Enrollment management as an organizational model has become a positive foundation for the strengthening of an institution’s enrollment by integrating seven primary functional areas.

Enrollment Management

Thomas Huddleston Jr.

“The radical underlying commitment of enrollment management is its unswerving focus on the longitudinal care and comprehensive education of students” (Keller, 1991, p. 3). This statement captures the essence of enrollment management in focusing on the long-term welfare of the student and the entirety of the collegiate experience.

The first book about enrollment management, published in 1982, defined the program as an assertive approach to ensuring the steady supply of qualified students required to maintain institutional vitality (Kemerer, Baldridge, and Green, 1982). Other authors have voiced broader definitions. For example, Michael G. Dolence (1993, p. 8) defines enrollment management as “[a] comprehensive process designed to help an institution achieve and maintain the optimum recruitment, retention and graduation rates of students . . . [a]n institution-wide process that embraces virtually every aspect of an institution’s function and culture.”

Optimally, an institution’s enrollment is comprehensively developed and is based on a strategic, integrative plan that includes the identification, attraction, selection, encouragement, registration, retention, and graduation of targeted student segments. The quality of the students’ collegiate experience is based largely on the academic environment, operational excellence of the institution’s transition programs, student services, and personal development opportunities. Within this broad context, an enrollment manager’s efforts are intended to shape and influence particular units that have significant impact on a student’s decision to enroll, persist, and graduate. The strategic management of these units is important to an institution’s growth, fiscal health, and student satisfaction.
Enrollment management may be structured within the administration as a formal committee, implemented through a matrix structure, or managed as a comprehensive enrollment division. Integration, communication, and collaboration with the academic affairs area are critical for a model's successful operation, long-term viability, and acceptance by the campus community (Huddleston, 1999).

**Background**

Enrollment management, as a concept and process, remains relatively new to higher education. Developed initially within private institutions, the enrollment management concept soon spread to public institutions and gained popularity among two-year colleges.

The development of enrollment management occurred in response to a widespread focus on increasing new student enrollments. Concern for larger and more profitable enrollments in private colleges served as the impetus to develop an operational unit that would increase the integration, efficiency, and effectiveness of key operations; improve tactics and strategies of those areas to strengthen articulation with prospective students; and following enrollment, enhance the retention of those new students. These new directions became the springboard for new thinking and organizational change that would build enrollment demand and provide more focus on the students' collegiate experience.

In a national study conducted by Huddleston and Rumbough (1997), seven functional areas were most frequently identified as enrollment management units by colleges and universities: institutional research and planning, marketing, admissions, registrar, financial aid, student orientation, and retention and advising. Each of these functional areas plays a key role within an enrollment model that strengthens the opportunities for institutional success. The shared missions, primary goals, and the integration and interdependence of these key areas are vital to the successful implementation and operation of enrollment management.

**Institutional Research and Planning**

Focused planning and research are one of the first steps in the enrollment management process (Hossler, 1996). An integrated research and planning effort can enable colleges and universities to remain sensitive to the marketplace and carefully assess external social trends and internal strengths and weaknesses, relative to the attraction of new students, and their retention and graduation at the university. Research and planning inform the strategic directions of enrollment managers. An institutional research effort manages and provides relevant data including retention rates, historical trends, registration statistics, student characteristics, and enrollment patterns and projections.
Such data can frame the enrollment needs and objectives and identify relevant issues for additional discussion. For example, discovering what prospective and current students perceive to be important as well as the corresponding level of satisfaction is essential. Additionally, salient questions pertaining to information needs and the communication of findings to the campus community are integral to research and planning within the enrollment management arena (see Chapters Eight and Eleven for further discussion of these functions).

**Marketing**

The application of marketing principles and strategies has become commonplace within colleges and universities, particularly within admissions offices. Employing marketing concepts, educational institutions have formulated plans that create institutional awareness, identify student demographics, project student demand, and develop enrollment and retention plans. The comprehensive value of marketing is reflected in Krachenberg's classic definition: “Marketing deals with the concept of uncovering specific needs, satisfying these needs by the development of appropriate goods and services, letting people know of their availability, and offering them at appropriate prices, at the right time and place” (1972, p. 380). This early definition served as a basis for the implementation of increased marketing within higher education.

To understand the marketplace, each enrollment organization should obtain data concerning students who apply, matriculate, persist, and graduate. The data collected serve as a springboard for the employment of strategic marketing plans, most typically coordinated by the admissions office.

**Admissions**

Today’s admissions office is responsible for numerous functions, all of which must take place within an environment of rising tuition costs, the special interests and needs of the institution, and the competitive marketplace for students. In today’s environment, the admissions office is expected to produce significant revenues based on student headcount, while concomitantly being asked to focus on quality and other student characteristics. Within their objectives for admissions, institutions balance desired revenue, student quality, diversity, campus resources, selectivity, service to the community, and maintenance of academic majors (G. D. Chavis Jr., executive director of undergraduate admissions at the University of Central Florida, personal communication, Jan. 2000).

The admissions office is responsible for a variety of activities including generating interest in the institution by creating a comprehensive student profile, identifying and contacting the potential pool, converting prospective students into applicants, maintaining consistent contact with the applicants
to sustain their interest in the institution, coordinating programs and activities to help sustain that interest through the application process, hosting yield enhancement activities to encourage enrollment, providing quality customer service, and maintaining and developing constituent relationships with various community leaders.

Janet Lavin Rapelye’s summary statement about admissions professionals suggests the importance of their work: “As admission professionals, we are simultaneously educators and business managers, bringing in millions of dollars of revenue to our institutions and (hopefully) spending smaller amounts in financial aid. We serve as advisors to our presidents, spokespeople to our alumni/ae and the outside world including the media, leaders to our staffs, and, if we are fortunate, counselors to our college students. We deliver the class to the faculty, calculate the statistics for our trustees, fill out questionnaire after questionnaire for guidebooks and survey groups, and work with parents, guidance counselors and students” (1999, p. 23).

Registrar

Historically, a close synergy has existed between the registrar and the admissions office. Functions such as admissions processing were once housed in the registrar’s area. As institutions grew, separate admissions offices emerged to provide more attention to new enrollment growth.

Relevant to any enrollment management model, the office of the registrar manages the registration of students, student records, class schedules, catalogue production, classroom utilization, academic calendar, centralized information systems, and policy and procedural practices in accordance with state and federal guidelines. The office’s professional staff are typically involved in the development and management of technological innovations within the campus community. Personnel are required to supervise and utilize management information systems for reports and programs of the academic infrastructure.

Cooperation between admissions and registrar offices are now commonplace. Today, the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) has extended its influence to include the national sponsorship of Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) seminars and publications.

Financial Aid

The importance of financial assistance continues to loom large for colleges and their students. Enrollment management personnel are aware of the importance that financial assistance has on college choice. Family lifestyle, socioeconomic status, or social educational values may preclude or encourage the decision to attend a particular college. Colleges can affect the per-
ceived value of their product through their tuition pricing and financial aid strategies. Financial aid administrators are crucial to enrollment planning both for the support of new student enrollments and for student retention.

The financial aid office responds to student and family questions and concerns regarding financial aid availability and distribution including packaging of state and federal monies, grants, loans, and scholarships; institutional aid; need-based and merit-based assistance; and expected family contributions. The financial aid office also remains responsive to institutional needs, particularly those related to enrollments and revenues while ensuring compliance with federal and state regulations.

**Student Orientation**

Perigo and Upcraft (1989, p. 82) define the orientation program as “any effort to help freshmen make the transition from their previous environment to the collegiate environment and enhance their success.” The role of the orientation process within the enrollment management framework is to strengthen student transition and retention. Orientation may be the first confirmation of the image that has been conveyed by a college. A typical orientation program will aid students in their academic success by providing information about advisement, registration, housing, the administration of placement tests, cocurricular activities, and the transition to college life.

The orientation process should provide students and their families with realistic expectations of college life at that institution. Also, the orientation process provides an opportunity for the institution to learn about the student (Perigo and Upcraft, 1989). Although most orientation periods are a few days in length, the process is essential for building affiliation and appreciation of educational opportunities at that institution. Extended orientation programs for one semester or longer are gaining popularity and seem to enhance the potential for student success.

**Retention and Advising**

Student retention is a widespread concern among colleges and universities. At least 40 percent of all entering students will not complete a baccalaureate degree in the college where they initially enroll within five years (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). A successful retention program, as part of an enrollment management effort, has broad benefits, including fiscal stability for the institution (Peterson, 1991).

A campus retention program is based on appropriate research among selected student groups. Examples of needed data include student persistence rates, course success rates, nonresidence statistics, and selection of academic majors. Targeted studies can be designed to examine student relationships
with the college and identify attrition-prone students. Findings from these studies provide information about why students leave or remain at the institution. These data can assist in directing the efforts of an institutional retention audit and plan. Dennis (1998) acknowledges the difficulty of implementing practical and effective retention management practices. She notes the need for involving a wide variety of campus personnel and generating campus-wide support.

Student retention outcomes are considered by some educators to be key performance indicators of a successful collegiate experience. From a student perspective, educational and vocational advising are vital to their persistence in college. Effective academic and career advisement programs are paramount in retaining students at all levels within an educational setting (see Chapter Two for a more thorough discussion of advising).

**Trends**

Enrollment management models have been adopted on numerous campuses (Huddleston and Rumbough, 1997). They differ in scope and influence depending on institutional goals, revenue requirements, internal culture, and the competitive marketplace. Within public institutions, most enrollment management organizations report to a provost or vice president of academic affairs. In private institutions, enrollment managers are more likely to report directly to the president.

Both public and private institutions indicate that interest in increasing enrollment is the main reason for changing to an enrollment management structure. Intended benefits include increased enrollment, improved efficiency of the units within an enrollment model, expanded marketing capabilities, enhanced quality of new students, and stronger internal and external communication of student information.

The implementation of successful retention strategies remains a challenge, however, for enrollment management specialists at most colleges and universities. Retention crosses many fundamental areas of an institution. Most institutions have not designated a professional charged to coordinate and take responsibility for successful outcomes; rather, most rely on a campus-wide retention committee.

Examining demographics; improving access; linking pricing, aid, and institutional budgets; achieving student diversity; attracting and serving international and adult students; developing campus retention programs; managing information systems; using integrated communication; creating a marketing plan; enhancing student services; establishing predictive modeling; measuring the success of academic support programs; and establishing desired program outcomes and assessment measures represent some of the important issues that are being addressed by enrollment management teams, institutes, and conferences.
Careers in Enrollment Management

As can be seen by the variety of functional areas described, many potential opportunities exist for individuals desiring employment within an enrollment management arena. Because of the diversity of offices that compose the enrollment management system, employment opportunities may be found nationwide at a variety of postsecondary educational institutions.

Historically, most enrollment management practitioners have had a background in college admissions. Other practitioners have built their careers in financial aid, the registration office, institutional research, and student affairs. Regardless of functional background, the successful director of a comprehensive enrollment management program must possess many attributes. Previous administrative management of a primary area in the enrollment management area, creativity, leadership, task orientation, understanding of fundamental marketing concepts, interpersonal skills, team management experience, and familiarity with higher education are essential components for a successful enrollment professional. A master’s degree or doctorate is a common educational credential.

Professional organizations assist in the generation, compilation, and dissemination of information of pertaining to specific fundamental areas. They also provide a forum for networking and exploration of career opportunities (see Appendix for a list of the professional associations relevant to enrollment management).

Private vendors that provide collegiate publications, information systems, and general marketing services also play key roles in strengthening knowledge about enrollment management strategies. Additionally, publications including newsletters, articles, and books discussing enrollment management are available. A recent sign of the increased professionalization of the field is the creation of a master’s degree program at the University of Miami in enrollment management (“UM Offers First Graduate Program . . . ,” 1998).

Conclusion

The concepts and practices implemented within an enrollment management model have improved student services and learning. Today, we know that enrollment should be comprehensive in focus and requires greater attention than a singular admissions office. The success of the enrollment management idea has been the identification and integration of key administrative units that work together to strengthen the student’s chance for academic success and the institution’s competitive advantage.

The environment in which enrollment managers work has changed from college recruiters targeting traditional markets to a larger focus that requires broader management skills and knowledge base. Today, attention
is also required to nontraditional students, community colleges, graduate programs, and branch campuses. New technology, on-line services, distance education learning programs, for-profit competitors, and student services must be considered.

Enrollment management provides a positive career option for professionals in higher education. The future will continue to bring new enrollment challenges that colleges and universities must address to remain viable. Enrollment management principles and practices continue to offer a comprehensive means to address these challenges.

**Career Profile: Thomas Huddleston Jr.**

After earning an undergraduate and master’s degree at Texas A&M, Huddleston began his professional career in corporate public relations and association management before being asked to return to his alma mater to develop that institution’s first admissions office. He later earned his doctorate in education and taught while serving as assistant to the head of the School of Journalism at Oklahoma State University. In the fall of 1971, Huddleston accepted the position of dean of admissions at Bentley College in Waltham, Massachusetts. He continued to increase his knowledge about strategic marketing applications for the nonprofit sector and worked closely with the New England College Board, the New England Association College Admissions Counselors, and the New England Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

Huddleston moved to Bradley University as dean of admissions and financial aid. During his nine years at the university, he advanced from his initial position to assistant vice president of student life planning and, later, associate provost for student affairs. During this time, Huddleston led collegiate marketing institutes, published numerous articles on the use of marketing strategies, consulted, and initiated geodemography strategies to strengthen Bradley’s enrollment opportunities.

He left Bradley to become the director of worldwide marketing for Sperry Corporation’s education industry segment and, later, the head of student financial systems at National Computer Systems. He continued to serve as an educational consultant and eventually elected to remain at one of his assignments, Spring Hill College, as the vice president for institutional advancement. Responsible for various enrollment and student service functions, he also joined the College Board’s Summer Institute and helped develop the institute’s enrollment management track. Later he accepted a position at Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia as associate vice president for enrollment.

From there, Huddleston joined the University of Central Florida in Orlando, where he now serves as vice president for student development and enrollment services. He continues to speak at various forums, remains active with professional associations, and is the co-director of the College Board’s Summer Institute on College Admissions.
References


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