherently culturally biased and had a disparate impact on minority students (Cureton v. NCAA 1999). Influenced by this case, the 2003 NCAA academic reform initiative established new standards for student-athletes competing in major college athletics. This initiative increased student-athletes’ access to higher education by creating an expanded sliding scale for GPAs and standardized test scores. As a result, prospective student-athletes with unusually low standardized test scores could be considered for admission provided they had high GPAs. This pairing of deficient test scores with exceptional high school GPA continues to complicate the process of identifying and admitting students with skills adequate to meet the academic challenges of higher education (Palaima 2011). This challenge is particularly significant for selective colleges and universities with competitive athletic programs.

PREDICTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Admissions personnel are responsible for offering admission to prospective students with a high probability of being academically successful. Admissions decisions typically are made on the basis of an applicant’s standardized test score, high school GPA, and a set of institution-specific requirements. For most college applicants, the predictive values of test score and high school GPA are limited; these limitations are particularly pronounced in populations with the lowest test scores and high school GPAs (Sawyer 2010). Arguably, admissions decisions pertaining to this population are the most complex.
The first step in the admissions process is for the prospective student to identify an institution that is a good “fit;” often, this determination is made by the student based on the university’s published standardized test score requirements (Sawyer 2010). This action is paramount in studying the predictive nature of a set of entrance requirements on a cohort of students admitted to a university. It is hoped that there is a strong predictive relationship between entrance standards and the decisions of the admissions committee. In other words, admitted students should achieve success at the university. Intercollegiate athletics can challenge the notion of academic “fit” to the extent that prospective student-athletes are recruited for reasons not solely academic. Coaching staffs identify prospective team members largely on the basis of their athletic ability. This is dramatically different from the academic self-selection characteristic of other groups of prospective students.

**Standardized Tests**

Historically, standardized tests have been criticized for their inability to accurately predict applicants’ first-year college GPA. Cultural differences, socioeconomic factors, and linguistic considerations have all been offered as explanations of why certain applicant groups have mean differences in scores (Zwick 1999). Perhaps sociological factors are at play: Consider the College Board’s finding (1994) that grades predicted on the basis of American Indian, black, and Hispanic applicants’ SAT scores tend to be higher than the actual grades they earn. Zwick (1999) notes that the skew is even greater when high school GPA is the sole predictor. The impact of test-prep courses on students’ standardized test scores raises additional questions about the reliability of such tests (Perez 2002). (If a student can perform significantly better on a standardized test because of improvement in his test-taking skills, then his score is not reflective purely of his intellectual ability.)

Standardized test scores may not be a perfect predictive tool upon which to base admissions decisions, but their overall utility as an admissions criterion is widely agreed upon. Geisinger (2009) considers that standardized tests provide a means of comparing applicants and that they help “universities to accept students who will succeed educationally and to reject those most likely to fail.” Woodruff and Ziomek (2004) maintain that standardized tests are “unvarying over time and equally applicable to all students.” One college president stated, “While the SAT is not overwhelmingly predictive of college success, it is carefully designed and tested to measure basic intellectual skills” (Epstein 2009). Though far from perfect, standardized tests serve a basic function of assessment.

**High School GPA and Grade Inflation**

A second consideration in the admission of prospective students is high school cumulative GPA. Like standardized test scores, high school GPAs have been criticized for their lack of predictive power relative to grades. As with standardized test scores, self-selection on the basis of GPA is part of prospective applicants’ decision-making process when choosing a university (Sawyer 2010). Students with higher GPAs tend to apply to universities that require such. Ultimately, the relationship of high school GPA to first-year collegiate GPA can be traced back to the admissions committee: By offering admission to applicants whose high school GPAs are most similar to those of academically successful matriculated students, admissions committees may strengthen the predictive relationship (if inadvertently).

High school grade inflation is another factor that has been given increasing attention. Grade inflation occurs when a better grade is assigned even when a student demonstrates no increase in knowledge (Woodruff and Ziomek 2004). Woodruff and Ziomek (2004) report that their data indicate average grade inflation of between 0.20 and 0.26 (on a 4.00 scale) and that grade inflation is greatest for students with low to average standardized test scores. This has particular meaning for the current study, the focus of which is prospective student-athletes who score in the lowest quartile on standardized tests.

Some faculty defend grade inflation, believing it encourages students and ultimately improves their self-esteem as well as their attitude toward academic work (McSpirit et al. 2000). Beyond serving as a measure of students’ academic knowledge, high school grades also reflect students’ “academically relevant behavior” (Sawyer 2010). This may include attendance, class participation, and/or other activities that do not necessarily increase academic knowledge but that reflect academic performance. Research suggests that high school grades have become greatly inflated and thus are less indicative of cognitive ability than perhaps they once were (Geisinger 2009).
THE NCAA’S SLIDING SCALE

In 2003, the NCAA responded to contentions of cultural bias in the process of gaining initial eligibility as a result of such bias existing in standardized tests. This response took the form of a sliding scale requirement to replace the previously established minimums (Bakker 2005). The scale allows a prospective student-athlete to be considered for admission provided he or she earned a score between 400 and 1010 on the SAT (37 and 86 on the ACT), depending upon his or her high school GPA in a certain distribution of specified courses. In theory, if a student experiences bias or other disadvantage as a result of taking a standardized test, then working hard in high school courses should provide the means of achieving initial eligibility. (However, it should be considered that prospective student-athletes who score remarkably low on standardized tests may be experiencing challenges other than test bias and may be benefiting from grade inflation.) Admissions decisions relating to prospective student-athletes are challenging and warrant additional study. Most prospective student-athletes are sufficiently well-prepared for college; nevertheless, a group of student-athletes—most of whom are in the revenue-generating sports of NCAA Division I universities—have markedly different academic profiles.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The NCAA’s expanded sliding scale for initial eligibility provides multiple opportunities to depart from traditional college admissions criteria. Admissions officers often are charged with reviewing the applications of heavily recruited prospective student-athletes whose academic credentials fall short of the institution’s published standards. College presidents need to be able to defend admissions decisions to coaches, donors, faculty, and university alumni.

METHOD

The research on which this article is based derives from data collected at a large, NCAA Division I, bowl-championship-subdivision university in the midwestern United States. The study considers traditional college admissions processes as well as scores on the Wide Range Achievement Test 4 (WRAT 4), a measure of basic academic skill. High school GPA and standardized test scores were used to define the study population.

SAMPLE

The university maintains a comprehensive, longitudinal database pertaining to specially admitted student-athletes that informed the current study. Three cohorts (2007, 2008, and 2009) of specially admitted student-athletes (n = 109) were included in the study. The cohorts were subdivided into two groups on the basis of their standardized test scores. The first group, the “selected reform group” (n = 21), comprised student-athletes who gained their initial eligibility by virtue of the expanded sliding scale. The distinctive quality of this group was that each of its members scored lower than 17 on the ACT (820 on the SAT). This benchmark was chosen because these test score values were below the previous NCAA legislation’s minimum requirements for initial eligibility. The remaining students (n = 88) comprised the second group, “other special admissions.”

All student-athletes who were admitted to the university through the special admissions process were administered the Wide Range Achievement Test 4 (WRAT 4). This test measures basic skills in the areas of writing, sentence comprehension, spelling, and math computation (Wilkinson and Robertson 2011). It is frequently used to determine a “grade level” of ability and may be administered as a first step in screening for learning disabilities. The WRAT 4 has been praised for its ability to create a reliable measure of reading ability (Wilkinson and Robertson 2011). Study participants’ WRAT 4 scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the univariate ANOVA technique. Findings were reviewed for statistical significance.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the general characteristics of the specially admitted student-athletes. Students in each cohort were grouped according to participation in a revenue-generating (e.g., football or men’s basketball) versus non-revenue-generating sport (i.e., all other sports); gender; diagnosis of a learning disability; state resident or non-resident; and minority status (inclusive of all ethnicities other than white). Almost two-thirds (74%) of specially admitted student-athletes were male; approximately half (52%) were ethnic minorities. (See Table 1, on page 6.)

Each member of the three cohorts of specially admitted student-athletes was assigned on the basis of initial
eligibility status to either the “selected reform group” or “other special admissions.” Next, the two groups were categorized according to participation in a revenue-generating versus non-revenue-generating sport; gender; diagnosis of a learning disability; resident status; and minority status. Analysis revealed two statistically significant relationships: First, those in the “selected reform” group were significantly more likely than those in the “other” group to be diagnosed with a learning disability ($F[1,107] = 4.094, p = 0.046$); second, minority student-athletes were significantly more likely to be in the “selected reform” group than in the “other” group ($F[1,107] = 9.123, p = 0.003$). (See Table 2.)

The student-athletes’ standardized test scores and high school GPAs were analyzed for statistical significance. For the purposes of this study, high school GPA included, variously, each student-athlete’s cumulative high school GPA (i.e., reflective of grades earned in all high school courses); high school GPA as calculated in accordance with NCAA eligibility requirements (i.e., reflective only of grades earned in core curricular courses); and subset GPAs (i.e., reflective of grades earned in each of the NCAA core course requirements of social studies, math, science, and English). Among the consequent six separate measures of high school academic performance, no significant differences were found between members of the “selected reform” group and the “others” group. (See Table 3.)

Both the composite score and the NCAA composite sum of either the ACT or SAT of each student were analyzed for the current study. (The composite score is the highest overall score in any one attempt; the NCAA composite sum is the total of a student’s highest score on each subset as an overall test score.) When standardized test scores were analyzed, it was determined that the “selected reform” group and the “other” group differed significantly according to both measures: ACT composite ($F[1, 264] = 60.100, p = 0.000$) and NCAA ACT sum ($F[1, 258] = 36.022, p = 0.001$); and SAT composite ($F[1, 224] = 38.475, p = 0.000$) and NCAA SAT sum ($F[1, 215] = 18.479, p = 0.001$). (See Table 4.)

Scores on the WRAT-4 were obtained for 93 specially admitted student-athletes in the three cohorts ($n = 109$). ANOVA was used to analyze these sub-scores for statistically significant mean differences ($\alpha = 0.05$). All variables passed Levene’s statistic, a test for homogeneity of

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Special Admits</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revenue Sport</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Resident</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* n = 109

Table 2.
Demographics: Specially Admitted Student-Athletes (2007, 2008, and 2009 Cohorts), by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Selected Reform</th>
<th>Other Special Admits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue Sport</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disability*</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Resident</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority*</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* n = 21

Table 3.
GPA Differences by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\alpha = 0.05$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School GPA</td>
<td>$p = 0.112$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCAA GPA</td>
<td>$p = 0.767$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCAA Social Studies</td>
<td>$p = 0.321$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCAA Math</td>
<td>$p = 0.913$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCAA Science</td>
<td>$p = 0.537$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCAA English</td>
<td>$p = 0.811$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.
GPA Differences by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\alpha = 0.05$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT Composite</td>
<td>$F[1, 264] = 60.100, p = 0.000$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCAA ACT Sum</td>
<td>$F[1, 258] = 36.022, p = 0.001$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT Composite</td>
<td>$F[1, 224] = 38.475, p = 0.000$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCAA SAT Sum</td>
<td>$F[1, 215] = 18.479, p = 0.001$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
variances. Statistically significant differences in mean score were found in the WRAT4 sub-scale areas of word recognition ($F[1, 91] = 12.789, p < 0.001$); sentence comprehension ($F[1, 91] = 7.592, p < 0.05$); and spelling ($F[1, 91] = 7.565, p < 0.05$). There was no significant difference in mean score on the WRAT4 sub-scale of math computation ($F[1, 91] = 1.568, p = 0.214$). (See Table 5.)

**DISCUSSION**

In its ongoing quest to determine the best formula by which to verify that prospective student-athletes are academically prepared for college, the NCAA established new standards for initial eligibility. Since these requirements went into effect, many disturbing trends have been identified in athletic departments across the country.

The current study demonstrates that both elements of the NCAA’s so-called sliding scale are inherently flawed; these flaws are exacerbated by the context of intercollegiate athletics. The authors speculate that high school teachers may feel pressure to inflate the grades they assign highly recruited athletes; indeed, as intercollegiate athletics become the subject of increasing publicity, they may have more incentive to do so. This problem is compounded by universities’ recruitment of student-athletes largely on the basis of their athletic—not academic—potential. This is a notable departure from the process whereby students typically choose a university—that is, whereby students choose to apply to institutions whose entrance requirements closely match their academic profiles.

**FINDINGS**

**High School GPA**

Perhaps one of the current study’s most significant findings pertains to the high school GPA of “selected reform” student-athletes (i.e., those who gain initial eligibility because of the NCAA sliding scale). Table 3 demonstrates that there is no significant difference in the high school GPAs of “selected reform” and “other” students. In other words, the high school academic evaluations of these students indicate no difference in their academic ability as compared to other students. However, Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate not only a significant difference in standardized test scores but also significant differences in the basic academic skills of word recognition, sentence comprehension, and spelling. These are fundamental skill areas that are necessary for reading mastery. It is troubling that students who may have significant deficiencies in their reading and other basic academic skills nevertheless are achieving high school GPAs comparable to students without such deficiencies. Thus, the findings of the current study suggest that high school GPA is not reflective of acquired knowledge for this student population.
Standardized Tests
Standardized tests have long been criticized as culturally and socially biased. Nevertheless, they are arguably the best means of comparing students, particularly for purposes of college admissions. Table 4 presents statistically significant differences in the standardized test scores of the two groups of student-athletes that were studied. Table 5 presents statistically significant differences in student-athletes’ basic skills as measured by the WRAT 4. The agreement of the findings for these two measures suggests that for this population of specially admitted student-athletes, standardized tests more accurately measure basic academic skill deficiencies than high school GPA. A standardized test score below a given threshold likely is indicative of academic challenges experienced by the student.

IMPLICATIONS
Changes in 2003 to the NCAA’s initial eligibility requirements expanded the group of student-athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics. A number of these student-athletes qualify with a low standardized test score paired with a high school GPA considered to be more representative of their academic ability—and, thus, of their preparedness for college. But with both measures having been proven flawed, universities and athletic departments are admitting student-athletes whose academic deficiencies are becoming apparent only after matriculation. Admissions officers must be aware of the significant needs for support that such students may have. Athletic departments and universities must provide the academic assistance required by this group of high-risk student-athletes and/or reconsider their special admissions policies and standards.

Inadequate support of some student-athletes is likely to result in their having negative experiences in the classroom. Their lack of mastery of basic academic skills and professors’ expectations that they will demonstrate their skills in front of their peers may result in some student-athletes’ perception of the learning environment as threatening.
These negative experiences can lead to dissociation from academe and disengagement from student life and can adversely affect student retention. To combat these kinds of experiences, athletic departments provide a variety of academic and psychological support to student-athletes.

CONCLUSION

Given the challenges inherent in the admissions review process for prospective student-athletes, it is important that university administrators understand as much as possible about the various factors at stake. Since 2003, the NCAA’s initial eligibility standards have expanded the pool of prospective student-athletes who are accepted. Student-athletes whose test scores are in the lowest acceptable range may require significant remediation. The current study indicates that students who score below the threshold—i.e., an ACT score below 17 or an SAT score below 820—are likely to have deficiencies in their basic academic skills; these are particularly manifest in the areas of word recognition, sentence comprehension, and spelling. Athletic departments and universities are urged to conduct their own assessments in order to fully understand the academic profiles of the student-athletes they enroll. The NCAA initial eligibility standards currently in place may not be sufficient to ensure that student-athletes have a reasonable chance not only of winning on the playing field but of succeeding in the classroom.

REFERENCES


About the Author

CARLA A. WINTERS, PH.D. is an Assistant Director of Athletics Academics and Student Life at the University of Oklahoma.
GERALD S. GURNEY, PH.D. is an assistant professor of Adult and Higher Education at the University of Oklahoma, a past president of the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics, and the former Senior Associate Athletics Director for Academics at OU.
“Cloud computing” is a catch-phrase for accessing IT resources such as software, application development, and infrastructure over the Internet. The cloud promises easy, on-demand access to powerful technology at less cost than homegrown IT systems. The former U.S. chief information officer likened it to the running water of the information age (Kundra 2010). But moving to the cloud is essentially outsourcing. And as in any outsourcing arrangement, cloud computing carries a range of business and legal risks (see, e.g., Porter and Larner 2011). This article focuses on just one: privacy and data security compliance.

The bottom line is that moving to the cloud in no way alters an institution’s privacy and data security obligations, but it does force an institution to rely on the cloud provider for compliance. Because U.S. privacy and data security law is a patchwork, the first step is to identify the
This article outlines privacy and data security compliance issues facing postsecondary education institutions when they utilize cloud computing and concludes with a practical list of do’s and don’t’s. Cloud computing does not change an institution’s privacy and data security obligations. It does involve reliance on a third party, which requires an institution to implement practical and legal protections to facilitate compliance with such obligations.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND PRACTICAL DOS AND DON’TS

By Joel Buckman and Stephanie Gold

The move to the cloud comes down to a cost-benefit analysis. Developing a process-based approach will help institutions make good decisions. Particularly in those cases, whether to move to the cloud involves multiple considerations. Institutions then should attempt—and in some cases will be required by law—to obtain sufficient contractual guarantees that the cloud provider will comply with any such requirements. However, cloud providers may be reluctant to provide such guarantees or may do so only at a price, perhaps undermining some of the cloud’s benefits. Particularly in those cases, whether to move to the cloud involves a cost-benefit analysis.
(FERPA); the final section provides a list of cloud computing do's and don'ts. The chart at the end of the article summarizes the cloud implications of privacy and data security laws commonly applicable to colleges and universities.

THE BASICS

Cloud Computing

Cloud computing is an evolving concept, and definitions abound (Katz, Goldstein and Yanosky 2009). A straightforward if over-simplified definition is the “delivery of scalable IT resources over the Internet, as opposed to hosting and operating those resources locally” (EDUCAUSE 2009). Typically, cloud computing is discussed in terms of three service and four deployment models. Institutions should understand the basics of these models because they can affect the level of control the institution will retain over privacy and data security (Jansen and Grance 2011).

The three service models are Software as a Service (SaaS), Platform as a Service (PaaS), and Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS). SaaS involves the use of prefabricated software and applications over the Internet (think Internet-based e-mail like Yahoo!); PaaS involves an Internet platform from which the customer develops and deploys software and applications (think Microsoft Azure); IaaS involves more barebones IT structures delivered over the Internet (think servers, network equipment, CPUs). (An analogy to manufacturing might help clarify: Under the SaaS model, the provider offers a fully furnished, prefabricated house; under the IaaS model, the provider offers a completely built house, but the end user is free to furnish it and otherwise outfit it as he sees fit; under the PaaS model, the provider offers just the raw materials for the house and the end user can help design it from the ground up.) Generally, SaaS offers the institution the least control over security settings, IaaS offers institutions the most control, and PaaS falls somewhere in between.

The service models can be deployed over a public cloud, a community cloud, a private cloud, or a hybrid cloud. Most relevant to higher education institutions are public clouds (open to all), private clouds (limited to, and in some cases built for, a particular user), and community clouds (limited to, and in some cases built for, a group of users with common business and compliance needs). The fourth deployment model, a “hybrid cloud,” is a “composition of two or more clouds (private, community, or public)” that remain unique entities but are bound by “standardized or proprietary technology that enables application and data portability among them” (Jansen and Grance 2011). Public clouds offer institutions the least control over privacy and security settings; hybrid clouds are tailored to an institution’s needs and may offer more control; and private clouds offer the most control.

Notably, a number of major cloud providers have rolled out cloud solutions geared toward higher education (see, e.g., Google Apps for Education at <www.google.com/apps/intl/en/edu/> and cloud computing in education at <www.microsoft.com/education/en-us/solutions/Pages/cloud_computing.aspx>).

Clouds offer on-demand, scalable, powerful, pay-as-you-go (sometimes free) IT resources. For example, Internet-based e-mail services offer megabytes of storage space that can be accessed via any Internet connection for free at the click of a mouse. At the institutional level, clouds allow institutions access to IT without a large up-front capital investment or the requirement to lock in long-term fixed costs. Home-grown IT no longer needs to predict usage requirements or to host or maintain software on campus servers and computers (EDUCAUSE 2009). But with these benefits come risks: Cloud providers store immense amounts of valuable data and may become targets for hackers (Jansen and Grance 2011); providing resources over the Internet requires more administrative and technical layers and, thus, more access points to private data (Jansen and Grance 2011); and cloud providers are able to provide services cheaply in some cases by aggregating and mining data.

U.S. Privacy and Data Security Law

U.S. privacy and data security law is in fact a patchwork of sector-specific federal laws, diverse state laws with numerous jurisdictional hooks, and various self-imposed requirements (typically by contract). To the extent that such laws apply “on the ground,” they also apply “in the cloud.” Further, because many colleges and universities are engaged in a wide range of activities, they are subject to many sector-specific privacy and data security laws. Such laws include:

- the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which applies to certain education insti-
tutions and protects education records (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 C.F.R. part 99);  
- the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA), which applies to financial institutions and protects certain non-public personal information (15 U.S.C. §§ 6801–09; 16 C.F.R. part 313);  
- the Red Flags Rule, which applies to debit and credit card issuers, users of consumer reports, and financial institutions and creditors holding covered accounts and requires identity theft prevention measures (15 U.S.C. § 1681m(e); 16 C.F.R. part 681);  
- the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH), which apply to, among others, certain healthcare providers and protects certain health information (42 USC § 1320d et seq.; 45 C.F.R. parts 160, 162, 164);  
- state data breach notification laws: 46 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have enacted some form of legislation requiring certain entities—e.g., those doing business in the state or storing one of its resident's data—to give certain notice to consumers affected by a data breach (see <www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=13489> for a listing of such laws);  
- state data security laws: several states have enacted more general data security laws, typically applying to entities doing business in the state or owning or licensing data about state residents (e.g., 201 Code Mass. Regs. §§ 17.01–17.05); and  
- state privacy laws: certain states have enacted either general privacy laws or laws applicable to certain types of information, such as health records, mental health records, or education records (see, e.g., Electronic Privacy Information Center, State Privacy Laws, at <http://epic.org/privacy/consumer/states.html>).

See the chart at the end of this article, which explains the general applicability, basic protections, and cloud computing implications of such laws.

These laws typically provide some mix of protections, including data security requirements and/or rights of privacy, access, or correction. In certain cases—for example, HIPAA—laws specifically require that an institution bind service providers to follow the laws’ mandates.

In addition to these laws and regulations, institutions may have contractual obligations to students or others that specify privacy or data security standards. For example, the payment card industry requires merchants to comply with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI/DSS). PCI/DSS requires merchants to implement prevention, detection, and appropriate reaction to security incidents. Student handbooks and IT terms of use and privacy policies are other potential sources of self-imposed requirements.

Many colleges’ and universities’ activities are sufficiently varied to implicate much of the patchwork. For example, many institutions participate in the federal Perkins Loan Program or provide institutional loans to students or faculty that may trigger the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act and the Red Flags identity theft prevention rules (Meers and Meade 2008). A student health center may be subject to HIPAA with regard to treatment of faculty and staff and to FERPA with regard to treatment of students. Because institutions commonly welcome students from all over the country, various state data security laws may apply regardless of where the institution actually provides its services. And if the institution accepts credit card payments for tuition and fees, then it likely is also subject to PCI/DSS. The list goes on. In short, because of the breadth of many colleges’ and universities’ activities, multiple privacy and data security regimes may apply to various IT functions that might “move to the cloud.” Consultation with legal counsel should be a central feature of any plan to utilize cloud computing.

CLOUD COMPUTING PRIVACY AND DATA SECURITY

Cross-Cutting Privacy and Data Security Issues

Nearly all cloud computing privacy and data security risks share a common origin. Moving to the cloud in no way changes an institution’s privacy and data security obligations (Jansen and Grance 2011), but it does force the institution to rely on a third party for compliance. Thus, colleges and universities must (1) identify applicable privacy and data security requirements, (2) conduct due diligence of the provider’s compliance package, and (3) negotiate effective contractual provisions—including ef-
fective remedies for noncompliance—to ensure that the provider will execute. Although this sounds straightforward, a number of the cloud’s features complicate matters, including the following:

- **Easy deployability means unauthorized deployments.** Precisely because cloud resources are easy to deploy, various campus constituencies might move to the cloud without considering the privacy and data security implications of doing so (Young 2011). This can be especially problematic at “flat” organizations—which many colleges and universities are. For example, a professor might begin to communicate grades to students by way of a free, commercially available file-sharing service, such as Dropbox. This may result in the storage of “education records,” implicating FERPA.

- **Data location:** The cloud model works in part because data can skip around the world instantaneously (Jansen and Grance 2011). An institution’s home jurisdiction may prohibit such transfers, and the transferee jurisdiction may provide less protection from government intrusion or impose fewer data security requirements on the provider. And because physical location is a traditional jurisdictional test, the location of a provider’s servers could subject an institution to the laws of a “strange” jurisdiction. Even if it is unlikely that a provider’s unilateral (and possibly unknowing) transfer of data to a server in a faraway jurisdiction would subject the customer to that jurisdiction’s laws, the provider should arguably bear that risk. (The cloud provider would likely already be subject to the laws of any jurisdiction where it maintains servers.) The U.S. Department of Education recently suggested that in its view a cloud computing “best practice” is to store sensitive education records within the United States (U.S. Department of Education 2012).

- **Data ownership & secondary uses.** Some public cloud providers rely on data mining to create revenue streams. Data mining ranges from behavioral advertising to the outright sale of personally identifiable information. This model presents compliance challenges for data security laws that prohibit the use of data for any purpose other than that for which the data were collected (“secondary use”). Institutions should be wary of provider agreements that claim ownership or license of the institution’s data and should consider whether some contractual limit on secondary use is necessary or desirable (Jansen and Grance 2011). Be aware of indirect ownership claims, as when a SaaS provider seeks to own software outputs created by subscriber data inputs.

- **Loss of control and lack of transparency:** Like any outsourcing arrangement, a cloud customer cedes control of some processes to the provider. Where an institution once had the power to allocate resources and develop a data security regime appropriate to its size and risk profile, on the cloud it must rely on the provider’s human, physical, administrative, and technical resources (Cloud Security Alliance 2010, Jansen and Grance 2011). Where an institution once had physical possession of its data, it now must rely on a provider not to hold its data hostage in the event of a contract dispute and/or at the end of the relationship. Trust must fill the gap. Effective pre- and post-contract diligence can create trust. But for various reasons, cloud providers may be reluctant to allow rigorous diligence (Jansen and Grance 2011). Independent third-party audits may constitute one solution; a provider’s reputation may constitute another. Still, the institution should negotiate mechanisms whereby it confirms that security controls are implemented and contractual promises are kept.

- **Data security risk profile:** Some argue that the cloud provides less security than on-the-ground computing because it adds layers of administrative and technical complexity, is portable, and becomes a target for hacker attacks. Others contend that cloud providers are by necessity expert at data security and provide much greater protection than any home-grown IT department (Winkler 2011). At the very least, the cloud does raise different data security concerns than on-the-ground computing. For example, cloud providers often achieve economies of scale by storing multiple subscribers’ data on the same server and segregating the data exclusively through technical (as opposed to technical and physical) means (Jansen and Grance 2011). But one cannot say that storing information in the cloud is like storing money in a bank (as opposed to a mattress) because some colleges and universities already have vaults. Thus, an institution’s IT professionals should conduct a case-by-case comparative analysis.

- **Refusal of providers to negotiate:** Finally, although a contract is critical to achieve privacy and data security
compliance, many cloud providers offer one-sided, form contracts with little room for negotiation (Jansen and Grance 2011). This is particularly true for the public, SaaS, out-of-the-box offerings. Providers assert that standardization helps keep down costs. In certain cases, contracts give providers the right to amend unilaterally, creating the potential to undermine any privacy or data security obligations an institution might obtain. Contracts also may not provide effective remedies or indemnification for breaches by the provider. (See Jansen and Grance 2011 for a more comprehensive examination of the cautionary implications of cloud computing.)

That said, large cloud providers increasingly are attempting to meet colleges’ and universities’ needs. For example, after initial resistance, Google reportedly agreed to comply with FERPA in its provision of Gmail to postsecondary institutions (DeSantis 2012, Mitrano 2009). A number of major cloud providers now have sites dedicated to education institutions, and institutions are uniting to negotiate with cloud providers. This represents progress but likely does not signal the end of problematic unilateral contracts.

For now, when an insufficient contract is all that is available, an institution must consider whether it is legally possible and prudent to proceed. Institutions should weigh the sensitivity of the information involved, the potential exposure in the event of a problem, and the cloud provider’s reputation. Sometimes an institution should proceed; sometimes an institution should look to a different cloud service or delivery model; and sometimes an institution should stay “on the ground.”

The FERPA Example

Because FERPA applies to most colleges and universities, it provides a useful example of how to evaluate a privacy law when moving to the cloud. FERPA protects “education records” (see 34 C.F.R. § 99.3), so the first question is whether the relevant IT function involves such records. If so, an institution must identify contractual and other guarantees needed to ensure compliance.

Generally, education records are any information recorded in any way that is maintained by or on behalf of an institution and that is “directly related to a student” (see 34 C.F.R. § 99.3). This broad definition covers any number of IT functions, including faculty and staff e-mail (Gilbertson and Storch 2009), student information systems, grade books, extracurricular participation records... the list goes on. But not all campus IT functions would qualify: For example, a professor’s research database comprising of interviews with non-students likely would not be subject to FERPA.

FERPA creates rights of privacy (34 C.F.R. subpart D), student access (34 C.F.R. part 99, subpart B), and record correction (34 C.F.R. part 99, subpart C). Cloud compliance for access and correction is relatively straightforward. For access, an institution should contractually prohibit the provider from unilateral records destruction and should confirm that the service level agreement (SLA) would allow a student to inspect records within 45 days of a request (common SLAs would so allow) (Porter and Larner 2011). The contract also should prohibit the provider from holding education records hostage in any contract dispute or at the end of the relationship (34 C.F.R. § 99.10[b]). For the right of correction, an institution should ensure that it is possible to attach electronic explanatory notes that will be transmitted with the records (34 C.F.R. § 99.21[c]; see also 34 C.F.R. §§ 99.20 and 99.22).

As compared to the rights of access and correction, the right of privacy is somewhat more complicated. FERPA’s privacy protections generally prohibit the disclosure of “personally identifiable information” (PII) from education records without a student’s signed, written consent that specifies details about the disclosure. The regulations define disclosure as “to permit access to or the release, transfer, or other communication of [PII] contained in education records by any means... to any party except the party identified as the party that provided or created the record” (34 C.F.R. § 99.3). Institutions may be able to rely on a number of exceptions to the consent requirement to allow disclosure to a third party in the context of cloud computing (for example, the exceptions for disclosures of directory information or for disclosures in connection with financial aid). Here we focus on the more general exception for disclosures to school officials who have “legitimate educational interests” in the records, which the U.S. Department of Education recently discussed in a publication regarding cloud computing (U.S. Department of Education 2012).

Contractors to whom an institution has “outsourced institutional services or functions” may qualify as “school
officials” with “legitimate educational interests” when they:

- Perform a service or function for which the institution would otherwise use employees;
- Are under the “direct control” of the institution with respect to the use and maintenance of education records;
- Use reasonable physical or technical controls or equally effective administrative controls to limit employee access to education records to those who need to know; and
- Agree not to re-disclose any PII without a student’s consent or to make any secondary use of PII.

In addition, in its legally required annual FERPA notice, the institution must define “school officials” broadly enough to include IT service providers.

The requirements that the provider fall under the institution’s “direct control,” limit access to records to need-to-know personnel, and prohibit secondary use and re-disclosure are the most burdensome. Cloud providers may push back on a prohibition of secondary uses or re-disclosure of personally identifiable information. Even more burdensome is the “direct control” requirement.

Read literally, “direct control” could foreclose cloud computing. But it seems that robust contractual provisions can provide a sufficient proxy (Gilbertson and Storch 2009). Some contend that it would suffice for a contract to (1) reserve all information ownership rights to the institution, (2) prohibit all secondary uses or re-disclosures of the data (as opposed to just PII), and (3) require data security protections (Gilbertson and Storch 2009). Mandating periodic audits, sufficient remedies in the event of a breach, and the return or destruction of the information at the end of the agreement also would seem prudent. These contractual provisions borrow certain features from the U.S. Department of Education’s recently released guidelines about how an institution can ensure that a third party complies with FERPA to the “greatest extent possible” under a different exception for nonconsensual disclosure. Although FERPA does not include an express data security requirement, the guidelines state that “best practice” is to “verify the existence of a sound data security plan” because institutions must determine whether the third party’s protections are “adequate to prevent FERPA violations” (76 Fed. Reg. 75,604, 75,612, 2011).

In sum, FERPA does not appear to prohibit cloud computing, and, indeed, the U.S. Department of Education recently stated its position to that effect (U.S. Department of Education 2012). To comply with FERPA, an institution first should make sure that the definition of “school officials” with a “legitimate educational interest” in its annual FERPA notice encompasses contractors. Second, an institution should obtain a provider’s contractual agreement to: (a) comply with FERPA; (b) acknowledge that the provider is under the direct control of the institution with respect to the “use” and “maintenance” of education records (including, perhaps, by adopting some or all of the contractual protections above); (c) provide physical, administrative, and technical controls to restrict access to education records to those persons who need to know; and (d) prohibit the re-disclosure and secondary use of PII from education records.

**CLOUD COMPUTING DOS AND DON’TS**

**Do**

- Develop a policy to mandate the use only of university-approved IT resources and to forbid the unofficial use of cloud services.
- Develop a process-based approach to managing cloud compliance. When considering a move to the cloud, develop an ad hoc or permanent cross-functional team to identify the institution’s needs, evaluate providers, and decide whether to move to the cloud. At a minimum, the team should include personnel qualified to provide the legal, IT, and business perspectives.
- Evaluate cloud privacy and data security compliance on a function-by-function basis (for example, the student information system might involve different considerations than an enrollment management system).
- Identify legal, contractual, or institutionally imposed privacy or data security requirements that are applicable to the information entwined in the IT function that is moving to the cloud.
- Seek transparency about and/or a third-party audit of the cloud provider’s privacy and data security measures.
Compare the cloud provider’s security protections with your institution’s existing on-the-ground data security protections.

Learn whether the cloud provider will sell your institution’s information directly or indirectly to advertisers or otherwise use your institution’s data for its own purposes; seek to restrict such activities when legally required or desirable.

Seek to obligate the cloud provider to bear the risk for laws that may be imposed on your institution as a result of the locations of the provider’s servers.

Build into the contract effective remedies for material breaches of the cloud services agreement—including breaches of privacy and data security provisions.

Build into the contract effective transition procedures to minimize the risk of cloud provider lock-in.

Conduct a cost-benefit analysis when it is impossible to obtain the ideal contractual guarantees from a cloud provider. Weigh the cloud provider’s reputation and potential costs in the event of a privacy or data security lapse, the sensitivity of the data, the risks to the institution, and the benefits of moving to the cloud.

Evaluate whether other cloud solutions—for example, a private or community cloud—would make it easier to obtain the requisite privacy or data security protections.

Don’t

Assume that your institution’s lack of knowledge about an employee’s use of cloud services would relieve the institution of its privacy and data security obligations.

Sign or electronically agree to a cloud services agreement without consulting your legal department.

Assume that all privacy and data security laws apply to all IT functions.

Assume that moving to the cloud somehow lessens or transfers to the cloud provider your institution’s responsibility for privacy and data security compliance.

Sign an agreement that does not require the cloud provider to maintain at least commercially reasonable data security standards or, ideally, no less protection than your institution provides on the ground (assuming that applicable law does not require a more stringent standard).

Assume that the cloud provider’s security protections are either better or worse than your institution’s on-the-ground data security protections.

Forget that free services often involve secondary uses of data.

Necessarily refuse to contract with a cloud provider who will not disclose the location of its servers because associated risks may be manageable through contract terms.

Sign a contract that allows a cloud provider to unilaterally change its terms.

Assume that transitioning from one cloud provider to another will be easy.

Expect to be able to negotiate the ideal contract with all cloud providers.

Assume that failure either to find a suitable public cloud provider or to obtain a suitable agreement means that the IT function can never move to the cloud.

CONCLUSION

Privacy and data security requirements pose a compliance challenge to cloud computing. But that challenge is not insurmountable. Institutions must understand that whatever their privacy and data security obligations on the ground, the same requirements apply in the cloud. By planning and contracting accordingly, institutions can take advantage of the tremendous benefits offered by the cloud while managing legal and other risks.

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About the Author

**STEPHANIE GOLD** is a partner and **JOEL BUCKMAN** is an associate at Hogan Lovells US LLP. Both work in Hogan Lovells’ education practice area and its Washington, D.C. office.

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### Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA")

FERPA protects “education records” and provides eligible students with rights of privacy, access, and correction for such records.1

- **Education Records**—broadly defined to include “any information recorded in any way” that is (i) directly related to a student, and (ii) maintained by an institution or by a party acting for an institution.2
- **Right of Privacy**—FERPA prohibits the disclosure of “personally identifiable information” from education records without a student’s signed, written consent.3
- **Right of Access**—FERPA requires institutions to allow students to inspect their education records or to provide copies of such records within a “reasonable period of time” but no later than 45 days of such request. An institution may charge a copying fee but not a retrieval or inspection fee.4
- **Right of Correction**—FERPA requires institutions to permit students to request amendment of education records; if, after a hearing, the institution refuses to correct a record, a student has the right to attach an explanation that must be transmitted with the record.5

### Applicability and Basic Protections

Whenever education records are disclosed, it is advisable to include some contractual language regarding FERPA compliance. The precise terms recommended or required may vary with the exception to the consent requirement upon which the institution relies. For example, assuming the institution discloses information to the cloud provider under the “school officials” with a “legitimate educational interest” exception, certain contractual requirements would be implicitly required. See “Cloud Computing Notes” below.

### Specific Privacy and/or Data Security Contract Provision Required/Recommended?

In general, institutions seeking to move to the cloud can probably rely upon the exception for nonconsensual disclosures to “school officials” who have a “legitimate educational interest” in such records. Cloud providers likely qualify when—

- The institution outsources a service or function for which the institution would otherwise use employees;
- The contractor is under the direct control of the agency or institution with respect to the use and maintenance of education records (for example, by contractually requiring data security, specifying that the institution owns the information, and by requiring periodic audits for contract compliance);6
- The disclosure of PII to the contractor is conditioned on a contractor’s promise not to re-disclose the information without the students’ consent and that the officers, employees, and agents of the contractor will use the information only for the purposes for which the disclosure was made;7
- The contractor has physical, technological, and/or administrative controls to limit access by its employees only to education records in which they have a legitimate educational interest;8 and
- The institution’s annual FERPA notice defines “school officials” to include contractors.

Institutions should seek guarantees that the provider will comply with all FERPA requirements (for example, service levels that would ensure the right of access; capability to attach student explanations to records as appropriate).

### Cloud Computing Notes

The GLBA applies to institutions meeting the definition of “financial institutions” which includes institutions that engage in common financial activities such as making, brokering or servicing loans.54

The GLBA protects “nonpublic personal information,” which means “personally identifiable financial information” and “any list, description, or other grouping of consumers that is derived using any personally identifiable financial information that is not publicly available.”55

The GLBA has two principle protections: (1) a Privacy Rule (governs the use and disclosure of nonpublic personal information) and (2) a Safeguards Rule (requires a data security program).

- **Privacy Rule**—colleges and universities that comply with FERPA are deemed compliant with the GLBA’s privacy rule, at least with respect to student records.56
- **Safeguards Rule**—requires financial institutions to develop, implement, and maintain a comprehensive, written information security program, which contains administrative, technical, and physical safeguards that are appropriate to the institution’s size and complexity.57

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2. 34 C.F.R. § 99.3.
3. Id. § 99.31.
4. Id. §§ 99.10, 99.11.
6. Id. § 99.31(a)(4).
7. Id. § 99.33(a)(5).
8. Id. § 99.33(g).
9. Id. § 99.33.

10. At first, this criterion seems problematic because cloud providers are not under the direct physical or even administrative control of institutions. Institutions can probably comply with this requirement, however, using contractual guarantees. Such guarantees should create the contractual equivalent of direct control.

11. Id. § 99.33(a)(6).
12. Id. § 99.31(a).
15. 16 C.F.R. §§ 314.2(b) 313.3(n).
16. 16 C.F.R § 313.1(b); 65 Fed. Reg. 33,646, 33,648 ("The Commission has noted in its final rule, therefore, that institutions of higher education that are complying with FERPA to protect the privacy of their student financial aid records will be deemed to be in compliance with the Commission’s rule.").
Yes, the Security Rule requires financial institutions to “[o]versee service providers” by “(1) Taking reasonable steps to select and retain service providers that are capable of maintaining appropriate safeguards for the customer information at issue; and (2) Requiring...service providers by contract to implement and maintain such safeguards.”18

In most cases, the critical GLBA component for cloud computing will be to ensure compliance with the Safeguards Rule. To do so, institutions should exercise diligence in selecting and retaining providers and by obtaining contractual guarantees to ensure that the provider is implementing an information security program that is at least as effective or better than the institution’s on-the-ground program. Even when the Privacy Rule does apply to institutions—e.g., when an institution acts as a “financial institution” to faculty—the Privacy Rule ordinarily should not prohibit institutions from moving to the cloud because the GLBA allows disclosures to service providers (provided appropriate notice is given and the provider is obligated not to disclose further or use the information other than to carry out the purposes for which the information is disclosed).19

In general, the Red Flags Rule requires, among other things, that

(1) Debit and credit card issuers develop protocols to assess the validity of change-of-address requests that are followed closely by a request for an additional or replacement card;21

(2) Users of consumer reports must develop reasonable protocols to apply when they receive notices of address discrepancies from a consumer reporting agency;22 and

(3) “Financial institutions” and “creditors” holding “covered accounts” must develop and implement a written identity theft prevention program “in connection with the opening of a covered account or any existing covered account.”23 “Covered accounts” are generally consumer accounts involving multiple payments or transactions, including a loan that is billed monthly.24

The second and third provisions ensure many institutions, because, for example, institutions participate in the Federal Perkins Loan program, offer institutional loans to students, faculty, or staff, or offer tuition payment plans. The regulations distinguish “stored value cards” from debit or credit cards so the first provision may not apply to all student ID cards that students use to purchase goods or services.

When a college or university is a “financial institution” and thus obligated to implement a data security plan, the provider should agree to provide at least as rigorous an identity theft prevention program (as tailored to its specific function) as the college or university. But the Red Flags Rule requires no specific contractual language or obligation.25 Instead, the regulations and guidance allow flexible business arrangements, so long as the service provider’s identity theft prevention is sufficient to meet the financial institution’s or creditor’s obligations under the Red Flags Rules. Also, if an institution is not a “financial institution,” depending on the nature of the services the cloud provider performs, an institution may retain control over all necessary personnel and processes to ensure compliance. For example, an institution that uses consumer reports likely still would retain complete ability to develop reasonable protocols to respond to address discrepancies in the cloud.

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18 16 C.F.R. § 314.4(d).
19 16 C.F.R. § 313.13.
21 16 C.F.R. § 681.2.
22 16 C.F.R. § 681.2.
23 16 C.F.R. § 681.2.
24 16 C.F.R. § 681.10(c).
25 Interagency guidance provides that this includes “take[n]ing steps to ensure that the activity of the service provider is conducted in accordance with reasonable policies and procedures designed to detect, prevent, and mitigate the risk of identity theft,” which may include contractually obligating the provider to comply with the institution’s Red Flags program.
26 16 C.F.R. § 314.4(d).
27 “Financial institutions or creditors may find it helpful to require a service provider, by contract, to have policies and procedures to detect relevant red flags that may arise in the performance of the service provider’s activities and either report the red flags to the financial institution or creditor or take its own appropriate steps to prevent or mitigate identity theft. See Section VI(c) of the Guidelines,” FTC, “Frequently Asked Questions: Identity Theft Red Flags and Address Discrepancies,” www.ftc.gov/os/2009/06/090615redflagsfaq.pdf.
Applicability and Basic Protections

Applies to any “covered entity,” which includes certain healthcare providers that engage in standard transactions (typically because it electronically bills third party payors). Generally, when a college or university healthcare clinic treats students, FERPA, not HIPAA/HITECH, will apply. HIPAA/HITECH applies to student healthcare clinics when they treat non-students, such as faculty members, and to affiliated university hospitals (because they generally do not provide care to students on behalf of a college or university). HIPAA/HITECH protects protected health information (“PHI”) which is broadly defined to include even just demographic information when provided by or to a covered entity. It protects PHI through the Privacy and Security Rule. The Privacy Rule generally prohibits unauthorized disclosure and secondary use of PHI; the Security Rule requires physical, technical and organizational data security safeguards. The Security Rule applies to electronic protected health information and requires a robust set of data security requirements. HITECH also imposes a federal data breach notification requirement.

Specific Privacy and/or Data Security Contract Provision Required/Recommended?

Yes, if the cloud provider qualifies as a business associate, then a business associate agreement (“BAA”) is required.

Cloud Computing Notes

Whether a service provider qualifies as a business associate typically depends on whether it receives or has access to PHI obtained from the covered entity. Note that HIPAA provides a regulatory exception to the business associate requirement for “certain private couriers and their electronic equivalents that act merely as conduits for protected health information.” In certain cases, a cloud provider may qualify for this exception, but it is extremely narrow. The HIPAA Privacy Rule restricts the use of PHI for marketing purposes without the patient’s consent. In addition to contractual obligations required by BAAs, the HITECH Act imposes a number of the Privacy Rule Requirements and nearly all of the Security Rule requirements directly on business associates. This does not abrogate or otherwise undermine a covered entity’s obligations under HIPAA.

State Data Breach Notification Laws

Applicability and Basic Protections

Forty-six states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have some sort of data breach notification law. Typically the laws apply to electronic records containing sensitive information; many contain some sort of risk-of-harm threshold. In all cases, service providers, such as cloud providers, have an obligation to notify the data owner (here, the institution) of a data breach; the law requires the data owner to make relevant notifications to customers.

Specific Privacy and/or Data Security Contract Provision Required/Recommended?

Always recommended; whether required varies by state.

Cloud Computing Notes

When selecting a cloud service provider, the institution should contractually obligate the cloud provider to give the data owner timely notice of any potential data breach and should dictate who will be responsible for costs associated with the data breach (for example, notification, legal, investigation, and reputational costs).

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### State Data Security Laws

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicability and Basic Protections</th>
<th>Several states—including, for example, California, Arkansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, and Utah—have laws that impose data security requirements; some of the laws require that security requirements be passed along to vendors by contract.(^{40}) Massachusetts has the most restrictive state legal regime. Unlike others, it imposes specific data security requirements, including administrative, technical, and physical safeguards and specific encryption requirements, for electronic records containing personal information.(^{41}) The Massachusetts law purports to apply to any entity that owns, licenses, or stores data of a Massachusetts resident.(^{42}) The other common jurisdictional hook for state data security laws is when an institution “does business” within the state.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific Privacy and/or Data Security Contract Provision Required/Recommended?</td>
<td>Always recommended; whether required varies by state. Massachusetts, for example, requires that businesses “take reasonable steps to select and retain” third-party service providers and to require such providers by contract to implement and maintain appropriate security measures for personal information.(^{43}) Together, these provisions could be read to require audits or assessments of cloud providers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloud Computing Notes</td>
<td>Institutions should carefully assess the regulatory risk from state data security laws. In some cases, even though the laws may technically apply to certain records because the state asserts jurisdiction over any entity that licenses information from a state resident, the risk may be small due to a limited number of data owners from that state. When state data security laws apply, institutions should impose by contract the data security requirements required of the institution and obtain some indemnification from the cloud provider. Note that cloud provider’s lack of transparency may render it difficult to obtain the requisite assurances that the provider satisfies the requirements.</td>
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### State Privacy Laws

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Applicability and Basic Protections</th>
<th>Many states have statutory and/or common law privacy requirements. States may have specific privacy laws for education records, health records, mental health records, or others.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific Privacy and/or Data Security Contract Provision Required/Recommended?</td>
<td>Always recommended; whether required varies by state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloud Computing Notes</td>
<td>As with other privacy laws, institutions should be especially attuned to restrictions on secondary use (that is, assuming the institution may disclose the information to a cloud provider, whether the cloud provider may use or disclose the information for purposes other than to provide the cloud services to the institution).</td>
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In the September 24, 2012 issue of The New Yorker, a cartoon shows a college student speaking with a staff member in the Student Accounts Office. The student asks, “How much would it cost if I don’t take classes but just live in the dorm with a meal plan?” Is this an absurd question or one laced with the possibility that Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) may alter forever the higher education landscape as we know it today.

Hardly a day goes by when MOOCs and their potential to reach millions of students worldwide are not mentioned. Neither does a day go by without some article about the dire state of higher education in the United States, the unsustainable business model of many colleges and universities, the unmanageable student debt of many college graduates, and the need for reform. Are MOOCs one answer to some of the big questions facing colleges and universities not just in the United States but around the world? Let’s examine some of the evidence to date.

Udacity, created by Stanford University professor Sebastian Thrun, delivers free courses to students in the United States and abroad. (Note: Thrun was a leading force behind Google’s driverless car.) More than 160,000 students enrolled in Udacity’s first course, “Introduction to Artificial Intelligence.” Udacity now offers eleven courses, and Colorado State University recently announced that it will accept transfer credit from Udacity.

edX, founded by MIT professor Anont Agarival, is pioneering efforts to make online education a viable al-
ternative for hundreds of millions of prospective students worldwide. Agarival, along with colleagues from Harvard, is engaged in a $60 million collaboration that could alter the academic landscape more dramatically than almost any pedagogic innovation since the lecture. Courses are free (for now) and not for credit (for now).

In February, edX offered a course in circuits and electronics. More than 150,000 students registered, 9,300 passed the midterm, 8,200 took the final, and 7,000 earned a passing grade. Of the 80 percent of students surveyed, two-thirds reported that taking the course online was better than taking a similar course in the classroom; only 1 percent reported it was worse. Of the students who took the course, 37 percent had an undergraduate degree, 28 percent had a master’s degree, and 6 percent had a doctorate. The 30 percent who did not have a bachelor’s degree included students in high school (5 percent of all enrolled students) and students in college (4 percent of all enrolled students). The oldest student was 74 and the youngest was 14; half were 26 or older.

Coursera is a year-old company founded by two Stanford University computer scientists. Among its 33 partners in the United States and abroad are the University of Michigan, Princeton University, California Institute of Technology, Duke University, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of London, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the University of British Columbia. Coursera offers 200 courses to more than 1.35 million students from 196 countries. Only one-third of the students live in the United States; the majority live in India, China, and Brazil.

Still other online providers of education are Udemy and Straighterline; doubtless, other providers are yet to enter the market.

If we consider what the Khan Academy is doing with middle and high school curricula, it should not be a surprise that the next logical stop for massive online education is at the college and university level. Salman Khan is a 35-year-old former hedge-fund manager turned YouTube professor. His more than 3,000 digital lectures could fundamentally change the role of teachers in the classroom and redefine the concept of homework. In Khan’s “classroom,” students learn at their own pace and move on to the next lesson only when they have mastered the concept that precedes it. As of July 2012, 600 million exercises had been completed by millions of students in more than 15,000 classrooms in more than 200 countries.

Despite being in their infancy, MOOCs have the potential to become a global higher education game changer. Employers may come to recognize MOOCs as an alternative credential to the traditional three- or four-year degree. They may consider a certificate of completion from
a world-class institution as a better indicator of the skills needed for success than a degree from a second- or third-tier college or university. Some international students may think it better to stay at home and take a MOOC than spend thousands of dollars to attend an international school. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is exploring the potential of offering MOOCs to low-income students. At present, we simply do not know where MOOCs can and will take higher education. Nevertheless, consider what we do know about higher education in the United States today.

In *That Used To Be Us*, authors Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum posit that the future of the United States rests firmly on the shoulders of our education system. However, the authors report that only 25 percent of high school graduates who enroll in an undergraduate degree program are prepared for college-level work. Approximately 40 percent are required to take remedial classes. Only 60 percent will graduate in six years, and only 20 percent of community college students will graduate in three years. Students today have college completion rates almost identical to those of their parents. Retention rates have not increased. Graduation rates are unchanged. Even after graduating from college, some employees cannot master the skills needed for the jobs of today and the future. Companies spend more than $3 billion annually on remedial training. The book cites many additional negative statistics, all indications that unless things change—in a big way—the United States will continue to fall further and further behind other countries’ college and university graduates. According to Friedman, “Big breakthroughs happen when what is suddenly possible meets what is desperately necessary.” Could that apply to MOOCs?

If we agree that some risk taking and big ideas are needed and that MOOCs—in some form and to a greater or lesser extent—will be embraced by higher education officials, then how could MOOCs affect the following?

- Accreditation agencies
- Book publishers
- Federal and state subsidies
- Rating agencies
- Advanced Placement exams
- Enrollment and retention managers
- Branch campuses
- National and international recruiters
- Career counselors
- Chief financial officers
- Facilities managers
- IT managers
- Students
- Faculty
- Venture capitalists
- For-profit schools
- Etc.!

**ACCREDITATION AGENCIES**

On September 21, 2012, the Heritage Foundation published an article on the current state of accreditation. Authors Lindsey Burke and Stuart Butler make the case for why accreditation should change and why the process is self-serving and archaic. They argue that accreditation, in its current form, makes it almost impossible for new education paradigms to flourish. The process of accrediting a school is complicated, expensive, and time consuming. The system, they insist, is rigid and inflexible and measures the wrong things—for example, the number of books in the library and the number of faculty with terminal degrees. In effect, accreditation focuses on academic inputs, not outcomes. A shift from in-coming benchmarks (e.g., SAT scores and high school GPAs of incoming freshmen) to outcomes (e.g., employment after graduation and alumni satisfaction) is already taking place.

MOOCs do not fit into the current accreditation model. What will happen to accreditation if employers begin to accept MOOC completion as a greater predictor of employee success than a college diploma? What if the federal and state governments begin to support and fund MOOCs? What if more and more schools accept MOOCs for transfer credit? Is it reasonable to assume that some of the benchmarks used by accreditation agencies will, of necessity, have to change?

**BOOK PUBLISHERS**

Consider the potential of thousands of students taking a MOOC with a required text. What would be the profit margin of 5,000 students paying $10 or $20 for a textbook as opposed to 25 students paying $80 for the same book? It should come as no surprise that Pearson, the education publishing company, is already involved with MOOC providers.
FEDERAL AND STATE SUBSIDIES
In the current system, accredited colleges and universities are permitted to receive federal and state subsidies. What if the federal and/or state governments begin to recognize and fund MOOCs? Some states have already made this possible. The Western Governors University offers an online competency-based degree, and the University of Wisconsin will begin to offer a competency-based degree called the Flexible Degree Program. In *The Innovative University*, authors Clayton Christensen and Henry Eyring describe the education paradigm offered at Brigham Young University-Idaho, where students can graduate with technical certificates in core courses for an attractive tuition rate.

Could college participation, retention, and graduation rates be increased by making MOOCs available to everyone? How could this possibility help meet the future employment need of the country? What is the big economic impact of a better-educated workforce? These are reasonable questions to ask; after all, it is not a stretch to link MOOCs with increased rates of college-level enrollment in courses offered by some of the best universities in the world.

RATING AGENCIES
Imagine that the measures used by most current rating agencies were flipped so that instead of measuring incoming statistics such as high school GPAs and standardized test scores, they measured what actually happened to a student after attending college or taking a MOOC. How much time and money have been spent trying to move a school up a notch in the (in)famous *U.S. News and World Report*? How many college presidents or enrollment managers have lost their jobs because they either refused or failed to play the rating game? What if admissions recruiters were asked about their institutions’ employment rates after graduation and their alumni networking program rather than their rankings? MOOCs have the potential to alter the way colleges and universities—and their potential “clients”—measure their success.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT EXAMINATIONS
What if, instead of taking AP examinations, high school students took a MOOC and “passed” with a certification of competency? And what if the school of choice recognized for transfer credit a certificate from edX or Coursera? Would AP examinations continue to exist? Remember that 5 percent (more than 7,000) of the students who took the edX circuits and electronics course were in high school.

ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION MANAGERS
At many colleges and universities, enrollment managers and staff in this division (e.g., admissions counselors, financial aid officers, and registrars) are responsible for maintaining the financial bottom line with regard to future and current enrollment. For years, these managers have warned about declining demographics, unsustainable student debt levels, and poor retention rates. They have written and implemented strategic national and international recruitment plans in an attempt to meet their schools’ financial needs. Some enrollment managers maintain that the pie is getting smaller every year. But could the introduction of some online or hybrid course offerings help affect enrollment and financial stability? Wouldn’t that make the pie larger, not smaller, and change the way students enroll in, finance, and register for courses? What if some hybrid and flexible course scheduling could take place? In *The Innovative University*, the authors suggest that classes should be held throughout the year across three enrollment registration periods: fall, spring, and summer. Doubtless this would radically change the administrative functions of the enrollment and student services offices. As a former enrollment and retention manager, I envision endless new and exciting possibilities. I believe it would open up new markets and cohorts of students and would grow the pie in ways that enrollment managers cannot possibly do now.

BRANCH CAMPUSES
What about the future of the branch campus and the international education hubs sprouting all over the world? Could MOOCs affect that enterprise? Older and well-established branch campuses may survive, but newer ones may already be in jeopardy. On September 12, 2012, an article in *USA Today* pictured high school students in Mongolia in a lab offered by a Stanford graduate student. Two of the students earned As in the course without ever leaving Mongolia!

CAREER COUNSELORS
I have always maintained that the office of career services should have a dual reporting structure to enrollment management and alumni affairs. This office will become more
important as government and higher education officials stress outcomes—including employment after graduation and alumni satisfaction. What would happen to career counseling if employers began to recognize the importance of what MOOCs measure—i.e., competency in a particular subject and proof of mastery of certain concepts? How many career counselors are preparing for that possibility and meeting with employers to determine the potential for that recognition? Employer information could and should be communicated to admissions recruiters and prospective students and parents and shared with the school’s alumni. MOOCs would expand the current functions of the career counseling office.

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICERS
Higher education is a big business: The World Bank estimates that higher education worldwide is a $400 billion industry. It is also a business that is wrapped around every corner of the globe. It is impossible to know how many small colleges and universities are in serious financial straits. The effects of “the great recession” will reverberate for years to come. In the October 2012 issue of Oprah, financial counselor Suze Orman writes that investing in your child’s college degree is not a great investment. She explains that only an affordable college degree is a great investment and therefore advises families to evaluate average debt levels before enrolling. Cumulative student debt exceeds $1 trillion, and the average college graduate leaves school with an average debt of $23,000. This is not sustainable. The current business model is outmoded. What would the introduction of some hybrid courses or MOOCs do for a school’s bottom line? How many chief financial officers consider the introduction of this type of education delivery not only reasonable but also essential to their schools’ financial viability? What if MOOCs made it possible to unbundle costs? What if MOOCs kept students in school longer and increased progression and graduation rates? CFOs are numbers people. They can—and should—do the math.

FACILITIES MANAGERS
I have supervised my fair share of college tours. Tour guides are always told to emphasize the latest addition to the school’s physical facilities—the new dorm with marble floors, the climbing wall, the food court that takes reservations. Anyone with a college-age child can identify. But what if more and more students take MOOCs and don’t care about special facilities? How much money could be saved by not having the latest and most trendy amenity? How will facility managers re-invent the responsibilities of their jobs? I am not suggesting that MOOCs will mean the end of the need for facilities management. Rather, I am asserting that this part of the higher education enterprise will change.

IT MANAGERS
In order to make hybrid courses or MOOCs a viable option, the staff in charge of technology will have to move to the forefront of the higher education pyramid. Nothing can happen without this part of the administrative staff being up to speed on how technology can take a college or university from the norm of today to the possibility of tomorrow. Any strategic plan that includes offering online courses should identify technology staff as key players in the plan’s implementation.

STUDENTS
How could we begin to project the impact of hybrid courses and MOOCs on students? Consider Jack, a high school junior, a whiz in math. He decides, during the summer before his senior year, to take one of the many MOOCs offered by an online provider. He registers and “passes” the course. He decides to take another MOOC in physics. Again he is successful. Jack is pleased to learn that he has been accepted to his first-choice college and that it will award transfer credit for the two MOOCs he has already taken. Jack’s first semester goes well. His grades earn him a spot on the dean’s list. But during the winter break, Jack gets sick and is advised not to return to school for the spring semester. No problem: Jack signs up for three additional MOOCs that are transferable and attends school from home. By May, Jack is better and decides to “enroll” in the summer semester. He is pleased that two of the courses he had planned to take in the spring are offered in the summer; one year after enrolling in college, Jack moves comfortably into sophomore status. By his senior year, Jack has met all of the requirements for graduation and can add several MOOCs to his resume. He is advised by the career counseling staff that several employers would be interested in interviewing him because of his grades and
his successful record of MOOC completion. Jack is hired by the second company that interviews him. His student debt at the time of graduation is $9,000. Is there really such a student as Jack? Maybe not today, but I would not rule out the possibility of there being many Jacks in the future.

**FACULTY**

In Khan’s “flipped classroom,” teachers act as facilitators and mentors, not lecturers. They will be the implementers of what Christensen and Eyring call “customized learning.” Professors will work directly with students instead of presenting “one-size-fits-all” lectures. To be certain, many professors will not be able to adjust to the new methods of teaching. Nor will every course be better because it is offered as a MOOC. But it seems safe to say that in the future some portion of the work of the academy will move from the all-lecture method to some online instruction. How many provosts, chief academic officers, and department chairs are preparing their faculty for this inevitable change?

**VENTURE CAPITALISTS**

Higher education is a big business. And wherever there is a big business, there are people who will want to profit from it. For now, most MOOCs are offered at no or little cost. How long will that be possible? What will happen when venture capitalists inject huge sums of money into this enterprise? Inevitably, return on investment will become part of the new business model. Udacity is supported by a venture capital firm. In a new report, Moody’s Investors Service calls MOOCs a “pivotal development” that has the potential to revolutionize higher education. Wall Street investors are monitoring the MOOC phenomena closely.

**FOR-PROFIT SCHOOLS**

It does not require much imagination to project the impact of MOOCs on for-profit schools like the University of Phoenix. If a student has the ability to take an online course offered by Stanford or MIT and if the courses are cheaper, transferable, and financial aid–eligible, why would she take the same course from the University of Phoenix?

**CONCLUSION**

Several years ago I wrote *A Practical Guide to Enrollment and Retention Management in Higher Education*. I began by quoting Francis Wayland, president of Brown University, who wrote in 1850: “Our colleges are not filled because we do not furnish the education desired by the people. We have produced an article for which demand is diminishing. We sell it at less than cost, and the deficiency is made up by charity. We give it away, and the demand still diminishes.”

Higher education in the United States is changing and will continue to do so. Its costs cannot keep rising as they have for the past twenty years. Federal and state governments, as well as parents and students, can no longer afford a product that increases at a rate more than twice the Consumer Price Index every year. The business models that have been in place at colleges and universities for the past 50 years are no longer appropriate given the nation’s changing demographics and economy. Education is an economic issue that is at the heart of restoring America’s place as a global leader. Employers are in search of applicants who are innovative and creative and who can work in an integrated and collaborative environment. College graduates should have effective oral and written communication skills. Friedman and Mandelbaum—and others—assert that we need to harmonize what students study in school with what the workplace needs.

The jury is still out on the efficacy and impact of online learning, hybrid learning, and MOOCs, all of which are in the experimental stage. Questions remain, particularly about awarding credentials and cheating. But solutions are being found. Pearson allows students to take proctored final examinations for Udacity courses, and it plans to do the same next year for edX courses. Pushback from higher education is no longer an acceptable option.

Some argue that online learning is disruptive. Others claim that precisely because it is disruptive, MOOCs offer the best hope for the future of our students and our country. For now, the apparent winners are the elite U.S. colleges and universities that enjoy national and international recognition. Smaller, non-elite schools may be in jeopardy if they cannot figure out some way to participate. Any entrepreneurial school should be able to figure out how best to become a player in online learning.

MOOCs will not replace colleges and universities. They will supplement—not replace—traditional higher education. They have the potential to solve some of the big problems facing higher education, to include unsustainable costs, unmanageable student debt, college participation.
rates, unchanged retention and graduation rates, and fierce competition from other countries. And for these reasons, online learning, hybrid learning, and MOOCs should be supported by the higher education community, by federal and state officials, and by accreditation agencies.

These are both exciting and challenging times for higher education participants—families, faculty, and administrators alike. Federal and state officials and accreditation agencies need to make some difficult decisions. Change is always a cause for alarm; change makes everyone feel uncomfortable. This is true for MOOCs. Offering courses online to the entire world will disrupt the “old order,” the way colleges and universities are managed and the way students are taught.

This article describes only a fraction of the possibilities for change posed by MOOCs. To be certain, more change and further disruption will be inevitable if MOOCs catch on and migrate worldwide. To quote Lincoln Steffens, “I have been over into the future, and it works.”

REFERENCES

About the Author
MARGUERITE J. DENNIS has been a higher education administrator for more than 30 years, first at St. John’s University in New York, then at Georgetown University in D.C. and at Suffolk University in Boston. Dennis is a nationally recognized expert on creating sustainable enrollment and retention management programs, and designing strategic international recruitment plans. She is the author of more than 50 articles on higher education and has appeared on national television, including CBS and PBS. Dennis has lectured throughout the United States and abroad on enrollment and retention management. She helped to found two colleges abroad, and has served as a consultant to colleges and universities in the United States and around the world. She is the author of “Developing a Sustainable Retention and Student Success Program,” published in April 2012, by Magna Publications.
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IN INTERNATIONAL ADMISSIONS

IN A RELATIVELY SHORT TIME, TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS HAVE BECOME AN ESSENTIAL FEATURE OF THE ADMISSIONS BUSINESS. THEY MAKE THE JOBS OF INTERNATIONAL ADMISSIONS PROFESSIONALS EASIER IN MANY WAYS, ALLOWING FOR MORE ROBUST COMMUNICATION WITH APPLICANTS AND COUNSELORS, A STREAMLINED APPLICATION PROCESS, AND QUICKER ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS. HOWEVER, TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS ARE NOT A PANACEA. THE EXPENSE AND STAFF TIME NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT THEM MEAN THAT OFFICES MAY NOT BE ABLE TO EMBRACE EVERY TREND. ASSESSING THE NEEDS OF YOUR OFFICE AND YOUR APPLICANTS IS A CRITICAL PART OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.
As recently as the late 1990s, many international admissions officers at U.S. colleges and universities relied on traditional postal services in order to communicate with applicants. While email and the Internet had existed for years, they had become broadly available in the United States only in the early 1990s. By the latter part of that decade, the telecommunications infrastructure was improving abroad, but was not yet mature enough to allow for reliable communication, particularly in developing countries such as China and India, which, then and now, send large numbers of international students to the United States (Press, Foster, Wolcott, and McHenry 2003).

The now-common term “snail mail” accurately describes the slow pace of first-class mail delivery between most countries. Consider the cycle of a typical international student’s application using regular mail: By the time an application is mailed and received, the institution acknowledges the application, and any missing documents are subsequently submitted to complete the application, eight weeks or more may go by. When mailing time for acceptance and enrollment packets is added, the three- to four-month turnaround time that was once the norm is understandable.

The way colleges communicate with prospective students—so crucial to the business of admissions—is just one example of the way the international admissions process has been changed by technology. Other technological trends of the last decade have also had an impact. The development
of more sophisticated student information systems has given admissions offices better tools with which to admit applicants and then track those admitted students throughout their university careers. Online applications dump applicant information into these systems, reducing staff time devoted to data entry. These systems, in turn, feed data warehouses, which give easier access to information about applicants, allowing for better trend analysis.

In fact, today it is impossible to imagine doing business without email, the Web, and other forms of technology that have grown up in their wake. Technology is now an essential part of recruiting, admitting, and enrolling international students at American colleges and universities. In and of itself, however, technology is not a panacea. In order to use it most effectively, you must understand the needs of your campus and of your prospective students, as well as be aware of current technological trends.

**ASSESSING YOUR NEEDS**

Not every campus will have the resources, the staff, or the will to take advantage of every new technology; nor should they. As with any significant investment, enrollment managers must feel confident that the perceived benefit will be worth the investment. One of the most salient factors of technology is its rapid pace of change. The newest trend this year may be passé in a year’s time; the most amazing new equipment will be obsolete in fewer than five years. Unless an institution is blessed with unlimited resources, it is not possible to embrace every new trend. Choices must be made. Several factors should be considered when making these choices.

**Budget**

One paradox of the technology available to admissions professionals is that it is both expensive and inexpensive. Certainly, the constant upgrades in hardware (computers, printers, scanners, copiers, etc.) require significant, ongoing investment. Software, however, can be relatively cheap and offer good bang for the buck (as with desktop publishing or Web design programs), or it can be enormously expensive (as with new student information system packages or enterprise resource planning systems [ERPs]). Offices that adopt a “do-it-yourself” approach, using the amateur talents of existing staff to create websites, maintain blogs, or create podcasts or video clips can have a fairly sophisticated marketing campaign without a huge investment. On the other hand, professional marketing companies that specialize in the higher education arena can take these homegrown efforts to new heights—for a cost. Developing a detailed enrollment plan in conjunction with your budget will help determine where money can most effectively be spent.

**IT Support**

The support of information technology staff is critical to the smooth functioning of any professional office. When considering which IT initiatives to embrace, consider the staff support that will be required. If you have IT staff members in your office, you may have more ability to influence their priorities. For example, if you want to establish a presence on various social networking sites, internal staff can probably do it; in fact, you do not even need to rely on IT staff for this kind of basic initiative. Some projects, however, will need to be addressed by institutional IT staff. If you need to revamp your website, for example, you may have to depend upon your campus Web master, which could dictate a longer timeline.

Whether you have in-house dedicated IT staff members, or rely on the institution’s central IT professionals, remember that many technology projects require not only start-up time, but also maintenance. In the social networking example above, you need to remember that once your school’s profile is up, someone will need to be dedicated to keeping it up-to-date.

**Size of Applicant Pool**

Campuses with a small number of international students may find that it is not worthwhile to embrace every trend. If you are processing only one hundred international applications per year, you probably do not need the most sophisticated database software. You also could decide to put less emphasis on marketing efforts that rely on impersonal email blasts or e-flyers; a more personalized approach may be possible, and also more effective.

**Applicant Access**

As web-based communication and email have become more prevalent, staff in international admissions had to become cognizant of the difference between Web access and speed in the U.S. versus the rest of the world. In recent years,
the telecommunication infrastructure in many developing parts of the world has improved immensely. Many students today have access both to computers and high-speed Internet connections, particularly in the metropolitan areas of the countries that send the largest numbers of international students to the United States. This makes browsing websites with graphical content or applying online much easier than it was even five years ago. However, in rural regions of these countries, as well as in other parts of the world (such as Africa), students may not find it so easy. Even in some developed countries, connections will be slower than in the United States. And, in some cases, access may be controlled by the government, preventing your information from reaching its intended audience. Remember that the way a certain application performs on your state-of-the-art office computer (with high-speed Internet access) may not be experienced the same way by your applicants.

If your college’s international applicant pool is made up largely of the typical prospective international student—city dwellers in India, China, and Korea—then issues of applicant access may be less important. However, schools with pockets of applicants from rural regions or other countries should research access issues for their specific feeder areas. Become knowledgeable about what your applicants are experiencing. If your campus recruits overseas, ask your recruiters to research this in-country. Certainly they will have some sense of access from using the Internet themselves while on the road. Since large Western hotel chains may have better Internet speed than that experienced by the average citizen at home, school, or in an Internet café, your recruiters should also talk to students, parents, counselors, and educational advisors about their ability to use the Internet and your school’s website in particular. If your school does not recruit overseas, develop a survey (low on graphics) to be sent to your applicants by email. Or, ask current students about Internet access issues in their home countries. With more information about what your “customers” are experiencing, you will be able to make educated decisions about how to structure your website and your communication plan.
COMMUNICATING WITH PROSPECTS AND APPLICANTS

One of the great advantages of electronic communication is its speed. Particularly for those who must interact with people all over the world, the way email and the Internet have sped up the delivery of the messages we must send to our students, and they in turn to us, is an amazing thing to behold. When developing a communication plan for your prospects and applicants, there are several facets to consider.

Websites

One of the most important recruiting tools for any college or university today is its website. In years past, a prospective student’s introduction to your campus was often the first printed piece he or she received in the mail. Now, students immediately go to the Web when they want to find out more information about your school. What will international students find when they visit your campus online? If your site has been designed only with typical U.S. Internet users in mind, including lots of graphics and multimedia applications (such as Flash), it is possible that you may be shutting out a pool of prospective students who cannot download portions of your site. As already mentioned, if you have done your research and feel confident that most, if not all, of your visitors can view sophisticated graphical content, then you need not worry. But if you find that access is an issue for some of your prospective students, you may need to become an advocate for a simpler website design. Get to know your campus’s Web master, and be sure that he or she is aware of the issues faced by your overseas visitors. Whether it means less use of Flash, simplifying the site’s design (requiring fewer downloads), or, in extreme cases, having a special international student gateway with very few graphics, you may need to educate your IT staff about the needs of your international population.

For many campuses, blogs are now a component of the admissions website. A blog (short for “Web log”) is a site listing the owner’s “posts” or entries, usually in reverse chronological order, along with comments from readers. Its interactive nature is one of its advantages; blogs can be used to create online communities, where students can “meet” before they even arrive on campus. However, this feature can also be worrisome to admissions staff, whose goal, of course, is to portray a positive image of their institution. A true blog is free-flowing, with no moderator or censor. An institution can start a blog and post entries, but it cannot control the comments made by readers. If someone has a negative opinion to express, it will be there for the entire community to read. The good news is that some blogging software allows an owner to moderate the site, with the ability to delete comments and remove users. Before creating a blog, check the rules of the software carefully to be sure that it will meet your needs. Blogger (www.blogger.com) and WordPress (www.wordpress.com) are just two examples of free blogging software sites.

Social media have more recently become another tool in the admissions office’s online arsenal. Many colleges and universities now have profiles on sites like Facebook and MySpace. These profiles may be formal, resembling an institutional website, or they may be set up by individual admissions staff members or student recruiters, with a more informal feel. (Some admissions professionals even find “friend” requests from applicants on their personal Facebook profiles; whether to accept these requests recently became a hot topic as an older demographic embraced Facebook for personal use [Anderson 2009]). Twitter is also gaining in popularity, as colleges establish accounts and ask their prospects or applicants to “follow” them. Either way, the point of having a presence on these sites is all about marketing: social networking is one more way to put your institution’s name out there for the college-bound demographic. Furthermore, it is not just Americans who participate on these sites. In 2009, for example, Facebook’s Press Room reported that 70 percent of its members lived outside the United States. It seems clear that prospective international students can be reached via social media.

Email

Email has been a boon to international admissions offices, which now can communicate with individual applicants in a much more timely way than was previously possible. On the other hand, it has created more work. International students often prefer to communicate by email, since it is free and they can send messages at any time. Their anxiety about the application process, and differences in time zones, may cause them to send multiple repeat emails when they do not receive a timely response. Because of the high volume of emails received, most admissions offices now have staff dedicated to monitoring the office email
account and responding to students’ questions. To head off repeated messages, it is a good idea to have an automated reply explaining the typical length of time it takes for your office to respond to a student’s message.

More beneficial has been the ease of sending mass mailings via email. Sending a message to hundreds, or even thousands, of people is fairly simple. Unfortunately, it may be too simple, as anyone who has been spammed (and who hasn’t?) can confirm. Even legitimate email blasts from retailers, banks, college alumni offices, and many other businesses now clutter our inboxes. When using email, colleges and universities must proceed carefully, attempting to maintain a delicate balance between being informative and just plain annoying.

Some have argued that college admissions offices should completely stop sending mass emails (Bonfiglio 2007). There may be a place, however, for judicious use of mass emails with your applicant pool. If a student is truly interested in your institution, they will pay attention when they see the name of your school in the “subject” line (as long as it is not the fifth message they have received from your institution that week). If you reserve your messages for reminders about deadlines or other important information, students should pay attention, and it is still a good way to reach a group of people quickly and efficiently.

Sending attractive, graphical electronic flyers and newsletters does not require extensive knowledge of HTML. With software such as Front Page or Dreamweaver, a novice can easily create a basic website, copy the background coding into an email message, and blast it out to a group of applicants. E-flyers are basic, resembling the reminders you receive from your favorite retailer about an upcoming sale. E-newsletters are more complicated, containing what are essentially links to a series of websites. In both cases, there is a significant cost savings compared to printing and mailing a full-color postcard or newsletter. There is, of course, the start-up cost associated with purchasing the software and training staff, but that expenditure is minimal when you consider the savings over time.

The uses for these electronic forms of communication are practically endless. For prospects, you can send out targeted messages with dates of upcoming recruitment fairs in a given city or country. For applicants, you can send reminders about application, scholarship, or tuition deposit deadlines. For committed students, you can send information about orientation or housing check-in. Universities commonly use this medium to send marketing or branding messages about the institution, although it is here, particularly, where caution must be exercised; too many messages of this nature may cause your applicants to delete future messages.

One other caveat: put a standard statement at the bottom of your messages asking recipients to add your sending address to their list of contacts. This is important so that your messages do not end up in junk mail folders. In addition, as with any email subscription list, you should provide the ability for a recipient to unsubscribe from the mailing list.

Real-Time Communication

In the past, if a student could not come to your office personally, the telephone was the best alternative way to communicate in real time. However, international long-distance rates per minute, especially during business hours, are prohibitively expensive. International admissions offices now have several other alternatives which are available for a much lower cost.

In Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) two parties talk using an Internet connection rather than traditional phone lines. Both users must have computers with microphones and a high-speed Internet connection. Video calls are also possible if one or both users have Web cameras. There is free software available online (such as Skype—www.skype.com) that allows members to talk for free or at international rates that are a fraction of regular long-distance rates. Some of these sites only allow members to talk, meaning that the person you want to call may also need to sign up for the service. Also available are VoIP phone services, such as Vonage, where a monthly fee is paid, allowing you to call anyone, just like your regular phone service. Sound quality is generally good, although problems may occur, especially when calling overseas. Due to sound quality concerns and connection limits, it is not currently feasible for admissions offices to use VoIP exclusively instead of regular long-distance calls. However, it serves as a low-cost way to contact prospects or applicants when a more personal touch may be effective.

Instant messaging (IM) also allows for live communication via the Internet, but it is typed rather than spoken. A number of free IM networks are available, including
Beginning with its inception in 1910, AACRAO has promoted leadership in developing and implementing policy in the global educational community with a focus on the identification and promotion of high standards and best practices.

AACRAO’s International Education Services (IES) serves as a resource center for matters on international education and exchange. All of the evaluators in IES have worked for a number of years at institutions evaluating foreign educational credentials for admission purposes. Our staff of professionals has evaluated thousands of foreign educational credentials, and has an average of 20 years of previous evaluation experience before joining AACRAO, with no staff member having less than seven years of experience. Our extensive archives, built up over 35 years, enable AACRAO to accurately research any educational credential in great depth. Historically, this service started with the AACRAO-US Agency for International Development (us-aid) Cooperative Agreement that began in the mid-1960s.

The Foreign Education Credential Service provides evaluations of educational credentials from all countries of the world, assuring consistent assessment of the qualifications of those persons educated outside the United States. The Foreign Education Credential Service is trusted in the field, and our evaluation reports are designed to help any reader to understand foreign academic credentials.

If you are looking for an easily accessible up-to-date electronic resource on foreign educational systems, the AACRAO Electronic Database for Global Education (EDGE) provides a wealth of information for each country profile in a convenient and consistent form. EDGE is a valuable and trusted tool for both novice and experienced international admissions personnel. The database is being expanded regularly and updated as educational systems change. For more information and to subscribe online visit aacraoedge.aacrao.org/register.
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Contact IES
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 520
Washington, DC 20036-1134
Tel: (202) 293-9161 Fax: (202) 822-3940
www.aacrao.org E-mail: ies@aacrao.org
AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, and Google Talk. Meebo is a newer service that allows members of any IM network to talk to each other, also for free. These conversations can be between two individuals, or they can be among groups of people in chat rooms. Similarly, admissions staff can use IM to communicate with individual applicants, or groups of prospects or applicants. Many campuses now promote IM as one more way for students to contact the admissions office to ask questions or obtain information about the status of their application; a Meebo or other chat window is prominently displayed on their website, and a staff person is available to respond to anyone who wants to chat. Group chats can also be organized and publicized as a way for prospective students to learn more about the campus or to have specific questions answered. In group chats, a number of admissions advisors can answer questions simultaneously, to manage both time and the topics discussed.

Because of the issues involved in sending mass emails to applicants, some colleges are now using cell phone text messaging as another way to reach pools of prospective students. There are several obstacles that could prevent the widespread use of texting by admissions offices. First, cell phone numbers are not commonly collected on recruitment and admission forms at the current time. However, this may change in the near future as more and more students use cell phones as their primary phone. Second, there is often a charge for the recipient of a text message. Mass emails are annoying, but at least you do not pay for them. Student resistance to these charges may limit the usefulness of texting at the current time, but if free texting becomes more common, it may emerge as a feasible way to reach students (Fratt 2006).

TECHNOLOGY IN THE ADMISSION PROCESS

As has been discussed, technology has fundamentally changed the way we communicate with prospective students. However, not only has communication changed; the way we receive and process applications has as well.

Applying Online

Today, applicants expect institutions to have an online application, and most campuses do, either through a form developed in-house using institutional resources, or via a contract with a vendor such as ApplyNow or CollegeNet. A homegrown online form is desirable, since the form will be customized to meet your needs, but it is expensive, both in terms of time and money. By participating in a vendor-developed application, a campus can have the application up and running quickly. Certainly, the cost of such a contract is not insignificant, but may be more easily justified since the costs are borne out over time rather than up front.

It is safe to assume that most students, even (or, perhaps, especially) those living overseas, now prefer to apply online. However, it is still a good idea to have a paper application available. If an applicant does not have his or her own computer and is using one in their school or an Internet cafe, they may not be able to finish a long application in the allotted time. This problem is compounded if the available Internet service has a low bandwidth. In this case, it could take minutes, not seconds, for each page of your application to load. A good “halfway” measure is to have a PDF version of your paper application available on your website. Even if Internet service is slow, at least the file must download only once. The student can then print the application, which also saves time spent waiting for the application form to arrive in the mail.

Databases

Perhaps the most important piece of technology used by an admissions office is its application database. Without an efficient means of gathering and storing information on applicants, it would be difficult to process applications in a timely way.

The database used by administrative offices on college campuses is broadly referred to as a student information system (SIS). The admissions office typically creates the initial student record for this system, either by manually entering data from a paper application or by uploading information submitted by the applicant on a web-based application form. These student records are then used by other administrative offices during that student’s career at the institution. Typically, the admissions office uses the campus’s SIS. However, since it can be difficult to find one software program that will meet the needs of many offices with divergent needs (especially on larger campuses), some offices purchase “shadow” databases to meet their unique needs. Ideally, these software applications will work in conjunction with the SIS, but technical issues
sometimes prevent this, leaving the shadow database with no connection to the larger system.

The international admissions office, in particular, may find that the SIS used by the campus does not meet its needs. Student addresses can present a problem, since foreign addresses rarely fit the standard U.S. format common in American database software. In addition, since the advent of SEVIS, the information tracking now required of international student offices may not be possible within the current SIS.

The major developers of SIS software, however, have been releasing more and more sophisticated products in recent years. As campuses upgrade to newer versions, or move from in-house legacy systems to ERP software, they may find that fewer shadow systems will be necessary. The most important thing to note here is that the international office should have a place at the table as decisions are made about the software applications used on the campus. Because the international population’s needs are unique, they could be overlooked without a strong advocate for a system that can serve the international office.

Application Status Website

Since so many applicants now have access to the Internet, some campuses have developed secure websites that provide application status information to applicants. In order for these sites to be efficient, a link must exist between the database information and the site; you will need the help of IT staff to build this. The advantage of having such a site is that, ideally, it should reduce the number of times that an applicant contacts your office by phone or email to check on the status of his or her application. Whether this is always borne out in reality can be debated. A critical issue here is timing; if a student sends a document to be added to his or her file, and it is not reflected on the site right away, he or she may contact your office anyway to confirm that the document was actually received. (This is especially true of the current “millennial” generation, many of whom expect instant communication, having grown up with technology.) At certain times of year, the admissions office may easily and quickly file and review new documents that are received. The nature of the admissions cycle, however, may make it difficult to match documents efficiently during the peak application period, when most applications are received. If your office is using such a site, make sure to provide applicants with information about the typical turnaround time for new information to be posted to the site.

Document Imaging

Paper is a seemingly inescapable feature of college admissions, especially for those working with international student applications. More and more campuses, however, are reducing their reliance on paper by implementing document imaging systems. Such systems allow scanned images of paper documents to be stored electronically, allowing an entire application to be accessed and reviewed on a computer. There are many benefits to an imaging system. Numerous application reviewers can view and comment on an applicant without waiting for a paper file to be handed to them. If the applicant contacts the admissions office with questions, front-line staff can answer them without tracking down a paper file. Since paper files do not need to be as readily accessible, more compact, locked filing cabinets can be used, saving physical space.

There are numerous vendors offering document imaging software and equipment. If a campus is implementing an ERP, this optional add-on can be integrated into the system. Or, the imaging system can be purchased and integrated with an existing legacy system. Either way, the institution’s IT staff must dedicate significant time and money to ensure that the document imaging system integrates effectively with the admissions system.

The University of Texas at Austin has employed a document imaging system since the mid-1990s, when only a few American universities had implemented this new technology (Ellison 2009). The impetus for imaging came from the sheer volume of paper applications received by UT Austin—a typical fall semester—with around 60,000 applications. The development of document imaging was undertaken carefully: five years were spent mapping workflow and business processes before the system was implemented. In the decade since UT Austin put their system into action, the technology has continued to develop. Until recently, standard flatbed scanners were used, but high-speed scanners have recently been purchased. New software also allows for less time spent sorting documents by color and size prior to scanning, as was necessary in the past.
With document imaging, a careful verification process is crucial to ensuring application and system integrity. For international documents, this begins with a careful review of the original paper document upon receipt. Since the look and feel of foreign documents play a significant role in ensuring their authenticity, this step must happen prior to scanning. Once trained staff verifies authenticity, the document is prepared for scanning. A document ID is assigned to match it to the correct student’s application. Once scanned, the image must be checked for quality. While trained and permanent staff must verify the authenticity of international documents, most of the other steps in the verification process can be handled by clerical staff, or even student staff.

After application materials have been scanned and matched to a student’s record, the paper file is stored for a specific time period before being shredded. This time period may be shorter than what is required under traditional FERPA guidelines, since the electronic file can serve as the official record. At the University of Texas at Austin, where paper documents are kept for one year after the last activity on the file, careful research ensured that the imaged documents met FERPA guidelines. Time is saved for staff in the registrar’s office as well, since a paper file does not need to be transferred and audited upon a student’s enrollment.

**Credential Evaluation**

We have already discussed the implications of increased speed of communication with applicants due to the Internet and email. Perhaps just as important for the international admissions officer is the ease of obtaining information about educational systems. Credential evaluators have a wide network of electronic resources at their fingertips and can cultivate relationships with experts in countries around the world much more easily. Table 1 lists some key resources that can help someone new to the field get started.

The three references shown in Table 2 are well-respected foreign credential evaluation services. Each organization’s...
website provides excellent—and free—resources for international admissions professionals.

SEVIS

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, it was discovered that a few of the terrorists involved in the plot to attack the United States had entered the country on student visas, obtained on the basis of admission to American flight schools. This discovery led the federal government to put new emphasis on a plan, known as CIPRIS, in existence since the mid-1990s to track international students during their stay in the U.S. using an electronic system. In 2003, SEVIS (the Student Exchange and Visitor Information System) was launched, with the requirement that all schools hosting international students and scholars on F, M, and J visas must participate. This new technology application has brought significant change to the field of international education.

SEVIS is a web-based system administered by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). If your campus issues Certificates of Visa Eligibility (Form I-20s) from the admissions office, the most pertinent change in the admissions process is the way colleges and universities issue I-20s to admitted students. Prior to SEVIS, campuses used basic software to create I-20s. Now, the campus must first create the student’s SEVIS record by entering data into the secure SEVIS website. Only after the student’s record is created can the I-20 be printed.

An institution can enter data into the SEVIS website in two ways. The first is by entering records one at a time using the Real-Time Interface (RTI). This method can prove efficient for campuses with small international student populations. The second method is to upload records in batch, using a software interface such as SunGard’s fsaATLAS or Oracle’s international student module in PeopleSoft. The batch method has obvious benefits for schools with large international student populations, although it is not seamless. Certain types of I-20s, such as those for students changing programs or degree levels at the same institution, or for students transferring from one U.S. institution to another, cannot be processed in batch. In addition, time must be spent troubleshooting after records move correctly from the software to SEVIS.

Even more fundamentally, SEVIS has changed the way campuses must monitor international students during their careers at American colleges. There are strict reporting requirements that schools must meet, or they risk losing their SEVIS certification and hence, their ability to enroll international students. Updates of information such as changes of address, funding, program, and degree level; failure to enroll; completion of program; and authorization of on-campus employment must be reported in SEVIS within thirty days of the event. As with the creation of I-20s, such updates can be entered using RTI or in batch; either way, international student advisors must now spend a significant portion of their time on SEVIS-related tasks. As a result, some campuses have created new full-time positions within the international student office devoted solely to SEVIS issues.

Wikis

The site that introduced most people to wikis is Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, now one of the most popular sites on the Web. On www.wikipedia.com, a wiki is defined as “a database of pages which visitors can edit live.” Anyone who has ever tried to edit a document with a group of people via email can see the advantage of this model. Rather than reattaching a new version of a document to an email and then waiting for the next person’s version to arrive, a wiki is more efficient, allowing for a more fluid, real-time editing process.

For admissions professionals, there may be several applications for wikis. If you have documents that need regular

Table 2.

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updating and must be viewed by a group of people (such as a training manual or admission letters), a wiki can help you move to a paperless, online editing process. A wiki can also be used for social networking, creating a community of students at any point in the admission process. There is free wiki software available on the Web; www/wiki.com is a good place to find an overview. Sites also exist that allow for creation of a Web page that can be edited by the public, wiki-style, or not, such as www.wetpaintcentral.com.

Data Analysis

One of the critical aspects of a successful enrollment management plan is data. It is essential that you have the ability to pull good data from your admissions database and analyze it to spot trends and inform your decisions regarding recruitment, admissions standards, and follow-up communication.

Obviously, technology is integral to the process of extracting information from a database. The way you do this will be determined by the systems in place on your campus. Regardless of how you pull the data, you will likely need a separate software application for full analysis. Novices can learn to use Microsoft Excel with minimal training; basic charts and graphs are easy to prepare. In particular, Excel’s pivot tables and charts allow for relatively easy manipulation of complex data. Some enrollment managers use SPSS or other more sophisticated statistical analysis software.

CONCLUSION

The dizzying pace of technological change can feel overwhelming. Once you become comfortable with a software program, an updated version is released. It seems that there is always a new gadget to learn to use. The reach of the Internet appears far from nearing its end. In the decade since the last publication of this guide, the number of technological applications available to international admissions professionals has exploded, making it likely that the decade ahead will bring more of the same. How can international admissions professionals keep up? It is critical to stay informed about trends in technology, but, even more importantly, we must understand how, and if, our prospective students are using the newest applications. Attend conferences and workshops, talk to your colleagues, and consult with high school and college-aged international students about the ways in which they use technology in their daily lives. Advocate for international students with your campus’s IT staff, to be sure that the needs of this important population are not overlooked. Challenges lie ahead, but in meeting those challenges, new opportunities for success will emerge.

REFERENCES


About the Author

ELIZABETH WHITE worked for sixteen years in undergraduate and international admissions at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York. She is currently the Administrative Director for Research and Graduate Education in UB’s School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. She has served on AACRAO’s International Admissions Committee and has been the publications editor for NAFSA Region X (NY/NJ). Beth has presented frequently on technology and marketing communication issues at AACRAO annual meetings and NAFSA regional conferences. She holds a bachelor’s degree in communications from SUNY Geneseo and a master’s degree in college student personnel from University at Buffalo.
It was at the end of a long work day: the door to the registrar’s office was closed, and we were huddled over our desks appreciating the recent quiet. Some of us were attempting to untangle complex questions into simpler parts; a few of us were trying to complete some data entry without constant interruption; and I was making a final effort to answer a few more e-mails before heading home. Then came a knock at the door. Despite the looks of my staff as they silently begged “please don’t,” I opened the door reluctantly. There stood a student, registration card in hand. She darted inside and made it clear that she required immediate assistance. As I began to explain the registration procedure, she interrupted and proclaimed loudly, “No, I want to talk to her” as she pointed to the support staff member behind me who typically sits at the service area. To the student, I had no credibility; I was invisible. It made no difference to her that I had completely redesigned and implemented the entire registration system in detail. Thus it is with the registrar. Since then, students have said to me incredulously, “So there really is a registrar?” And so to all who “may be affected by skepticism and who do not believe except what they see,” I say, “Yes, Virginia, there really is a registrar.”

As a matter of fact, there are many hundreds if not thousands of registrars—unsung leaders in U.S. higher education who often may be “unseen” but who are both quite present and surprisingly influential. Leadership styles among us vary somewhat, but many of us practice what I call “inconspicuous” leadership. My strengths do not lie in my polished rhetoric or quick wit, in my ability to energize audiences, nor in my capacity to impress with grandiose accomplishments that make headlines; I confess that although I try my best—particularly when circumstances call for such abilities—others are much more skilled in these areas. Given the option, I shy away from the spotlight. I know my limitations and recognize that I must both partner with and learn from others who are more accomplished at “being visible.” My strengths lie in my abilities to think globally and strategically; to garner confidence and respect; to keep my focus; and to build consensus so that goals are achieved. Like so many registrars, I don’t get or seek a lot of attention; I just get things done.

As a leader, I constantly seek to cultivate my patience and deepen my confidence in my abilities while trying to express the genuine enjoyment and satisfaction I obtain from my work. I do this in the hope that others may be inspired to find gratification in their work as well. Doing work that fully engages us and that is naturally enriching is essential to good leadership. When we derive pleasure from...
the work we do, those around us are more likely not only to approach their work positively but also to be more fully engaged in it. First and foremost, a leader is a model who sets expectations for him- or herself—and, thus, for others.

When I achieve a goal (which never happens as a result of my efforts alone but always with the help of others), it is immensely satisfying. Typically, the registrar can anticipate the effects of her leadership initiatives; and often, the tendrils of a systems change are widespread and have a positive impact on a great many on our campuses. Breaking through barriers to change in order to move an institution forward is an art practiced over and over by registrars. In fact, sometimes the most effective way to lead is to intentionally not seek attention and so avoid a negative reaction. Change is not always embraced, and the outcome is what matters.

I have learned when to push others gently, so as to motivate, and when to step back and let things flow. Always, I keep the vision in focus and steer toward achievable goals. I don’t do it perfectly by any means, and I have made many mistakes along the way. Nor am I unique: This is the reality of the leadership I see all around me when I connect with fellow registrars. In fact, they continually impress me with their ability to lead in increasingly complex academic environments and with their generous sharing of their expertise. A good leader always finds mentors (I have had many) who help them along the way; she also makes time to mentor others. One of the greatest pleasures is to see someone you have mentored enjoy success.

“Inconspicuous” is not the same as “silent” or “acquiescent.” Leadership requires confidence, which, unfortunately, may on occasion be misconstrued by the insecure as self-importance or arrogance. Nevertheless, it is important to be confident about your expertise and not hesitate to share it with others. Senior officers should be confident in your leadership, and you should seek opportunities to build that confidence. Never underestimate the value of utilizing good management techniques and providing opportunities for staff input and independent work; yet the job of a leader should never be conflated with that of a manager. Almost any position in an organization can be a leadership position, and anyone can develop leadership ability from the start of their careers and within the constraints of any position. Potential for leadership often shows itself early; it can be nurtured in a support role, technical role, and managerial role as well as in a role at the level of director or above. Developing trust, planning strategically, and then taking action toward a focused vision are the cornerstones of my leadership style. At the same time, I seek to build connections, use imagination to inspire, and insist on excellence (not perfection, which is a different thing altogether).

There are many ways in which the registrar is a natural leader even as she is forced by virtue of the position to be one. The registrar never works alone, and she must remain focused on the institutional vision even as the institution grows and changes and as projects are implemented. To do this effectively, we must continually make and cultivate connections both within and outside the institution. We partner with many, and we often help bring others’ visions to fruition. We cannot avoid challenges; they come our way daily, so we become adept at meeting them head on, even when they are uncomfortable. A tension inherent in our position is that we are respected though not necessarily always liked; this can prove difficult for some leaders. We implement projects continuously, and to do so we have to be focused and goal oriented. Our daily experiences help us build resilience, a particular asset during times of budget cuts. And because we hold a position that is central to our institutions’ operations, we are adept at seeing the “big picture.” All of these are essential elements of good leadership. The registrar develops these skills as a foundation of the profession, distinct from other equally necessary technical and managerial skill sets. Finally, the registrar is a natural leader because he has no choice but to develop a good sense of humor. Who else hears the most outrageous excuses, sees the most extreme behaviors, or is asked to accomplish what is so laughable?

Why, then, do so many registrars not believe themselves to be influential institutional leaders? Students, campus colleagues, and friends typically respond respectfully when we tell them that our title is “registrar;” yet few know the entirety of what we do. Perhaps it is how leadership is often defined, or maybe we need to assess and strengthen our leadership roles and envision how our role can contribute even more to the campus environment. I suggest the following:

□ Value what you do: It all begins here. Question any assumptions you or others have that what you provide as a leader is anything but essential and remarkable. Insist on being a leader.
Borrow shamelessly, and give generously. We are a collection of leaders who share openly in a multitude of ways. Connect, and recognize the strength we give one another in this important role. Connect as well with leaders from other professions, and learn from and use their skills to supplement your own.

Value goal achievement over credit: It is wonderful to be recognized, but the sheer complexity of campus initiatives often requires letting go of individual accolades. When initiatives are successful, relish the fact that you have achieved your goal, and be sure to celebrate.

Come into the limelight once in a while: It is important to make others aware of your value and of your contributions to the institution. If self-promotion or office PR is not your strength, learn techniques for communicating your message, and partner with those who are good at it. Important people need to recognize you and your work. Be comfortable with being inconspicuous as well as present—and, perhaps, visible—where and when it matters.

Cultivate endless patience: Plan; think and reflect deliberately; understand and accept what those you are leading can and cannot accept; and help them as best as you are able. Be prepared to be disappointed—quite regularly, in fact—and keep moving forward regardless.

Develop a strong support system outside of work: It is said by many—and I agree—that having friends outside of work, engaging in exercise, pursuing hobbies, and keeping a healthy work/life balance are important. Stressed-out people do not make good leaders.

Enjoy what you do: Have fun! If you don’t find yourself laughing frequently and looking forward to going to work, then the position is not a good fit. You cannot lead well if you are not having fun.

The registrar, while often an inconspicuous leader, is not unremarkable; in fact, quite the opposite is true. On occasion, someone actually does see us and what we do as leaders serving our institutions. When that happens, it makes us truly glad. Alas, how dreary would be the world if there were no registrars.

About the Authors

MEREDITH BRAZ is a graduate of St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y., and she received a Master of Arts in Teaching from Smith College. She spent fifteen years in the Bates College Registrar’s Office, starting as Assistant Registrar in 1991 and progressing to Registrar, Registrar and Director of Student Financial Services and finally Registrar and Administrative Dean for Academic Systems before coming to Dartmouth as Registrar of the College. Prior to her tenure at Bates, she taught in Massachusetts and Vermont schools. Braz also worked in the Sophia Smith Collection, a Women’s History Archive at Smith College, at Williston-Northampton School and at the Yarmouth Historical Society. She has done consulting work for the American University of Kuwait.

Braz has served as Vice President for Professional Development and as President of the New England Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Counselors (NEACRAO). She has also served as a member of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) task force to study the impact of utilizing outsourcing in Registrar and Admissions offices, as a member of the AACRAO Public Policy Committee, and as a member of the Nominations and Elections Committee. She also served a three-year term on the Small College Issues Committee, and is a frequent presenter at the AACRAO national meetings. Braz is recognized as a national expert on topics such as implementing online registration, course proposal and class schedule creation strategies, online course evaluation, merging offices and reengineering systems, leadership strategies, and project management.
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Lessons Learned: If I only knew then…

By Janet Ward

When I entered the profession in 1978, the phrase “enrollment management” was non-existent. One worked for admissions, financial aid, student accounts, or registration and records, and each department worked independently from the others. Most professionals specialized in one area (e.g., admissions) and then spent their entire career in that field. My own career has traversed the enrollment spectrum; along the way, I’ve picked up several kernels of wisdom.

**LESSON ONE: BUILD YOUR BRAND**

Whether you are starting your first professional position, moving up the career ladder, or entering a new institution, it is important that you control your brand. For what do you want to be remembered? How will you choose to work with your staff and colleagues? As you work through challenges, disappointments, and crises, your words and actions will be remembered and judged by others. You have a choice, either to “take control of your brand” by taking responsibility for your words and actions or allowing others to create it for you.

Become a lifelong learner: Change is inevitable. Successful enrollment professionals have an innate desire to continually learn new techniques, processes, tools and become skilled at adapting to change. Learning is tied to achieving your institution’s business objectives. This can be accomplished by streamlining a process to reduce overhead, re-aligning staff assignments to maximize productivity, or enhancing the experience of higher education consumers (e.g., prospect, admit, enrolled student, alumnus, parent, donor).

Character matters: Honesty, ethics, sound decision-making, and how you treat others combine to tell your story. Your words, actions and principles must consistently transcend any situation. You are the same in any situation, regardless of the pressure you are under. This requires developing the ability to work effectively in various situations with various personalities while managing differing points of view.

**LESSON TWO: BECOME AN ASTUTE OBSERVER**

I started my career as a manager of off-site community college programs. Asked if I wanted a typewriter on my desk (my boss had one on his), I told him that I would rely on the support staff for this function; after all, I had noticed that the other program managers (all men) relied on the administrative assistants when they needed to have something typed. I believe as a result of my choice, my male colleagues more readily accepted me as a partner and an equal in the operation of the department. I believe that if I had placed a typewriter on my desk, I would have been
perceived—and treated—as a member of the secretarial pool. And while the secretarial pool’s members were all wonderful women, I wanted to be treated as a manager.

“Walk the floor” to understand your business and people. Listen. One of the greatest lessons I learned early in my career was the value of taking the time to rotate through every position within the department. Not only did I learn each function firsthand, I also learned about and from each staff member—challenges, what did not work, ideas to improve operations. As a result, the staff and I grew to trust one another and to work together to implement needed changes. For example, a staff member who was instrumental in the marketing a specialized program needed to improve her public speaking skills. How did I motivate her? I challenged her, you face your fear by taking a public speaking class, and I would confront one of mine. I felt proud when she received top honors in her course and even more so as she became a more effective admissions counselor.

**LESSON THREE: LEAD BY EXAMPLE**

Expectations are part of the job: set clear performance expectations, and hold staff accountable from the outset. I put my performance expectations in writing and then refine them after seeking staff input. Once finalized, the expectations become part of the annual review process; staff members are held accountable. Remember that your staff will expect you to meet any expectation you set for them. If you want your staff to be punctual, then you must be punctual. If you want your management team to effectively address personnel issues, you need to demonstrate these skills and teach them to your team and serve as their mentor.

Choose to act rather than react: Others will observe how you handle difficult situations, and many will emulate your behavior. My personal philosophy is that much of life is out of my control: organizations change, technology changes, and staff come and go. The only area I know I can control is how I choose to act or what I choose to say. When confronted with a demanding situation, I compose my facial expression so as not to give away what I am thinking while I consider the alternatives. Once I have made my choice, I carefully phrase my response. Words are powerful, so choose wisely such that your viewpoint will have the best chance of being heard. Many arguments could be avoided if we simply imagine ourselves in the other’s position, consider his thoughts and feelings, and then respond in a way that takes his needs into account.

Be transparent: be kind, and be firm. Working with people can be one of the most exhausting jobs. As the size of your staff increases, so will the the variety of personalities you encounter. You need to become both an effective manager (about the task) and supervisor (about the people). Most staff members appreciate a boss who is consistent, transparent, kind, and firm. Being transparent means not having hidden agendas or “playing favorites” in the office. Keep your staff informed about what is happening on campus. The only information I don’t routinely share with my staff pertains to personnel matters.

Be kind. Life is a journey, and each of us, at different times, will benefit from a kind word, encouragement, or forgiveness. As the saying goes, “what goes around comes around.” If you want to be treated with kindness, then be considerate of others.

Be firm—the counterpoint to compassion. The challenge for any leader is to find the right balance between the two. We all make mistakes. A good leader encourages staff to step forward and acknowledge what failed so that training may occur to ultimately improved services, programs, operations. If training has occurred and errors continue, then be firm and handle the situation appropriately; this may require you to dismiss the employee (though I believe everyone deserves a second chance). Too many times, I’ve seen poor performance excused; the result has been that the entire department—and/or “downstream” processes—pay the price for on-going ineptitude. Be firm when you need to be. After all, leaders have to make tough decisions.

**LESSON FOUR: THE ART OF GETTING THINGS DONE**

Learn the political landscape. To be effective within your department or college, you need to understand organizational politics—“the art of getting things done.” In a healthy organization, true leaders are able to find common ground (despite diverse points of view on a variety of topics) and focus on furthering the institution’s mission. Leaders remain open to exploring new ideas; operate transparently and hold few institutional secrets; and base decisions on sound principles and good data.

Movers and shakers propel our institutions forward. These individuals are able to influence others, build an action plan, and then implement the plan so as to achieve the
desired business objective. Movers and shakers may include frontline staff, managers or executives; it is more about the person than the position. Movers and shakers should be highly prized as they know how to get things done.

Manage your time well: Time is a precious commodity that, once lost, cannot be recaptured. If it is managed effectively, significant progress can be made toward achieving goals. Effective time management starts with your calendar. Review the past few months and consider how your time was spent. Then consider the following questions:

- Did you allocate time to such value-added activities as planning, assessment, staff development, and your own professional development?
- Did your meetings result in tangible outcomes or action plans that moved the organization forward in achieving its business objectives?
- Did you control your calendar by scheduling uninterrupted work time at your desk (e.g., no phone calls, no e-mail, etc.)?
- Is your staff cross-trained so that every critical business process has a back-up—that is, if one person is absent, can operations continue unimpeded?
- When you leave work at the end of the day or for vacation, do you “disconnect” (i.e., leave work at work)?

If you answered yes to all five questions, then congratulations: you’ve demonstrated that you are the boss of your time. If you answered no to any of the questions, then you have some work to do to improve your time management skills. Here are some techniques I’ve found effective in managing my time and multiple projects:

- Create a master task list with start and end dates that includes recurring projects for you and your staff. Review the list every Monday, marking off those that have been completed and following up on any that are past due.
- Before leaving work on Friday, review your own task list and prioritize what you’ll focus on in the coming week.

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Each week, inform your staff that a specific day/time on your calendar has been blocked off for planning. Unless a crisis requires immediate action, do not accept phone calls or check e-mail during this time.

Whenever you facilitate a meeting, be sure to provide an agenda in advance that is focused on achieving specific business objective(s). After the meeting, send out minutes that highlight the key discussion points and action steps as well as who is responsible for each. If you are invited to meetings that do not adhere to this format, encourage the facilitator to adopt it—and/or consider opting out of the meeting in the future.

Schedule a planning day each month when you work from home, uninterrupted. This can be a great opportunity to catch up on reading.

Consider closing the office at specific times during the year for staff development that is focused on improving operations and the student experience, or learning new technology.

LESSON FIVE: ENJOY LIFE’S JOURNEY

I learned one of my greatest life lessons from my father: Life is short, so live each day with zest and energy. At points in my career and life when I have felt under-valued, I have learned to close that chapter and move on. Know when it is time to dust off the resume, and have the courage to act. You never will know what you are capable of unless you try.

Balance work and play. Some of my colleagues are amazed when I go on vacation and disconnect completely from work—no e-mails, no phone calls. I am able to do this for two reasons: I have built my leadership team so they can handle any situation; they know I trust their judgment. The second reason is self-discipline: I choose to disconnect by not checking my e-mail. With the benefit of rest and a change of pace, I return to work re-energized and ready to invest myself fully in the work of the university.

Leave work at work. When at work, give your best effort; when you leave at the end of the day, turn work off. Do not check your e-mail. Do not take work home with you (you may have to make rare exceptions). Invest in yourself. Learn a new hobby; find something you are passionate about and pursue it. Take time to exercise, eat nutritionally, and get a good night’s rest.

Finally, laugh more, and celebrate the simple joys. In the blink of an eye, you will be approaching retirement and, I hope, looking back over a career filled with accomplishments, joy, and friendships.

About the Author

JANET WARD is Associate Vice President for Information and Data Management at Seattle Pacific University. During her 30 years in higher education administration, she has worked at public two-year institutions and at a private four-year institution where she has experienced how factors tied to leadership, organizational structure, mission, federal regulations, market competition, and technology influence changes on campus. In an effort to help prepare new professionals as well as those seeking advancement opportunities, this article describes several lessons learned along her journey.
Student Learning Outcomes: The Role of the Registrar

By Reta Pikowsky

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education’s Self-Assessment Guide for Registrar Programs and Services includes an introductory statement on the role of registrar programs: “The overarching role of the registrar is increasingly that of an educator, defining student needs through learning outcomes and identifying assessment strategies that involve innovative learning techniques.”

On the surface, this statement conforms with what we all have believed for a very long time: We are educators as much as we are administrators and service providers. However, stepping back a discrete distance and considering this belief in different contexts causes one to realize that this is a rich area for exploration.

It is instructive to provide some insight into the difference between “student outcome” and “student learning outcome.” In a 1999 article in Dialogue, Richard Frye of Western Washington University describes the difference this way:

At this point, it is useful to make some distinctions between “student outcomes” and “student learning outcomes.” Student outcomes generally refer to aggregate statistics on groups of students, like graduation rates, retention rates, transfer rates, and employment rates for an entering class or a graduating class. These “student outcomes” are actually institutional outcomes; they attempt to measure comparative institutional performance, not changes in students themselves due to their college experience. They have generally been associated with accountability reporting (Frye 1999).

For the purposes of this discussion, we are concerned about changes in students themselves due to their college experience and, specifically, their interactions with the registrar’s office, including its programs, services, systems, and staff.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

There are at least two ways of looking at this question: One is to consider how the registrar’s office is pushing out information to students about its services and programs, ensuring that they learn how to do things such as read a degree audit report, navigate the registration system, and apply for graduation. A second way is to consider how the registrar’s office is contributing to student learning in terms of helping them develop skills they will need once they leave campus.

Works such as Student Learning Outside the Classroom: Transcending Artificial Boundaries (Kuh et al. 1995) describe how what happens outside the classroom can have
a significant effect on what students learn and how prepared they are to succeed after they graduate. If we embrace impact on student learning as one context of our daily business—and one which serves as a critical component of learning outside the classroom—we might not rely as much on cookie-cutter responses to questions or send students to other offices in the hope that they eventually will “connect all the dots” to solve a specific problem. Instead, we would help them learn how to communicate and solve problems more effectively—skills they will use throughout their lives.

This article focuses on how the registrar’s office can affect student learning beyond the scope of what we might consider “training” (as, for example, in how to utilize technology that supports the office’s functions).

**DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS**

The registrar’s office has an impact on student learning in direct as well as indirect ways. It facilitates student learning through its support of committees that handle such things as curricular change and academic policies as well as academic advising and through the scheduling of classrooms and the deploying of technology to deliver services, information, and programs efficiently. Indeed, the vast majority of the functions we perform facilitate student learning in some way or another.

The registrar’s office also has frequent opportunities to interact directly with students: There are teachable moments when we deliver information and services; there are mentoring opportunities when we work with student representatives on committees and when we employ students in our offices. By treating students as learners, we can help them hone essential skills and develop useful and practical knowledge. One of the challenges is to identify the interactions we have with students in order to determine how we can turn them into learning opportunities that will support their persistence through and success after college.

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INTERACTIONS
Following are some examples of interactions that offer specific avenues for student learning.

As part of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Learning Outcomes Assessment Project, California State University–Monterey Bay (CSUMB) describes its learning outcomes for the Office of the Registrar as follows:

At the conclusion of the Office of the Registrar primary interventions:

- **Knowledge**
  - Students will know the deadlines and fees required for graduation.
  - Students will know the CSUMB degree requirements (ULR, GLO, MLO).
  - Students will know the documentation required to apply for graduation.

- **Skills**
  - Students will know how to access and produce a degree progress report.

San Francisco State University’s 2009–2010 Assessment Plan for the Registrar’s Office also addresses student learning outcomes. Outcome number two describes how the registrar’s office and the advising center will work together to ensure that students who require math and English remediation will be given every opportunity to complete those requirements. (Their goal is to increase completion rates by set percentages.)

Student employment provides significant opportunities to interact with students. Colby-Sawyer College has work-study student performance development program guidelines that describe in detail how to increase students’ knowledge and skills through employment. For example, the following activities are to occur during meetings with student workers:

- Discuss student worker’s performance on primary responsibilities/priorities during the review period. **Discuss what went well, and what could have gone better.**
- Discuss student worker’s professionalism and ethics in carrying out the job duties. **What constitutes professional behavior; what is considered unprofessional? What work ethics are expected?**
- Discuss student worker’s strengths as well as areas for growth in critical performance factors.
- Discuss student worker’s professional development goals/needs as well as how the experience has promoted the college’s student learning outcomes. **Includes student’s plans and/or what the supervisor and/or college can do to help.**
- Discuss any barriers to effective work performance and job satisfaction.
- **May include work process improvements, system limitations, communication issues, work environment, training, scheduling, etc. Should include a discussion of how these barriers can/might be alleviated.**
- Discuss specific plans for ongoing communication regarding the position and performance issues.

A DIFFERENT PATH
If we continue to consider this question from the point of view of an educator—that is, with the goal of better focusing our efforts in this area—then learning outcomes that our institutions already have in place (as, for example, for general education or a core curriculum) could help guide our thinking.

Mt. San Antonio College describes its general education outcomes as follows:

*The goal of General Education Outcomes (GEOs) is to improve general education curriculum to the ultimate benefit of our students. It is through general education that the college fulfills its mission to provide quality transfer, career, and life-long learning programs that prepare students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in an interconnected world (www.mt-sac.edu/instruction/generaled/index.html).*

The question is whether the programs, functions, services, and roles performed by the registrar’s office offer opportunities to support students’ development of the skills that are identified as learning outcomes of most general education or core curriculum programs. This is not about the registrar’s office inserting itself into the academic life of the institution or into the business of the faculty but

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2. [http://home.tiora.net/aaron/kgonzalez/backup/slo.php?dept=20&year=0]
3. [www.sfsu.edu/~vpsa/files/Assessment%20Plans%20%20Outcomes%2009-10%20Registrar.pdf]
4. [www.colby-sawyer.edu/assets/pdf/ws_performance_eval.pdf]
rather about it approaching student learning in a manner consistent with learning outcomes the institution has already deemed important.

Learning outcomes that are in place at Georgia Tech, for example, relate to communication, quantitative skills, humanities–fine arts–ethics, natural sciences–math–technology, social sciences, and critical thinking, among other things. There would be no logical or practical way for the registrar’s office to use most of these outcomes as a backdrop, framework, or even as an inspiration for its thinking in regard to how it might facilitate student learning. However, consider two learning outcomes that could guide our interactions with students: communication and critical thinking.

Learning Goal A1: Communication states “student will demonstrate proficiency in the process of articulating and organizing rhetorical arguments in written, oral, visual, and nonverbal modes, using concrete support and conventional language.” We therefore identified ways in which we could do more than offer pat answers to students’ questions. We interact routinely with student workers, with students who are petitioning for exceptions to rules and regulations, and with students who serve on standing committees (e.g., the rules and regulations committee) as well as ad hoc committees (e.g., the registration task force). We can help hone students’ communication skills by giving them meaningful work, evaluating their performance, and administering exit surveys that solicit student workers’ feedback on the quality of their experiences in our office. Exit interview questions focus on students’ development of communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

We help students understand how to construct logical and persuasive arguments in support of the exceptions they request that we make to academic rules and regulations. We work with them to review and to propose new language for academic rules and regulations. We work with them to collect feedback on registration services so we can improve our services.

Learning Goal III: Critical Thinking states “student will be able to judge factual claims and theories on the basis of evidence.” We therefore identified opportunities to have students dig more deeply into information and data so as to deepen their understanding of processes and actions—of how and why decisions are made.

Student workers conduct our walk-in assessment survey. We work with them to explain what we’re doing, why, and how the information will be used. Rather than simply handing out and collecting the surveys, the student workers are an integral part of the overall process.

Students who serve on the registration task force help us analyze data related to the registration system that inform decisions about schedules, systems support, access to courses, and so on. The students benefit by seeing the process come full circle.

EVOLVING ROLES

The evolving role of the registrar in enrollment management provides some context for our on-going discussion of student learning outcomes. The more student learning is the focus of the campus and the more it permeates the culture, the more likely it is that student retention will increase.

Vincent Tinto has been a key figure in helping us understand why students persist. In “Taking Student Retention Seriously,” he writes

[S]tudents are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that foster learning. Learning has always been the key to student retention. Students who learn are students who stay. Institutions that are successful in building settings that educate their students are successful in retaining their students. Again, involvement seems to be the key. Students who are actively involved in learning, that is, who spend more time on task especially with others, are more likely to learn and, in turn, more likely to stay.

As registrars, our challenge now and for the future is to evaluate the ways in which we can and should be involved in student learning on campus. Whether our impact on student learning is direct or indirect, there are implications in other areas as well.

CHANGING FOCUS OF ASSESSMENT

Discussions are also underway as to whether the focus of assessment will change. In a 2007 presentation at the Center for Educational Leadership, Innovation, and Policy at
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From 1965 until 1991, AACRAO evaluated foreign educational credentials for the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Office of International Training, Academic Advisory Services. With the end of USAID's scholarship program for developing nations in 1991, AACRAO opened IES to provide an evaluation service to its members, as well as the public.

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San Diego State University, Dr. Richard Haney, vice president of learning support, and Dr. Debralee McClellan, associate vice president for student development, stated that Frederick Community College was making a transition to a “learning college” and that the focus of assessment was shifting from student satisfaction to student learning.

A shift toward student learning and away from an accounting of the programs and services that are provided could mean that assessment—for all of us, academics and non-academics alike—will change. It could become more focused on measuring what students are learning as opposed to how satisfied they are (or are not) with the programs and services we offer. Perhaps the adequacy and efficiency of our programs and services will become a given, and we will be left to evaluate how we are facilitating students’ growth. If this proves true, our planning processes likely will change. We will be gathering and analyzing different kinds of data to guide a new kind of action item in addition to those traditionally included in our annual cycles.

CONCLUSION

One could debate whether this is more about form or substance. Perhaps it is some of both. At a minimum, it would seem that we are entering a period when we will think in new ways about the role of the registrar’s office. Industry focus on student learning as the key aspect of what we are about on campus will cause us to think differently, as will technology as it both supports and alters how we serve and interact with students. These factors and students’ success in the workplace will cause us to think about all of the things we are and that we should be or could be teaching them while they are enrolled.

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About the Author

RETA PIKOWSKY is Registrar at Georgia Institute of Technology.

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Professionals in higher education face many challenges. Chief among them are increasing leadership and organizational effectiveness. A variety of approaches can be used to build competencies to increase leadership that results in organizational effectiveness. For the purposes of this article, leadership is “the capacity to influence others by unleashing their power and potential to impact the greater good” (Blanchard 2010). “Organizational effectiveness is the concept of how effective an organization is in achieving outcomes that the organization intends to produce” (Etzioni 1964). Understanding leadership and organizational effectiveness in higher education constitutes a critical opportunity. One strategy, successorship, is intended to identify and develop current talent within the academic environment. This paper addresses this strategic premise in four sections:

- understanding successorship in higher education;
- identifying the skills of an effective leader;
- developing leadership; and
- why and how higher education should increase leadership and organizational effectiveness through successorship.

Two key processes and activities—talent identification and talent development—can help increase leadership and organizational effectiveness. “These are the processes and activities to define and discover the sources of talent” (Davies and Davies 2010).

SUCCESSORSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

For the purposes of this article, successorship is identifying and developing academic leaders through processes and activities to fill leadership roles in the future. Successorship often is referred to as “filling typical hierarchal leadership roles that exist today” (Davies and Davies 2010). Developing a successful academic organization through successorship is a strategic proposition. Among the many strategies that are most important to colleges’ and universities’ success is the increase of leadership and organizational effectiveness through successorship.

Leadership in higher education has become more difficult in recent years. “With the impending retirements of so many baby boomer community college leaders, the leadership gap is an issue of increasing concern” (Wallin 2009). The same may be said about four-year institutions, some of which have been characterized as utilizing a top-down approach dominated by “a boys’ club.” Whereas higher education once was the purview of a homogeneous group, it has become tremendously diverse. Opportunities for “changing the guard” are bountiful: Internal candidates alone provide diverse representation.
IDENTIFYING THE SKILLS OF AN EFFECTIVE LEADER
In higher education, leaders are many; they include faculty, department chairs, deans, vice presidents, and the president, to name just a few. As outside influences continue to force change in higher education, today’s leaders must react quickly, recognize the need for change, and bring constituents together in ways that make the institution more nimble, more resourceful, and more adaptive. It is expected that technology will be utilized increasingly. In fact, familiarity with the latest technology is critical. Social networking, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are just a few of the technology platforms that are popular. Podcasts and expanded online learning opportunities are changing the way in which teaching and learning occur. Despite rapid changes in the kinds of skills, knowledge, and abilities the effective leader needs, the processes and activities of discovering talent remain constant. Individuals who can make a difference in academia demonstrate the potential to become leaders: They understand the big picture, are able to solve problems, and help the academic community move forward.

The ability to successfully implement change in higher education derives from experience and knowledge; in other words, the successful leader understands the character of his institution's students, faculty, curriculum, and governance. Implementing change in higher education also requires taking risks. Leaders outside higher education cannot fully appreciate the specific barriers and challenges as they typically are not found in business.

Michael Shattock defines university governance as the constitutional forms and processes through which universities govern their affairs. Shattock adds that while governance and management are theoretically separate functions (management is more about the preparation of policy proposals; the implementation of what is agreed; and the efficient and effective deployment of resources), they have close interrelationships in the higher education context, in a way not always seen in the corporate world because governance operates at many more levels in the university context than in many other fields (Leadership Foundation for Higher Education 2012).

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE REGISTRARS AND ADMISSIONS OFFICERS
Higher education is distinctly different. Consequently, internal candidates are the foundation of successorship planning.

Successorship planning begins with attracting internal candidates with high potential for leadership. Processes to retain the commitment of these candidates and to build on the talents and abilities they bring to the field must support a planned strategy for managing successorship. Higher education has the foundation it needs to move the academic community forward: the growth and development of internal candidates in key leadership roles.

"It takes a conscious effort to become an education leader. Usually, it doesn’t just happen" (Childs 2012). In higher education, the leader must be effective in supporting and facilitating the teaching and learning process. Education leaders have expertise and experiences that differ from those of business leaders. For example, education leaders must understand the concept of student development. “The term ‘student development’ has been used to categorize the theory and research on late-adolescent and adult development” (Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito 1998). Furthermore, “effective leaders must know and understand their faculty and staff” (Pollock 2012). Pollock (2012) also provides insight into strategic enrollment management: “Strategic enrollment management can be defined as a concept and process that enables the fulfillment of institutional mission and students’ educational goals.” Higher education has struggled to develop the richness of its own talent. “Higher education is full of smart, talented individuals who, given the proper preparation, may emerge as the leaders of tomorrow” (Harris and Associates 2012).

**DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP**

Many leadership values can be learned. As James R. Davis (2003) writes in *Learning to Lead*, “Although the context of leadership is important, certain basic leadership skills can be identified, learned, and transferred from one setting to another.” Leadership is the ability to influence others. “The concept of leadership and the application and demonstration of leadership in an organization is central to the health and prosperity of that organization” (Vandeveer and Menefee 2006).

Strategically developing leadership is important to the current and future success of higher education. A well-established process for professional learning should guide leadership development. It is important to consider a variety of learning practices that are integrated and linked to strategic intents. Mentoring programs, individual work projects, networking, and research are but a few components of an effective process. Along with timelines for readiness for a position and regular progress checking, these learning practices should be mapped to potential leadership roles. It is hard to predict gaps in a candidate’s knowledge, but a planned strategic successorship program can help.

Developing a potential leader should include several approaches. A professional learning component and a rigorous performance evaluation should be among them. Developing leadership is “enabling talent as a future-focused activity which enables the planned replacement of key staff” (Davies and Davies 2010). If higher education is to be sustained over the long term, then internal candidates for leadership must be identified and developed.

Why and how should higher education increase leadership and organizational effectiveness through successorship? Leaders inspire organizational effectiveness. As in other organizations, they are critical: They make the difference. Historically, higher education has not valued succession planning as much as other organizations have. One of the key reasons for succession planning is that many leaders are approaching retirement age.

According to an American Council on Education study, nearly half of the presidents and chancellors at U.S. and European colleges and universities are quickly approaching retirement age. In fact, nearly 50 percent are already [age] 61 [years] or older. While many will continue to lead effectively, a dramatic turnover of unprecedented size is imminent in the next few years (Harris and Associates 2012).

As many colleges and universities are challenged by internal and external forces, leaders are a critical resource for the future. Leaders can help followers join in the process of change and identify what inspires growth in the pursuit of organizational excellence. Investing in human talent constitutes a tremendous opportunity for success. Refining human capital can create resilience in higher education. Higher education should review its successorship planning and identify and develop current academic staff who could continue to pursue the mission and values of academia while sustaining their institutions’ success.
It is time to develop internal resources in order to increase leadership within higher education. By developing leaders who understand the necessity of making difficult financial decisions, the rewards of teaching and research accomplishments, and the building of educational effectiveness, higher education can overcome its current leadership predicament. If it succeeds in doing so, higher education will become a model of a learning organization poised to compete for the future; resilient to change; and ready to take on as-yet undiscovered opportunities and challenges. Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, describes “organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together” (Senge 1994).

Higher education could be such an organization.

**CONCLUSION**

Investing current resources and building leadership and organizational effectiveness will build resilience in colleges and universities and thereby prepare them for the future. “Institutions that strategically invest and support their emerging leaders will continue to thrive. Those who do not will continue to face a significant challenge to compete” (Harris and Associates 2012). Successful institutions have in place the infrastructure to build leaders at all levels. Many benefits can derive from this infrastructure, to include increasing student learning, faculty engagement, and financial stability.

“While succession planning is a cornerstone of business leadership, it is anathema in academia. It is rare indeed for department heads, deans, provosts, or university presidents to groom potential successors. When someone does step down, either unexpectedly or unexpectedly, an outside search usually is conducted; often, it is at least a year before a permanent successor is in place” (Chikwendiu 2011). Higher education cannot afford not to develop leaders from within its ranks.

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**About the Author**

**DIANE FURTEK** is the Registrar at American International College. She is pursuing a Doctor of Education.
“Fresh start” or amnesty policies have made their way across American universities and colleges. As the Director of Student Enrollment Services/Registrar at Polk State College, in Winter Haven, Florida, I could not help myself: I set aside time for several weeks to research amnesty policies and related best practices. Policies offering students a fresh start in their GPA have grown in popularity over the last five to eight years, even at large traditional institutions. Both the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Council on Adult and Experiential Education (CAEL) recommend that institutions either take into account each student’s current abilities, motivation, and potential for success or the student’s maturation.

In education’s great box of chocolates, amnesty policies are a coffee crème: I don’t particularly like coffee crème, but if it were the last chocolate in the box, I would eat it. My distaste for amnesty policies has more to do with my philosophy of postsecondary education and my opinion about the unpreparedness of entering students than with the practice of helping students complete their education. This year, I am faced with a coffee crème at my institution. I had hoped that research would prove that amnesty policies are disadvantageous and uncommon. Neither being the case, I have had a change of heart. This article describes my personal journey.

My research included review of amnesty policies currently in effect at 50 randomly chosen institutions, including two-year and four-year, private and public, large and small. I hoped to discover a more palatable way to manage the re-enrollment of students whose previous academic status was unsatisfactory. I found some surprises, and definitely some emergent best practices, enough to satisfy my misgivings.

The first step in evaluating a policy is to determine its purpose. I would like to think that faculty and student affairs hold meetings to discuss the pros and cons of amnesty, in particular, with careful consideration given to the following topics:

- What does this do for our standard of academic rigor?
- How does this impact our institution’s academic stature among peer institutions?
- What are the long-range implications for the perceived value of education at our institution?
- How does this policy motivate or release responsibility from the incoming first-time-in-college (FTIC) student?
- How will this policy affect the returning students to whom it will apply? What would they have done without this policy?
- Can the policy really improve completion among the subset of students for whom it is intended?
If these discussions have not yet taken place at your college or university, now is as good a time as any to initiate them. (Take notes!) If your institution has not yet had to consider these kinds of questions related to amnesty, it likely will—especially if the topic proves to be of particular interest to your accreditation audit team.

There are two reasons an institution should not institute an amnesty policy:

- To improve federal financial aid opportunities for these returning students. I have news for you: It won’t. Best practice in the financial aid side of the house is to count all native credit in the calculation that fits the institution’s transfer and native credit criteria. At most institutions, there is no imaginary line in the sand for federal financial aid when it comes to cumulative GPA.
- To improve your graduates’ chances of earning advanced degrees and of being accepted elsewhere. Admissions offices will calculate all students’ GPAs on the basis of their institutional policies; that is only fair. Admissions decisions need to be based on comparisons of apples to apples; this cannot be done by allowing the GPA policies of multiple institutions to stand face to face at the admissions decision table.

Now let’s consider the tenets of an amnesty policy that promise to emerge as best practices and discuss their merit. Let’s start with an easy one.

**HOW MANY FRESH STARTS SHOULD A POLICY ALLOW?**

Let’s be frank: If a student goes to the trouble of invoking the privilege of fresh start and still doesn’t make it, we might want to examine whether she is college material. Part of our responsibility as educators is to ensure that we are helping students progress toward a degree. It is unfair to students to continue to take their money when a trade school or another career option might be in their best interests. All of the institutions whose policies I reviewed agree that amnesty is a one-shot option. I earnestly hope that strategies to identify students who are unable to maintain standards of academic progress at college and to refer them to other education resources are coupled with one-shot fresh-start policies.

**WHEN IS A STUDENT ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR AMNESTY?**

The purpose of this tenet of an amnesty policy is to ensure that the student is prepared to demonstrate his serious attitude toward academics and that he can maintain good academic standing in the current attendance period, before amnesty is applied. This, however, is a little muddled in application. Restrictions and policies vary. Some institutions state that a student is disqualified from requesting amnesty if he already has earned a degree, such as a bachelor’s or an associate’s degree. This seems reasonable as the degree record generally should remain unchanged once it has been bestowed. Another policy element states that the student is required to write an explanation of his improved motivation and readiness to do better as part of the petition process. Other examples of policy elements include the requirement that the student complete 30 hours toward graduation or that the student have more than 30 hours yet to earn before graduation. Some institutions require a “cooling off” period of up to three, four, or five or more years—that is, the student cannot have been enrolled at the institution for that period of time. We will cover this later.

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**Central Connecticut State College**

**FRESH START POLICY**

At the discretion of the associate vice president for Academic Affairs, a student whose college career has been interrupted three years or more may be considered for a “Fresh Start.” Under this option, the office of the Registrar initiates a new GPA for the student, beginning with his or her second matriculation, and uses this new figure for graduation purposes. Each case is decided on its own merits, and each decision has advantages and disadvantages. Students returning to the University for full or part-time study after a long interval should consult the office of Admissions.

Guidelines for the Fresh Start Program are:

- At least three academic years shall have intervened between the exit from and re-entry to CCSU;
- The student shall not have attempted more than 60 credits at CCSU;
- The student’s record will be treated like those of a transfer student;
- During the first semester back at CCSU, the student shall be restricted to 16 credits or fewer;
- Graduation requirements shall be those listed in the catalog at the time of re-entry; and
- The option can be used only once.

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If these discussions have not yet taken place at your college or university, now is as good a time as any to initiate them. (Take notes!) If your institution has not yet had to consider these kinds of questions related to amnesty, it likely will—especially if the topic proves to be of particular interest to your accreditation audit team.
All institutions expect the student to demonstrate at least one term of success with a required number of credits ranging from twelve to thirty before applying for amnesty. The most common credit requirement is twelve college credit hours. I think an institution’s choice should be closely associated with the institution’s standards of academic progress. If the student can attend under a certain status—say, a warning status—for two terms without impeding progress toward degree completion, then it is acceptable to require proof of performance for two terms and up to twenty-four credit hours, which represents a full-time load. The option should be related to the time to completion for the degrees the institution offers. Two-year institutions should consider one term at a full-time load; a four-year institution may consider two terms at a full-time load.

**WHAT CURRENT GPA QUALIFIES A STUDENT TO APPLY FOR AMNESTY?**

The GPA calculation used to qualify for a fresh start should never include the older record. It could not be equitably applied to students, so it only stands to reason that the current term’s (or terms’) GPA should be the qualifying record. Some institutions require an arbitrary GPA requirement above and beyond their minimum standards of academic progress. Also, some institutions will revoke the amnesty if certain conditions are not met (as, for example, maintaining a higher GPA).

Qualifying GPAs for current course work range from 2.00 to 3.00. The majority of institutions match their standards of academic progress. Institutional standards of academic progress are designed to give all students a minimum standard needed to complete their degrees successfully. Institutions must ask why it should be necessary to impose requirements beyond their own minimum standards of academic progress in the qualifying term. Are the additional requirements based on proven outcomes, or are they “arbitrarily” set so as to facilitate their acceptance by the faculty governance body? Do they affirm the college’s academic rigor, or are they intended to reduce the number of students who qualify? It is never advisable to set policy criteria that lack a specified purpose that serves the best interests of the student as well as the institution. The required minimum GPA that is stipulated in an amnesty policy should be identical to the institution’s threshold for good academic standing.

Other elements of an amnesty policy may be added if they reflect the institution’s culture; these may include a cooling-off period and a student statement of commitment to academic improvement. That said, I advise caution with regard to the length of any cooling-off period. Consider how much time may elapse: the age of the courses plus the cooling-off period plus the required terms of improvement. If the age of the qualifying course is comparatively great, then the cooling-off period should be less than—or, perhaps, equal to—that of your institution’s suspension period. Relate any such policy element to the number of students you can serve and the probability of their success vis a vis the cooling-off period. How
Middlesex County College

ACADEMIC AMNESTY APPEAL

A student who had exhibited poor academic performance prior to an extended period of absence from the College, may, following a successful return to the College, appeal to have the previously earned grades disregarded in calculating the GPA.

The following terms and conditions apply:

- The GPA prior to the period of absence from the College must have been below 2.0.
- A minimum of three years without Middlesex County College enrollment in credit and credit equivalent courses must have elapsed prior to re-enrollment.
- A student must complete 18 credits following re-enrollment, with a minimum GPA of 2.0, prior to submitting the appeal.
- No credits or grades earned prior to the period of absence will be counted in the calculation of the new GPA or credits toward graduation.
- All courses and grades will continue to appear on the transcript.
- An Academic Amnesty Appeal may be approved only once for any individual student and is irrevocable.
- Note that a student receiving benefits from the Veterans’ Administration will not be reimbursed for repeating courses which had already been passed.
- Note also that a student transferring to another college will be bound by the incoming college’s terms and conditions for accepting transfer credits.

How Old Do the Courses Have to Be to Qualify for the Fresh Start?

This question is related to others which I will try to treat independently. Policies indicate a range from two to ten years, with the most common age of courses being three or five years. Consequently, a student cannot apply for amnesty for any course taken less than three or five years previously. (I would add that two years seems too short a time and ten years too long.) A useful study would consider the success of students who have received amnesty in relation to the age of qualifying course work (and other factors). Years of experience in the registrar’s and admission’s offices suggest to me that three to five years is likely the best policy.

What and How Many Courses/Grades or Terms Qualify for Amnesty?

This discussion can lead in several directions. (And let me warn you that I have an opinion.)

- Do we draw a line in the sand, or do we apply institutional transfer policies to qualifying courses and give amnesty only for those courses for which passing grades were not earned and thus would normally be refused for transfer credit?
- Do we allow one term, a set number of terms, or any term within the age limit specified in the amnesty policy?
- Do we establish criteria as to which courses may qualify, as, for example, only general education courses; only courses not currently in the student’s program; all courses or none; only workforce courses (if the institution is a two-year college); etc.?

History should guide our practice in setting this aspect of any amnesty policy. (This explains why I am opinionated.) The “Joint Statement on the Transfer and Award of Credit” was issued within a year of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation’s November 2000 statement that institutions should not make transfer decisions based solely on the source of accreditation. (The three organizations that oversee accreditation and set standards and best practices for our industry were trying hard to repair the damage of years of credit-transfer practices that affected courses that had been paid for by federal financial aid before the U.S. legislature passed bills to alleviate all institutions of any choice in the matter.)

The “scare of 2003” was H.R. 3311 (introduced by U.S. Representative Howard “Buck” McKeon), which assumed that the rejection of credit was a major contributor to the rising costs of education. H.R. 3619 was introduced on the heels of H.R. 3311’s defeat; it removed the threatening
rhetoric of H.R. 3311 and encouraged articulation between institutions. After H.R. 1619 was defeated, two more years were spent debating—and defeating—bills that proposed to legislate credit-transfer practices. Beginning in December 2003, AACRAO intervened with letter-writing and lobbying efforts. Higher education institutions fought valiantly in 2004 and 2005 to retain their autonomy and academic freedom to evaluate and transfer credit on the basis of valid acceptability and applicability criteria. Finally, legislative interest in transfer credit subsided. Given this difficult and not-so-distant history, it is imperative that any amnesty policy balance its treatment of credit against any unnecessary or non-defendable practice that would require a student to repeat credit already earned at the institution in question or elsewhere.

Most colleges do not “draw a line in the sand” such that all credit older than x number of years will not transfer. Where such policy does exist, it typically was established prior to 2000. Institutions that do have such a policy in place should consider reevaluating it as it seems arbitrary and removes useable credit from students’ records. Such policy also is not defendable given acceptability criteria (e.g., the course was taught by a qualified professor; it met for the appropriate length of time for the three credits awarded; textbooks used were of legitimate rigor for a course of its level; etc.) and applicability criteria (e.g., the course is equivalent to one required in the student’s program; the course may substitute for one of yours; other students have used the same course to meet a requirement at your institution; etc.).

According to my research, the best policies apply their own transfer practices to all or some terms that meet the age criteria. Any course for which a passing grade was earned is retained while those for which failing grades were earned may be granted amnesty. Institutions may want to stipulate a maximum number of terms—three consecutive terms, for example—to which amnesty may be applied. They should not adopt additional restrictions (for example, “only program courses qualify” or “only general education courses qualify”) unless the institution can...
satisfactorily answer the question, “How does this restriction benefit the student’s academic performance or safeguard the college’s degree integrity?”

Another item notably absent from amnesty policies is whether they disqualify students from receiving graduation honors. Only one of the 50+ institutions I researched mentioned it; honors at that institution are calculated on the basis of all courses taken regardless of amnesty. A partial poll of 25 additional institutions indicates that probably 95 percent of schools do not calculate all courses for honors but use the fresh start GPA. The graduation honors policy thus is reduced from being a matter of philosophical opinion to being one of practicality for the student.

Giving students a fresh academic start seems more reasonable to me now than when I first undertook my research. A good amnesty or “fresh-start” policy will include the following criteria:

- It is a one-time-only option.
- The student must have a current term GPA of 2.00 for a minimum of 12 college credits or a current term GPA for two consecutive terms of 2.00 for a minimum of 24 college credits (assuming that 2.00 is the minimum GPA for good academic standing).
- Amnesty will apply to terms of study that were completed at least three to five years previously. Lesser qualifying periods should require a greater cooling-off period. Greater qualifying periods should require the same cooling-off period as for suspended or dismissed students.
- Terms counted toward a degree may not qualify for amnesty.
- The institution will apply amnesty only to courses for which non-passing grades were earned and in accordance with the institution’s transfer policy.
- Amnesty will apply either to all terms or to a specified number of terms—as, for example, to three consecutive terms—that meet the age criterion.
- How credits will be allocated; how they will appear on the transcript; how they will be calculated in the GPA; and how they will affect graduation honors should all be addressed.
- The process for applying for as well as for granting and denying amnesty should be well-defined as part of the institution’s policy.

Would you like a chocolate? I’m sorry; all I have left are coffee crèmes.

About the Author

KATHY BUCKLEW is Director of Student Enrollment Services/Registrar at Polk State College in Winter, Haven Florida, part of the Florida College System. She previously was a consultant for Jenzabar, a higher education software company, and also spent four years as registrar for Southeastern University, a private institution in Lakeland, Florida. She is the Chairperson for the Florida College Admission and Registrar Officer’s organization and is a frequent presenter at conferences and seminars.
Welcome back for this third in a series of eight articles on project management (PM) in the academy. If you have tried to implement some of the PM techniques we suggested in our first two articles, you doubtless are starting to realize that getting organized is a lot of work. However, we hope you are finding that it is well worth the effort.

It is worth it in that you will be able to set priorities, establish employees’ levels of effort, align schedules with resources (personnel and budget), and establish deadlines and other unit dependencies so your office can begin to bring projects to completion in a timely fashion. Recall that we must define what “completion” means so that our work and our projects do not continue in perpetuity and so stakeholders do not feel they can impose changes without first having a conversation about schedule, personnel, and budget. Remember: Leaders and managers must remain vigilant about organization and project management. Just a few extra pieces of work can misalign a department.

This effort is meant to be a structural (meaning permanent) change in the way your office performs and approaches its work. This is not a “one-time, get organized, and now we are good” exercise. It only works if you work it—and then keep working it. To aid in that effort, this article describes a specific application of the processes we have discussed to date: the step-by-step implementation of a structural change to Indiana State University’s Office of Registration and Records (ORR). It is one thing to espouse 5,000 words of theory and opinion; it is another to follow up with a specific example of the theory in practice.

SETTING THE STAGE

Indiana State’s ORR, like so many offices, has been overwhelmed with change, including an increase in expectations and effort, many additional projects, and increases in workload. The usual suspects are to blame: fewer staff in the office (the result of budget cuts, retirements, and layoffs); fewer staff in other offices (mission pushback); and a host of new information technology projects in response to the charge to automate everything. In addition, change in the type of work that is expected is not always reflected in current staffing. This can result in some employees wondering what to do and some with the requisite skills feeling overwhelmed. Often, those who have the good skills seek employment elsewhere, leaving the office in even worse shape.

Our case study began in fall 2009 as several key changes were being implemented at ISU. The strategic plan was being formalized, and many projects were being jump-started all over campus prior to the plan’s formal roll-out. In addition, the new president—a data-driven person—
had completed his first year at ISU and was beginning to make his mark. The result was an increasing workload campus-wide accompanied by new suggestions regarding how to accomplish that work. One of these new efforts was a large data warehouse project that involved several resources in the ORR. ISU’s Information Technology (IT) paradigm at the time was that IT took care of the back end, with most application owners living in the departments. The data warehouse fell to ORR, and the registrar was the lead, or project manager, with much of the work falling to ORR staff. As this project ramped up, other project work (not to mention anxiety) increased not only in ORR but all over campus.

The new strategic plan was formally unveiled at homecoming. Karl Burcher, a professor and twenty-plus-year veteran of PM and numerous startups, was hired to lead the implementation of the plan. (His start date was to be January 4, 2010.) In the meantime (November and December 2009), a budget process began to fund some of the work of the strategic plan, and some monies and resources were distributed across campus to facilitate this work. In particular, Goal 1, Initiative 9 (see www.indstate.edu/strategicplan) was created to ensure the “better use of data.” ORR was intimately involved with this initiative, as was the Office of Information Technology (OIT).

It was around this time that a couple of significant events occurred. In late December 2009, just before the start of what was planned to be an aggressive implementation of the strategic plan (approximately 30 initiatives; currently, there are 45), ISU suffered a midterm budget cut of $10 million. ISU had been operating pretty close to the bone already, so the university began to initiate layoffs and an early retirement program. (Few of these retirements would be replaced in the near term.)

Consider the timeline: (1) the plan rolled out formally in October; (2) money started to flow in November and December; (3) a $10 million budget cut was announced the last week of December; (4) full implementation of the plan began January 4; (5) layoffs and early retirements were announced in late February (ISU ultimately suffered a 15 percent workforce reduction); and (6) Goal 1, Initiative 9—“Better Use of Data” was being implemented at full speed, increasing the workload of ORR and OIT. In addition, ORR was threatened by the loss of up to ten staff. In response to this difficult scenario, the registrar of the ORR retired, along with several others. An interim was assigned, data projects came to a screeching halt, the number of office staff decreased from 25 to eighteen, and staff were buried by the workload. The new paradigm for this office proved quite painful and necessitated changes and increased efficiency.

What happened next on all of the new projects was...not a whole lot. This remained the case for quite a while. The interim registrar assessed the organization (and eventually became the permanent registrar). Immediate challenges were fewer staff, more work, more complex work (this had been happening over time), and misaligned work (in terms of the skills versus responsibility of those responsible for the work). Eventually, the data warehouse project team was reformulated, and the project started moving again. But this was just the tip of the iceberg for the ORR. The new registrar knew she must undertake significant changes in the way the office did its work and serviced its stakeholders.

The first step, a complete reorganization of the office, resulted in all ORR employees having to apply for positions in the new structure. This proved no small task as the registrar and her associate registrars had to rewrite approximately twenty job descriptions. Then staff had to apply, interview, and, finally, wait for their new appointments. This process took time, but once completed, it resulted in staff having responsibilities that aligned more closely with their skills. Most were enthusiastic. Morale improved.

Then, in early 2011, the registrar reached out to Karl (and, thus, Mike) for some project help. Karl and Mike had recently ramped up the strategic plan using PM techniques, and PM was gaining traction in various areas on campus. But little did the registrar know what she was
asking for. The office had reached the tipping point where the pain associated with change was less than the pain of staying the same. It was time to get organized. There were fewer staff, more and increasingly complex projects, and more interaction with and dependency on other units on campus. ORR’s world was moving faster with more work, more responsibility, less authority (the result of a more complex matrix of stakeholders), and an unending stream of deadlines and deliverables. The registrar had asked for help. There was no turning back.

**STARTING THE PM PROCESS**

How to begin? We knew we needed to understand the magnitude of the level of effort expected, all of the projects that were at stake, recurring items (maintenance associated with any organization), and whatever else might be brewing. We also knew that we needed to engage the staff, talk up “why we are doing this,” empower people to perform (i.e., protect them from the world so they could do their work), prioritize a few things from the outset, sniff out any politics, and assess the strength of the hierarchy. All of these steps were necessary to good management.

In the next few sections, we describe how we implemented PM practices. The process may vary as it is implemented elsewhere, but we generalize in order to provide a roadmap that others may follow. We facilitated the process at ISU, but the leader/manager of a unit could do so just as easily. It is not necessary to hire someone from the outside; in fact, an insider actually may have a much better understanding of the situation. Think of the change management process as a design-build process. Be willing to learn along the way what the next steps are and what actions will help the organization progress.

**THE FIRST STEP**

Our first step was to have a few conversations with the new registrar/director of the ORR. We needed to assess the issues, build trust, explain some processes, discuss work plans and white papers, and find out where the landmines were. Perhaps most important, we needed to develop a relationship with and achieve buy-in from the registrar. It took a couple of weeks or so to find the time for some meaningful visits.

Managers who serve as facilitators should set the stage and achieve initial buy-in by having conversations with their direct reports. The group needs to know that change is coming. We asked the registrar to speak with her direct reports and then with the entire staff at a regularly scheduled meeting so no one would feel surprised. In times of dire need, the facilitator might call a special meeting to talk about the “new way.” Be honest about the costs, including added initial work and the benefits of following through. We spoke candidly with the registrar about “the pain” before “the gain.” Both require accurate and timely discussion.

We also decided whom to invite to the first meeting. This was made easy by deciding who (that is, what level in the organizational hierarchy) could accurately write work plans; we needed to involve the people who would know how much time each unit of work would require and whether it involved a project or a recurring item. Ultimately, between eight and ten people were fully engaged in the process.

Be sure to “manage up.” In this case, the registrar reported to an AVP. Buy-in from above is critical, for a whole host of reasons. First, you want to stave off “end runs” from those who will complain about the changes taking place. Second, the AVP must convince the provost that our world (i.e., the office) needs work and that we are fixing it but that it will take some time. We informed the ORR that we would obtain some minor breakthroughs in three months; that we would be well on our way to understanding all the work in six months; and that in a year or so we would begin to benefit from a significant balance of resources, schedules, projects, and deliverables. And once that occurred, the office would begin to meet assigned/negotiated deliverable dates for all projects. Regardless of how well-prepared and well-organized you may be, more work inevitably will be added during this period of adjustment. Make the best of it, and fold it in. Eventually, the (re)organization process will catch up with the new work (read: projects) that just keeps coming. It is worth reiterating that it is better to be organized than not. The education process (the “whys”) must continue throughout—internally, externally, up, and down.

**THE FORMAL KICK-OFF MEETING(S)**

This meeting sets the stage for the work ahead and the use of the first PM tools. It sets expectations, assigns and aligns responsibility, and unites those who may not know one another well. It permits all within the hierarchy—from top to
bottom—to state that this work is important, that we will do it, and that my boss, his boss, her boss, and your boss are on board too. Remember: the AVP (or whomever your direct report happens to be) should be present. If she will not attend, go back to step one! And if step one does not work, it may be time to consider your own end run (or, in drastic cases, alternative employment). Note that if you do an end run (in which case you must be willing to crash and burn) and lose, you may need to find alternative employment anyway. You must decide what you are willing to live with, what is possible in your environment, and whether that environment is where you want to be. In some cases, a valid option may be to simply do nothing—to let things be a mess—and to remove yourself from the pain intellectually. All options are valid, though all are not necessarily productive or what is best for the whole. You must choose.

At our kick-off meeting, Karl described in detail the work that was ahead: work plans/white papers in the near term and the strategy (in brief) behind why we were undertaking this process. He also listened to their pain. The staff needed an open and safe forum in which to speak their minds and discuss what was happening to them. (Note the “to them.”) We always have to “get through this” and acknowledge publicly that the world is changing faster than it used to and, privately, what people are doing to themselves by staying the old course.

Our kick-off meeting turned into several kick-off meetings during which Karl taught lessons on efficiency, meeting processes, motivation, and team building. These sessions included handouts and discussion of the “whys” and “wheres” of the next steps. We also listened intently as part of an effort to determine what “easy” change(s) could be made and where staff would sense that their efforts would prove useful from the outset. We needed to find a task that we could accomplish and that would have an impact. Work hard to identify this first task. If it does not become apparent, then focus on a few tasks that staff can share and that will benefit everyone. At a minimum, this first task should involve the writing of white papers and brief work plans.

We found it ironic that the first task we identified was the office’s many meetings. Everyone felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of meetings they were attending. Meetings are inherently disruptive: Every time one transitions from meeting to work and back again, there are inefficiencies.

We decided to define every meeting that people had to attend in the office, to treat each meeting as a project, and to write a white paper for each. We would examine how much time the meetings took and how often they occurred. We also defined the meetings’ purpose and the level of effort and need to attend each meeting. An assignment was given: In three weeks, a white paper was due for each meeting they or their staff attended. The white papers followed the format described in our last commentary; most were only a page long because they needed only to assess resource consumption. The work was divided into three areas—academic, data, student—each area having been assigned to an associate registrar. Each white paper was submitted to Karl and Mike for review and editing, and then we called another meeting to review them as a group.

THE FIRST WHITE PAPER REVIEW

While meetings are an important topic to address, our intent was really to help the staff learn how to write white papers to represent their work. Helping staff adopt a white paper/work organization mindset helped them think logically and methodically about their work, schedules, resource use, and deadlines. We edited each white paper using red ink (we approached this process as if we were teaching a class), reconvened everyone, and went through each as a group. We believe fully in transparent management: Everyone gets to see everything; there are no secrets. We build trust, and each person has something to teach every other person.

Sometimes you learn things along the way that prove to be tremendously valuable. For example, after reviewing the meeting white papers, we determined that the ORR was paying for approximately 1.34 FTE of “meeting” time. We were shocked! How can an office survive when staff members spend so much time in meetings? One could hardly work for any length of time without being interrupted by a meeting. (We suggested sarcastically that the office ought to designate an employee as the “Meeting Goer—Liaison to the Campus.”) Granted, some meetings are important, and content experts need to attend meetings sometimes, but not every meeting. This office was spending more than $100,000 each year just on meetings! This had to change.

The next step was to determine what to do with this newfound information. There was some real work we could do
right away. (This is good for team building. It is the Steve Jobs presentation philosophy: Talk about the enemy [a problem], then bring the group together to defeat it. The effort also helped prepare us to develop plans for bigger and more complex projects.) We analyzed each meeting and set about making the process of attending meetings more efficient. We examined the purposes and schedules of internal and external meetings and began to develop a plan, to include “sharing the load.” We also made sure that two did not attend when only one was needed. We also considered delegating meetings rather than always having a supervisor attend. (The office often needed to send a representative, but that representative did not always have to be the registrar or an associate registrar.) It can be fun to attend meetings with one another; and meetings can provide some respite from chaos, but not in our shop. If you need a change in pace, get organized, use PM tools, read a professional article, or have lunch with a colleague.

Although we began this first exercise as part of an effort to learn to write white papers, we ended it by cutting 0.65 FTE in meetings. Notably, we had just begun our reorganization.

We determined how to save more than $50,000 (S&H) in time, and we learned how to write white papers. Methodical PM analysis works. Getting organized is worth it. Folks were happy to attend fewer meetings, and they began to think more efficiently. Overnight, staff began to get more work done simply by thinking about the what, why, budget, and schedule of their actions. Most people like to work hard, provided their work has a clear purpose, is brought to completion, and provides a sense of accomplishment. We started down the path by analyzing meetings. Do this as a proxy for the greater good, and who knows: at the very least, a good laugh may come of it. It will bring people together, and they will learn how to write white papers...the beginning of the rest of the story.

**DIRECT PROJECT (AND RECURRING) ANALYSIS**

Having learned to write white papers, it became time to “eat the elephant” (that is, the “big problem”—chaos management and work overload). (You may be familiar with the expression that you “have to eat the elephant one bite at a time.” In ORR, people had been running from the elephant. We argued that we could not run any longer.) Workloads and pace are increasing exponentially. (Is it too much to think that before too long people will work 24–7 for a few years and then take a season off before doing it all again?)

The short story is that we face increased competition with narrower margins, fewer employees, more IT, more projects, and a pace we have never yet had to endure.

We asked the group to list every project on which they were working—and/or on which they were supposed to be working. Each of the associate registrars were to meet with their direct reports; compile a list and description of each project in her area; and indicate who was (or who was supposed to be) in charge. For work that had no named lead, we asked that each project be assigned a project manager or lead person. We also asked the group to think about what resources they might need but not yet have for each project. The registrar created a master spreadsheet. Two-inch binders—one for each associate-level area and another for the registrar—were created; these came to be referred to as “the books.” If a project was not in “the books,” it did not exist. And to get in the books meant that a work plan or white paper complete with resource needs, a schedule, priorities, and an accountable leader had been submitted, discussed, and approved. Yes, we compiled the white papers in binders. Why? So staff could consult a master book that all could see and touch and contribute to; this is far preferable to having one hundred (or even ten) different versions of a digital file on five staff members’ computers—a situation conducive to confusion and, possibly, argument. Detailing every project in a white paper and making hard copy available helps ensure common understanding; decreases conflict; and improves efficiency and management.

During our review, several people began to articulate office requirements associated with recurring work. Typically, we focus on project work, but in ORR (as in so many offices), many items require daily, weekly, monthly, or simply “periodic” attention. We decided to refer to these as “recurring projects.” Because recurring projects comprise such a high percentage of the work of ORR, they had to be represented so that new project requests could be considered in context. All office work must be “lined out” (that is, resource requirements and schedule must be determined) so we have a good idea of what we are already doing, what additional projects we can handle, what timelines will need to be adjusted, and what work will need to be re-prioritized. When the office is organized and staff
are working efficiently, we can push back with data when we are asked to do additional work. We can ask, “What is to be given priority?” We will do what we are asked to, but we need to know what the new priority is, what the new sensitivity is, and what the new schedule(s) should be.

Once we had compiled a master list of every project for which the office was responsible, the staff started writing. Our initial thought was to write work plans—ten-page (or fewer) documents—but we had to concede to white papers (approximately two-page summaries) as we had listed more than 50 projects in addition to more than 50 recurring projects. We had a book to write, two pages at a time! The sheer magnitude of the task gave staff pause. “No wonder we feel the way we do,” some said; some asked, “How are we going to find time to write these white papers?” We replied, “How can we not find the time? Do you want to live in this chaos forever?” Just as an office’s workload is not created in a day, so it takes time just to document the workload. We began by writing three to four white papers at a time. We met, we assigned workload, and we set delivery dates. Mike and Karl helped along the way and then reviewed each and every white paper. Back and forth we went, for six months. And in that time, an amazing thing happened: the office staff started getting organized before we were planning to be such. They adjusted, they got faster (most likely just to survive), and they wasted less time on mobilization and transition. Eventually, those two-inch binders were filled with white papers. Even before we used data to change our world, we engaged in lots of writing, reading, and editing in order to increase our efficiency.

PRIORITIZATION
With all office projects documented in detail, we could move on to prioritization and subsequent resource utilization/availability/capacity to perform quantification. We still had to complete a couple more steps before we could undertake a data-driven push-back to work overload. Remember: We never can stop the onslaught of projects and work. Instead, we must organize and manage ourselves so we can ask for adjustments in schedule and priority when new projects are assigned. We must ask our bosses, clients, and stakeholders for permission to manage our time though prioritization; when permission is granted, we can start to deliver excellent service and products on time and within budget.

We took the better part of a year to accomplish the steps described above. The staff became adept at assessing work and projects, articulating needs and resource requirements, and establishing precise business requirements. But the question remained: What work should be done first?

It was time for a retreat. The retreat was a one-day event that had many parts. The morning session included a fairly standard chat about the future, a motivational speaker, and a few exercises. After lunch, it was time to prioritize. Each of ORR’s three areas worked as a group to prioritize its projects (approximately 10 to 25 per group). (In reality, few are willing to invest the level of effort that is necessary to get fully organized; even fewer complete the process and get to the “top ten” list.) It was important to have the AVP present; she had attended several of the white paper reviews and was fully engaged in the process.

AND THE FINISH
We finally had to call the groups back together. We posted the groups’ priorities on the wall and stared them down. The elephant was in the cage. People knew what to do tomorrow, and the registrar could take all of the information about resource use and scheduling and priority, add it up, and hold it close. Now, when a new project loomed, she had proof that resources were tapped through the top ten existing projects (in addition to the recurring projects) and that the group was working hard to complete the projects as efficiently as possible. That said, more work still comes along, but can now be better integrated into the work load of the office.

Allow us to be specific: ORR had approximately 50 projects and at least 50 recurring projects, each of which had hours of associated effort as well as dependencies, staff, and estimated schedules. We counted up the hours, figured in a margin of error (this was bottom-up analysis) to account for unanticipated challenges and negotiations, and determined that ORR staff were tapped out at 125 percent. Most of the time, even the most conservative estimate will demonstrate that there is more work than can be accomplished in a 40-hour week. This is the new paradigm, and it promises to be the norm for some time to come—perhaps for our lifetimes. But you need the data to prove it. You need the organization and the white papers (i.e., the plans) to build trust through the hierarchy, to
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demonstrate that you know what to do next, and to build trust with your boss. Then all can believe that you know what you are talking about and can show with real data why the work is lined out as it is.

With the retreat behind us, we held a brief final meeting with the original group. It was time to stand at the front of the room and say, “Go.” It is important for the facilitator (or the boss) to clearly signal a change in the way business will be done. Someone has to say, “Nice list; we approve; enough learning, planning, etc.; now it is time to begin.” Ours was a year in the making—a long time to define three “top ten lists.” But neither was it a small task.

Standing there, looking at the staff and at the list, it was clear that they were ready to begin. They understood the logic and the process of the entire year. They were ready. There would be no more discussion about work (at least in the near term). Finally, we told them to do the work. They were on their way to taking control of—and being responsible for—their own destiny.

As important as this exercise was, and as much progress as was made, we are under no illusions that this was the end or that it would be easy from this point forward. Many challenges remain. But this group succeeded in seizing some power from the chaos. You, too, can take control, one step at a time.

Until next time,
Karl and Mike

About the Authors

KARL E. BURGHER, PH.D., P.E., is Chief Strategy Officer and a Professor at Indiana State University (ISU), where he has worked since January 2010 to manage the implementation of the University’s five-year strategic plan. He oversees 45 teams, more than 250 people, and well over 300 specifically defined projects in a PM-like matrix. Karl learned PM techniques in the construction industry, where he worked for ten years as an explosives engineer. Subsequently, he managed many federal research and education contracts. Prior to arriving at ISU, he taught management and project management at the University of Missouri-Rolla. Karl 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 University of Missouri-Rolla (now Missouri University of Science and Technology).

MICHAEL B. SNYDER is a director of enterprise services in the Office of Information Technology at Indiana State University and a certified PMP. He has been a Project Manager for more than twelve years, actively working in higher education for the past four. Prior to his current position he worked for many years in the private sector. Currently, Mike reports to both the CIO and the Chief Strategy Officer managing multiple projects that impact various specific areas on campus as well as others impacting the entire university. Most recently he is managing a very robust co-curricular data collection effort culminating in a student Co-Curricular Record. In addition, he is ramping up a Business Intelligence Unit and student success “War Room” helping the CSO and Associate VP of Student Success initiate campus wide Strategic Enrollment Management practices. Mike earned his bachelor’s degree in computer science, specializing in business systems from Pacific Lutheran University in Washington State and is currently working on his M.B.A. at Indiana State.
EIGHTH SISTER NO MORE

MARTHERS, P. P. 2010. EIGHTH SISTER NO MORE. NEW YORK: PETER LANG PUBLISHING. 268 PP.
Reviewed by Veronica Jarek-Prinz

One of my son’s best friends, a young woman I love and admire, was reciting the list of colleges to which she’s applied. She’s a bright girl, and most of the names she mentioned were familiar to me for the academic rigor and prestige they represented. The last on her list was Connecticut College. Surprised, I asked her what about Connecticut College had made her apply. “I really, really liked it,” she said. “I felt like they were really working hard to create an atmosphere that empowered women.” Wow, I thought: A college that can do that and that can make eighteen-year-olds feel it is a place I’d like to learn more about. So I was eager to read Eighth Sister No More by Paul P. Marthers. I wanted to find out whether what my friend saw in Connecticut College was merely her perception or was present by design.

The book chronicles Connecticut College’s beginnings as the brainchild of several talented, very motivated people who believed that Connecticut needed and deserved a college for women. Marthers details the commitment these individuals brought to the project and chronicles how they convinced others of its worth and desirability. In so doing, Marthers creates a case study of the women’s club movement—who belonged to them, how they worked, and why they were effective—that is quite interesting and seems an important contribution to the study of what was, at least to me, a little-known segment of history.

Once he completes the story of how the college was established, Marthers writes of Connecticut College’s struggles to define itself and its curriculum. He includes an effective section on the tug of war between wanting to provide women with an education in the liberal arts that was equal to the one men were getting at Yale and Wesleyan and the practical need to supply those women with skills and abilities that would be useful to them as they pursued the kinds of jobs and careers that were open to women at that time. This discussion has important echoes of the struggle higher education faces today, confronted as it is by escalating tuition costs, scarce employment opportunities, and the high debt burdens carried by many of its graduates.

The book’s narrative becomes somewhat less interesting as it shifts toward the present. The discussion of the College’s decision to become a coeducational institution is much less interesting than the story of the College’s founding and the evolution of its curriculum. The book’s depiction of the personalities involved—particularly that
of Claire Gaudiani, a philosopher focused on nonprofit institutions and their leadership—is interesting and absorbing. Gaudiani graduated with her bachelor's degree from Connecticut College and returned in the 1990s to serve as the College's president. According to the Hartford Courant, Gaudiani was as controversial as she was dynamic during her tenure as president. Her forceful leadership and tendency to go it alone alienated the school's faculty and ultimately forced her departure.

Eighth Sister No More succeeds in conveying a sense of what my young friend was talking about when she related her excitement about Connecticut College: It truly seems to be an institution dedicated to and informed by a desire to empower its students—particularly its female students—and to give them both the knowledge and skills necessary for success after graduation.

About the Author

VERONICA JAREK-PRINZ is Director of Graduate and Adult Admissions at Iona College.

ALL lowING STUDENTS TO ENGAGE THE BIG QUESTIONS

DELBANCO, A. 2012. COLLEGE: WHAT IT WAS, IS, AND SHOULD BE. PRINCETON, NJ: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS. 240 PP.

Reviewed by Helena Minerva

At present, higher education seems to exist as an industry, with its administration and faculty treating it as a business and its students attending for the sheer, constricted purpose of obtaining sustainable jobs once they graduate. This narrow view, combined with an increasing socioeconomic gap facilitated by colleges and universities’ becoming more elitist, shuns the ideal that college was meant to be an exploratory time for students to realize and assess new ideas and ethics while guided by their peers and teachers. “Institutions,” as Delbanco says, “should teach with their mouths shut.”

In College, Delbanco strongly defends this educational ideal and merges it with the promise of the American dream by examining the origins and intentions of the higher education system and tying them to the state of the system today. He argues that college

should be a place where young people find help navigating the territory between adolescence and adulthood. It should provide guidance, but not coercion, for students trying to cross that treacherous terrain on their way toward self-knowledge. It should help them develop certain qualities of the mind and heart requisite for reflective citizenship.

Delbanco asserts that it is crucial that college be available to all young people, regardless of economic status; otherwise it would be an offense to our democratic promises as nation. He warns that if we continue along our current path, we are at risk of abolishing the true ideals of what it means to be educated.

A testament to Delbanco’s claim that higher education should be multi-faceted and open the mind, College is not thesis driven but rather touches upon multiple aspects of the college system, from history and religion, to economics, to such inner workings of institutions as financial aid and faculty. Delbanco integrates historical documents, interviews, and literature and poetry with the research he spent some two decades conducting at more than 100 colleges of various types. The smart sprinkling of anecdotal, relatable elements makes his writing accessible and appealing to a wide variety of readers.

The author understands that in order to apprehend anything in its current state, we first must learn about its origins. He declares that undergraduate education is a “fascinating part of America’s history” and explains that writing the book is a result of his effort to “better understand certain central questions—not just about admissions or financial aid but about curriculum, teaching techniques, the financial structure of academic institutions, and, more generally, the premises and purposes of college education.” Even as a professor of literature, Delbanco acknowledges how little faculty may know of the ways in which their institutions work. Such sincere self-exploration makes this book an important, honest tool for a broad audience of students, parents, faculty, administrators, and citizens alike. “Anyone concerned with what it means, and what it takes, to educate citizens in our republic will find some interest” in this book.

College begins with historical detail of the earliest forms of undergraduate education in the United States. Delbanco notes that laments concerning college stretch from the colonial period to the present (in 1776, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband that education “has never been in a worse state”). We have always had a disparate education system; today, these disparities are exacerbated
by globalization, the unstable state of our economy, the increasing inadequacy of grade school education, and the technological revolution. We are even uncertain about what students should know and learn through the process.

Early in the country’s history, its colleges required no entrance examinations but rather nudged undergraduates to aspire to be worthy of sitting among their intellectual superiors. The aim was to “develop the whole man—his body and soul as well as his intellect,” which, of course, had a central focus on religion because “the subject matter of knowledge is intimately united in itself as being the acts and the work of The Creator.” This unity between all studies and the divine likely was the birthplace of a liberal arts education; few boundaries existed between subjects, with the result that education truly was interdisciplinary. In sum, when brought to the states, college (from the Latin collegium, or community) was modeled on the church as a place where people met voluntarily to learn from and to support one another.

College was not only about young people coming together to learn from their superiors; it also was about students converging to learn from one another. This “lateral learning” was (and still is) invaluable to a person’s moral and intellectual well-being, particularly because students formed bonds with others unlike themselves and had to learn to appreciate pursuits beyond their own. This attitude is still prevalent today, as any admissions representative knows. One of the foremost questions in the minds of selection officers is what each candidate can bring to the institution. College was meant to exist as an interaction of consciences, thoughts, and people, so admission arguably should be based upon each candidate’s ability to enlighten other members of the student body. But this is not entirely so....

Attempts to preserve the lateral learning model were made in the early 1900s, but none was so great as to dislodge the criteria of exclusion that existed (and that continue to exist) within the system. Schools began to raise their standards; this should have meant that any student who met the qualifications would be taken in, regardless of his social background. However, college always has been a somewhat exclusive institution. Delbanco notes that even the first dormitories served the purpose of exclusion, separating as they did the few Jewish and black students within each population to their own houses.

Examined from the perspective of the present day, it might be natural to praise ourselves for how far we’ve come. However, a closer look tells us this may not be appropriate. Delbanco cites admission procedures such as personal essays, interviews, and letters of recommendation that may silently and sometimes even subconsciously be used to identify qualities that can’t be captured by grades or standardized testing. Interviews often are conducted by student interns or alumni volunteers who have little input into the final admission decision; interviews thus are merely symbolic of a college’s supposed commitment to personalized evaluation. Need-blind admissions is another commendable activity; however, when colleges concentrate their recruiting on wealthier areas, they’re not likely to encounter many who actually need aid. As Delbanco notes, “If you really want to practice need-blind admissions, cover up the zip codes when the applications come in.”

Even more prevalent and less likely to be resolved are the barriers low-income students encounter when trying to get into college. According to the author’s research, merit aid increased more than 150 percent between 1999 and 2009 while need-based aid rose by less than 100 percent. The assumption is that scholarships are granted to high-performing students from high-income families rather than to deserving students from low-income families. Delbanco also cites a study of the nation’s top eleven institutions wherein the percentage of students from families in the lower 25 percent income bracket remained the same—about 10 percent—between the mid 1970s and the 1990s. Yet during the same period, the percentage of students from the top 25 percent increased from a bit over a third to fully half. When this equation is “broadened to the top 150 institutions, the percentage in the bottom quartile drops to around 3 percent.” Delbanco cites Donald Heller, who has observed that “college-going-rates of the highest-socioeconomic-status students with the lowest achievement levels are the same as [those of] the poorest students with the highest achievement levels.”

Ever optimistic, Delbanco doesn’t attribute these factors singularly to prejudice but instead offers “prestige” as a cause of the problem, particularly in the higher-ranked institutions from the aforementioned study. Trustees, alumni, and the public all eagerly await the annual rankings of colleges and universities published by U.S. News & World Report. Desire to attain this prestige and to maintain
rank has resulted in the confusion of the quality of students’ experience and education at such schools with their selectivity. A lower acceptance rate is believed to equate with greater prestige, so that schools fight to broaden their applicant pools not to find more suitable students but instead to prove how difficult it is to get accepted.

Even less publicized is the similarity between attaining admission and buying tickets to a concert: Some find it much more difficult than others to do so. In the same way that box offices sell large proportions of their tickets to big-money corporations before tickets go on sale to the public, institutions offer admission to recruited athletes, to relatives of alumni, and to members of underrepresented minority groups. By the time the general applicant pool is considered for admission, a majority of members of the freshman class have already been admitted. Early action programs contribute to this as they primarily attract students who are better prepared to successfully negotiate the admissions process and whose families do not depend on offers of financial aid to determine a college’s affordability.

A disproportionate emphasis on test scores is another obstacle that mitigates against a democratic higher education. Delbanco astutely observes that this has very little to do with what individual students can learn or contribute but very much to do with “reducing access for students from low-income families.” It is widely known that test scores correlate directly with the socioeconomic standing of students’ households. Does this mean that children from lower-income households aren’t as smart? Of course not. More likely, it means that the parents of children in higher-income families invest more money in better schooling, tutors, and/or test prep for their children.

Given recent economic trends, community college enrollment has increased, as have students’ financial needs. It seems clear that college size also will increase, but at what expense to students? The president of a community college writes, “Enrollment in community colleges has expanded at a rate four times greater than in four-year public and private institutions, yet they are able to expend only one-third as much per full-time student as their better-financed private and public counterparts.” The majority of community college attendees (often first-generation students or minorities) require the most support; undoubtedly, many of these will struggle with fewer resources and potentially will be taught by “underpaid, overworked, part-time faculty trying to cobble together a living teaching at two or three campuses at the same time.” It is no surprise that graduation rates at such institutions are low.

The factors currently at issue in higher education boil down to one thing: many institutions “have arrived at a conception of themselves that is the reverse of where they began.” Even the oldest institutions have mostly abandoned the religious foundations upon which they were built—that is, the “cardinal principle” that “no human being deserves anything based on his or her merit.” Institutions also have departed from their idealistic origins of self-discovery, examination, and ethical maturation. Students have become less likely to pursue “fruitless” subjects, such as the arts, in favor of more profitable subjects such as business and economics. In the wake of the current financial crisis, students have begun to question what is useful at all, in any capacity. Grades mean less than ever before. Grades of A+ are doled out regularly, and students frequently graduate with GPAs higher than 4.0. Yet, as Delbanco points out, a recent study indicates that “about a quarter of college graduates cannot comprehend a moderately sophisticated magazine article, or estimate if there’s enough gas in the car to get to the next gas station.” The significance of a college degree is so variable across institutions that it’s soon to become a “meaningless certificate.” Today’s students are in a constant state of worry about their lives after college. Delbanco suggests that “too many colleges are doing too little to help students cope with this siege of uncertainty.” He refers to the original core ideal of college—the idea of community—that is, to serve others by serving oneself “by providing a sense of purpose, thereby countering the loneliness and aimlessness by which all people, young and old, can be afflicted.”

Delbanco leaves his readers with suggestions as to how to combat the loss of community and discovery within higher education. He briefly describes common ideas (as, for example, the Robin Hood theory) but is quick to note that most traditional solutions will be resisted because of disparate treatment of those with and those without financial advantages. Instead, Delbanco focuses on innovative solutions better tailored to the technological revolution and the recent economic downturn. He insists that the government knows exactly how to meet the financial needs of prospective students (whether it does so or not). Yet even if it were to do so, we still would have no idea how to make students learn.
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Younger generations are accustomed to immediate gratification, multi-tasking, and obtaining information in short bursts. Delbanco is keenly aware that this means we likely will be less able to depend on the past to pave the future of higher education. He proposes hybrid learning whereby students “attend” online lectures by world-class teachers and then, in an effort to preserve the notion of community, gather on campus to discuss with their peers under the leadership of local faculty. This solution would relieve some of the financial burden for lower-income students; information through JSTOR for example, is cheaper to access than that presented in textbooks that must be purchased. Delbanco even suggests that students’ “mental attendance” may be greater when they are able to log in at a time of their choosing than when they are required to be in a classroom at a time when they might just as well be daydreaming.

Some changes need not be “rocket science”; even small changes can garner significant results. Delbanco tells of how Harvard professor Eric Mazur, after realizing that his students were merely memorizing facts as opposed to pondering them, shifted from long lectures to shorter ones interspersed with collaborative learning periods. This shift in pedagogy not only increased students’ thoughtfulness but also became a model for assessment as the instructor would not move on to discuss another problem until the present one was readily understood. The point, says Delbanco, is that undergraduates often are not lost; in fact, they’re bored.

The obvious remedy is to produce more instructors who believe that teaching is its own reward. But this is not easy given that scholars aren’t necessarily equipped to be effective teachers. Delbanco is aware that “a gift for teaching cannot be certified by any advanced degree, and that zeal for teaching can be drained away by the professional training that allows one to become a college teacher in the first place.” He blames this not on university research but rather on the way in which college teaching is used to finance researchers’ training. Teaching assistants are primed to think of teaching as an obligation: It will pay part of their tuition. And often, they are barely trained to teach the courses they are assigned. In this case, “products of a bad system grow up to be the operators and perpetuators of it.” In response, Delbanco urges Ph.D. programs to provide better “student-centered” doctoral education as those students one day will be teachers.

The author advocates for colleges to be more than places to weed out “the best from the rest.” He rejects the notion that colleges should be sanctuaries from debate and instead insists that they remain places where young adults can contend with themselves to identify their own ideas for meaningful living; this need not mean a lack of interest in the ideals of others. Delbanco beckons us to put our faith in our students—to understand “whether they are studying philosophy, hotel management or history, the vast majority of college students are capable of engaging the kinds of big questions—questions of truth, responsibility, justice, beauty, among others—that were once assumed to be at the center of college education.” We just need to let them.

About the Author

HELENA MINERVA is the Assistant Registrar at Hofstra University. She graduated from Syracuse University with a Bachelor’s in English, and received a Master’s in Education from Adelphi University. She brings a wealth of real-world experience to the Registrar’s Office having worked in a corporate setting in media strategy as well as in education as a teacher. She is an active participant in both her state and regional professional associations through presentations, as well as administration.
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