MANAGING THE

STUDENT ENROLLMENT OBSESSION

A REVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE ON THE COLLEGE STUDENT ENROLLMENT IMPERATIVE

Author: Dr. Jim Black

FIRST EDITION

ABSTRACT

Like many other industries, higher education is in the midst of a disruption. Perhaps, there is no more significant threat during this period of disruption than student enrollment. The author's hypothesis is that industry disruption represents both enrollment opportunities and threats. For this reason, *Managing the Student Enrollment Obsession* is primarily designed to provide a roadmap for colleges and universities to successfully navigate the changes ahead.

In the book, environmental scan data and a literature review are leveraged to forecast the potential implications for higher education of emerging trends, particularly as they relate to student enrollment. The environmental scan includes international, national, and regional findings associated with traditional and nontraditional undergraduate and graduate students attending U.S. postsecondary institutions or in the pipeline of potential students. While the literature review focuses on student enrollment, it more broadly examines other practices within the academy, such as teaching, learning, and service delivery. The review also extends beyond higher education to consider related trends in technology, market forces, as well as the attributes and expectations of Generation Z and Millennials.

Results of the meta-analysis reveal that the changing composition of students with diverse learning needs and expectations combined with exponential technological advances, increased competition for students, rising college costs and student loan debt have created the perfect storm. How institutions respond in this era of disruption will determine if this is a time of innovation or for some, an extinction event. From the analysis, the author suggests possible implications for colleges and universities viewed through the lenses of academic program innovation, student recruitment, student retention, and enrollment planning.

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PREFACE

An obsession may simply be a passion for or fascination with something like student enrollment. However, when pushed to an extreme, obsessions have a dark side: manic fixations, addiction, irrational thinking and behavior, or even more nefarious actions. An organization's ability to channel an obsession to positive, productive ends is the difference between success and failure. With this in mind, higher education institutions with a student enrollment obsession must manage change, mitigate threats, and seize opportunities in a way that lifts the entire organization to a higher plain.

Reflecting on my nearly twenty years as a university administrator and the last thirteen years as a consultant for some 500 colleges and universities across virtually all higher education sectors, I have concluded that many things have not changed. Reductions in state and federal funding, accountability, transparency, and dependency on enrollment revenue are just a few such constants. Even so, many of these factors have intensified over time.

Among the most substantial changes in recent years have been the morphing of students served by postsecondary institutions, advances in technology, the escalating cost of attending college, the related and ever-increasing burden of student loan debt, and the perception among some in the public that the value of a postsecondary credential may not be worth the cost or debt incurred. The rapidity of such changes is at the core of the challenge facing academic institutions today and into the future. After all, colleges and universities are not often known for their nimbleness and strategic dexterity.

In pondering this perplexing condition, I am reminded of an episode of *I Love Lucy* in which Lucy and Ethel Mertz are working on the assembly line at a chocolate factory. Initially, they are successful at wrapping the chocolates as each piece rolls down the conveyer belt. But, the supervisor demands that the conveyer belt speed up. Lucy and Ethel quickly become overwhelmed—providing some comedic relief. Then, Lucy evaluates their situation and makes a profound statement. "Ethel. We are fighting a losing battle." Unfortunately, this is exactly the predicament faced by many college and universities.

This quandary, along with the constant and rapidly changing factors previously alluded to, represent the fuel that has created an obsession over student enrollment at most schools. While increasing enrollment may be part of the remedy to the malady that plagues higher education, it should be only one facet of a much broader strategic solution. Increasing

enrollment comes at a cost and may not always be prudent in the longer-term. It also may not be possible at your institution.

Today's enrollment managers are frequently faced with internal and external environmental factors over which they have no control or influence: budget cuts, staff reductions, a shrinking primary market, and aggressive competition, among others. Regarding intensifying competition, I witness firsthand the growing gap between institutions that are adequately resourced and have the necessary staff expertise versus those that do not. Perhaps the best example of this relates to the use of big data in predicting new student enrollments and current student risk factors. The colleges and universities that have enrollment analysts or so called data scientists on staff have a significant competitive advantage to leverage data more strategically. Relying on the same old approaches to enrollment management will ensure your institution does not maximize its enrollment opportunities.

For this reason, I decided to write *Managing the Student Enrollment Obsession*. The intent is to provide institutional leaders and enrollment managers with research, insights, and a road map to overcome the enrollment obstacles you face. My sincere hope is that you will use this book as a resource for decision-making, planning, and strategy development.

The Purpose of the Book

Managing the Student Enrollment Obsession is primarily written for executive leaders and enrollment managers. It offers a review of the literature associated with the current and emerging context of higher education, the students you serve, as well as enrollment challenges and opportunities.

Within this context, the book explores implications for academic program innovations, enrollment strategies, along with effective methods of enrollment planning, implementation, and continuous improvement on the strength of performance measurements. Equipped with these tools, you will be prepared to navigate the complexities of ever-changing environmental conditions and end the hysteria about next year's enrollment. You will become increasingly strategic in your thinking about the dynamics that are in play and consequently, what actions to take.

Organization of the Book

The book is organized in four parts with eleven chapters. The three chapters in *Part One* provide a high-level overview of the environmental context—challenges and opportunities at the forefront of the higher education industry; changes in student behaviors, attitudes, values, and expectations; and common enrollment issues facing colleges and universities. *Part Two* includes chapters that focus on the academic enterprise—alignment with the needs of the market, educating students effectively given the attributes described in *Part One*, and promoting academic programs in a way that will engage today's students and compel them to enroll. In *Part Three*, the emphasis shifts to the more traditional elements of an enrollment management portfolio—student recruitment, retention, and progression. Highlighted in these chapters are methodologies and strategies designed to resonate with Millennial and Generation Z students, who collectively compose the majority of postsecondary students today as well as for the foreseeable future. The last section of the book, *Part Four*, consists of chapters intended to illustrate how to successfully plan, implement, and measure the enrollment strategies presented in *Part Three*. Finally, the *Conclusion* describes concrete actions campus leaders and enrollment managers should pursue with a view to strategically managing student enrollment.

Dedication

As of the writing of this book, I am expecting my first grandchild. He will become part of your future. This child, Sawyer Reynolds Buddin, will belong to the next generation of students, newly named Generation Alpha. Get ready. There is more change on the way.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The president and CEO of SEM Works, Dr. Jim Black, is an internationally recognized expert in enrollment management as well as in marketing. He has published a monograph titled, *Navigating Change in the New Millennium: Strategies for Enrollment Leaders,* and four books, *The Strategic Enrollment Management Revolution,* considered to be a groundbreaking publication for the enrollment management profession, *Gen Xers Return to College*, *Essentials of Enrollment Management: Cases in the Field*, and *Strategic Enrollment Intelligence*, Canada's first book on enrollment management. Among his other published works are numerous articles and book chapters including a feature article in College & University, *Creating Customer Delight;* a chapter, *Creating a Student-Centered Culture*, for a book on best practices in student services published by SCUP and sponsored by IBM; a chapter on enrollment management in a Jossey-Bass book on student academic services; as well as a bimonthly feature in The Greentree Gazette.

Dr. Black is the founder of the Community College Enrollment Management and Student Marketing Symposium and the National Conference on Student Retention in Small Colleges as well as the cofounder of the National Small College Admissions Conference and the National Small College Enrollment Conference. He formerly served as the director of AACRAO's Strategic Enrollment Management Conference.

Black was honored as the recipient of the 2005 AACRAO Distinguished Service Award and was selected as the 2012 Alumnus of the Year by his graduate program in Higher Education and Student Affairs at the University of South Carolina. He has been interviewed by publications such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Atlantic*, AASCU, *Converge Magazine*, *The Enrollment Management Report*, *The Lawlor Review*, and AACRAO's *Data Dispenser*. Black also was featured in an international teleconference on enrollment management sponsored by The Center for the Freshman Year Experience at the University of South Carolina, and a PBS broadcast on "Blending High Tech and High Touch Student Services." In 1999, Jim Black was named an IBM Best Practices Partner, one of only twenty-three in the world. He was invited by The College Board to Heidelberg, Germany, to evaluate the APIEL Exam and was invited to lead conferences on enrollment management and student services in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

Dr. Black has served on the boards of several technology companies and has consulted with

companies such as Microsoft, Blackboard, and the SAS Institute. Higher education clients have included over 500 two-year, four-year, public, and private institutions. In his role as a university administrator, Black served as an associate provost, dean, and director of enrollment-related operations.

Jim earned a B.A. in English education and M.A. in higher education administration from the University of South Carolina, as well as a Ph.D. in higher education curriculum and teaching from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

PART ONE

An Analysis of the Enrollment Context

The Disruption of Higher Education

Attributes and Expectations of Today's College Students

Enrollment Challenges and Opportunities in the Environmental Context

INTRODUCTION
An Analysis of the Enrollment Context

Few colleges and universities are immune to market forces or other environmental conditions that can alter their enrollment trajectory—positively or negatively. Certainly, you are familiar with phrases like "demography is destiny" and "the political winds are shifting." Though these are clichés, they reflect possible truths as well as the enrollment outcomes of institutions that ignore obvious and subtle signs on the horizon. Too often, leaders in the academy wait for the associated pain to ravage the organization before reacting. Particularly as this phenomenon relates to the enrollment context, reactionary efforts to address emerging issues and opportunities yield only modest results.

As Walter Gretzky once told his son, Wayne, "Skate to where the puck will be." The lesson here is that higher education leaders, enrollment managers, and their institutions will thrive only if they anticipate change and plan accordingly.

Admittedly, being strategic requires time and expertise to monitor emerging trends, analyze the data and research, identify related implications, and act proactively. In my role as a higher education consultant, I have observed that these are daunting tasks for many, but they pale in comparison to possessing the institutional will to act. Letting go of the old ways of doing things along with underperforming strategies and programs is the most difficult mountain to climb. Instead, most colleges and universities default to doing more—often with less. This approach is not strategic or sustainable.

To support your development as a strategic thinker, the chapters in *Part One* define the current enrollment context and foreshadow seismic changes in the higher education realm. *Chapter One* points to the trends that many experts predict will lead to the disruption of postsecondary education, as we know it. While disruption of this magnitude is disconcerting to many, it can be an opportunity to reconceptualize how education is delivered, students are served, and enrollments are optimized. In *Chapter Two*, the focus is on the changing nature of students pursuing a college credential, namely Millennial and Generation Z populations. The chapter explores their attributes, values, and behaviors, particularly as these characteristics relate to their educational journey and use of information and technology. Finally, *Chapter Three* reveals trends that frequently have a direct impact on

student enrollment. Demographic and pricing trends as well as enrollment patterns are emphasized in this chapter.

CHAPTER ONE

The Disruption of Higher Education

The Austrian economist, Joseph Schumpeter, coined the term "creative destruction" in the 1940s to describe how human lives are improved through technological innovations. Then, as is the case today, creative destruction often translates into fewer or at least different industry leaders and worker jobs.

Accenture, a global strategy and innovations company, conducted a study of disruptions across twenty industry sectors (Abbosh, O., Moore, M., Moussavi, B., Nunes, P. & Savic, V., 2018, February). The results of the study revealed that nearly two-thirds of industries are currently undergoing high levels of disruption and another two-fifths show signs of susceptibility to future disruption. These findings suggest that not only is disruption pervasive, but for many industries, it is a way of life.

For example, many tax accountants have been replaced by self-service tax software like TurboTax, brick-and-mortar booksellers such as Borders have been supplanted by online bookstores like Amazon, and cable and satellite TV services are being upended by digital providers such as Netflix and Hulu. In the near future, it is expected that driverless cars will dramatically reduce driving jobs (e.g., taxi, Uber, Lyft, truck, and bus drivers). 3D printing is growing rapidly, which will soon make it possible to produce a wide variety of goods on demand without ever leaving your home. And, there are mounting fears among many workers that robots will continue to replace jobs at an alarming rate, particularly in the manufacturing sector. In fact, most experts predict that robots also will be performing many routine tasks in households within the next fifteen to thirty years.

With such widespread industry disruptions, it is inevitable that higher education will undergo a similar period of creative destruction. One could posit that the disruption of higher education is already under way. College libraries and librarians have moved online. Websites like Kahn Academy have supplemented student tutoring, and learning platforms such as StraighterLine and Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) may reduce the need for college professors over time.

Higher Education: Ripe for Disruption

In an article published by University Business (Sussman, J. & Kim, C., 2015, March), the authors compared the causation of disruption in the healthcare industry with similar signs in higher education. The similarities include:

❖ *The perceived value of the service is declining.*
❖ *Costs to purchasers are high and have been rising more rapidly than inflation.*
❖ *Government provides a significant degree of funding and is pushing back.*
❖ *The ability to shift costs from one payer to another is diminishing.*
❖ *Legacy organizations do not place a premium on convenience.*
❖ *The current business model is heavy on buildings and light on technology.*

The evidence to support these claims is pervasive. To illustrate, consider why media, policy makers, and the public have expressed frustration over the high cost of a college education relative to the return on that investment. Their frustrations are not entirely unfounded. For instance, too few students complete their degree, and many of the non-completers are saddled with loan debt. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), the six-year graduation rate at all four-year institutions was only fifty-nine percent. At two-year institutions, the three-year graduation rate was much worse—twenty-nine percent.

For those who do complete a degree, the unemployment rate is lower than for those who graduate only from high school—2.5% vs. 5.3% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017, February). However, Preston Cooper, a contributor for Forbes Media (2017, July), reported that about one-third of graduates work in jobs that do not require a college degree, and thus, it can be argued that they are underemployed. Of course, underemployment varies significantly by college major, as do wages. Data presented by the New York Fed (2018, January) show that majors with the lowest underemployment rates include nursing and education, and those with the highest early career wages consist of various engineering majors and computer science. The New York Fed also provides evidence that the median annual wages of college graduates peaked in 2002 at $46,292 as compared to $42,000 in 2017—a 9.3% decrease over the last fifteen years.

Over the same period, student loan debt has increased 300%, and since 1978, "the indexed price of college tuition and fees has surged by more than 1,122%," far outpacing inflation (13D Research, 2017, June). Consequently, it can be inferred that today's students are paying

more, incurring more debt, graduating at unacceptable rates, earning less, and many are facing underemployment. Richard Vedder, director of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity at Ohio University, credits recent declines in student enrollment not so much to shifting demographics or the residual effects of the Great Recession but rather to the rising cost of college attendance while the benefits of earning a degree are diminishing (13D Research, 2017, June). This is not a value proposition that appeals to the masses. The assertion that a college degree is the ultimate pathway to career and life success is debatable, particularly for the students who graduate from non-elite institutions.

Many non-elite four-year universities that do not possess a compelling value proposition, along with evidence to support their claims, will be highly vulnerable during this time of creative destruction. Compounding their dilemma will be external factors such as formidable competitors, old and new, as well as an inability or unwillingness to embrace radical change (e.g., embracing online and hybrid course and program delivery; eliminating expensive, nonproductive academic programs; rethinking the role of research and scholarship; limiting investments in new buildings; creating new revenue streams; exploring innovative partnerships). Simply recruiting and retaining more students is not the solution in an era of disruption.

While the federal government provides approximately 180 billion dollars annually to support higher education, primarily in the form of student financial aid, these appropriations have not kept pace with the rising cost of education. Moreover, state government appropriations have declined by eleven percent since 2008 (Sussman, J. & Kim, C., 2015, March). Ultimately, these funding reductions have been passed along to students and their families in the form of tuition and fee increases. Even though college and university enrollments were relatively strong until 2011, the tide has shifted and higher education may have reached a tipping point where an increasing number of middle-income families can no longer afford a private or even a four-year public university education. The long-standing strategy of shifting the cost of a college education from one student to another through tuition discounting is not sustainable. Evidence supporting this statement is found in the National Association of College and University Business Officers' (NACUBO, 2016) study of tuition discounting practices, which revealed that the average tuition discount rate for first-time, full-time freshmen reached an all-time high of 49.1% in the 2016–17 academic year.

Most people are willing to pay for quality products, services, and experiences up to a point, including a college education. With that said, time is the most valuable commodity that

students have. How they invest that time with your institution relates to time in classes, time to complete a degree, and time to engage with services. Campus locations are often centralized, and hours are limited. Gaining access to the right person at the right time can be challenging. Furthermore, navigating higher education institutions often requires an understanding of complex organizational structures, processes, and systems. This situation is in stark contrast to the infinite array of information and services available to consumers using their smart phones (Sussman, J. & Kim, C., 2015, March). Bottom line, compared to much of the world in which people conduct their lives, traditional colleges and universities are not particularly convenient, which has created an opportunity in the market for for-profit and free educational providers that place a premium on student convenience.

The aforementioned conditions suggest that higher education is on the brink of a disruption. At question is whether or not your institution will respond to these early signs and actively engage in what Harvard professor Clayton Christensen and his colleagues call "disruptive innovation" (Christensen, C., Raynor, M. & McDonald, R., 2015, December).

What to Expect in an Era of Disruption

Fortunately for higher education leaders and enrollment managers, the academy is not the first to undergo a disruption. Therefore, you can benefit from the lessons learned in other industries. An overview of relevant industry lessons is presented herein.

There is an old African proverb that states, "The animals on the Serengeti begin to look at each other differently when the water hole dries up." This proverb can be viewed as a metaphor for a dwindling customer base in other industries and a shrinking pool of students in higher education. In these scenarios, the natural consequence is heightened competition. So, expect and plan for more intense competition for a limited pool of students than your institution has experienced to date. To gain and sustain competitive advantage in this emerging environment, your institution must innovate, invest strategically in the initiatives and programs that matter most to your potential and current students, remain true to your mission, leverage institutional strengths to the degree possible, and focus on delivering a value proposition that aligns with the needs of the market (e.g., preparation for academic, career, and life success).

Expect an increasing number of alternative educational providers. Given the growing credibility and adoption of online learning by for-profits like the University of Phoenix that

enrolls some 200,000 students or free online courses delivered by edX for elite institutions such as Harvard, MIT, and the University of British Columbia, these online providers present a legitimate threat to lesser known brick-and-mortar campuses, even those that offer an extensive array of online courses and programs. Specialized providers, such as coding boot camps, also have entered the higher education landscape.

For most of these organizations, their business models were designed from the ground floor up to offer convenience, flexibility, affordability, and streamlined pathways to the credentials highly sought after by the masses. Moreover, their offerings are often scalable—something that traditional institutions have struggled to emulate. The ability for students to bundle educational credits across a variety of educational providers will further accelerate the expansion of this trend. The good news for traditional colleges and universities is that they often possess a superior quality product as well as the required technology infrastructure and instructional expertise to compete at some level. However, to do so, they must overcome internal cultural barriers, leverage market research to pursue the opportunities that have not been saturated by competitors, build on institutional strengths, and have the will to stay the course when the market opportunities are identified.

While competitive threats abound, they are often symptomatic of more deeply rooted issues within an industry sector, including higher education. New competitors typically rise from the smoldering ashes of a troubled sector, where gaps and thus, opportunities exist. Other lessons learned from industry disruptions made possible by competitive gaps and opportunities consist of the following:

1. Determine what the customer craves and deliver it.
In the case of college and university students, there are limits. Balancing student wants and desires with what they actually need to be successful students and engaged citizens can, in fact, be extremely challenging. "The customer is always right" philosophy practiced by many businesses simply does not fit with the mission of postsecondary institutions. Instead, the role of educators is to advance and apply knowledge, facilitate the exploration of ideas, foster cognitive dissonance, prepare students as lifelong learners and productive workers, and even hold them accountable for their actions or inactions. Ideally, the college experience should be transformational—helping students become the best person they can be. Still, failing to align teaching methods, curriculum, academic programs, and institutional services with the needs and expectations of students is a perilous path.

2. Create unexpected value.

Incumbent institutions tend to focus on known problems (e.g., student attrition causation factors, poor service delivery, cumbersome processes, undersubscribed programs, insufficient class availability). True disruption seldom occurs in this space. Creating value where it did not exist before or was not expected spawns disruption. In the private sector, such intuitive value ideation is seen in Disney's "Imagineering" the attractions in its theme parks, Apple's invention of the iPhone, and Airbnb's alternative to staying with the multitudes at expensive, disturbingly uniform hotel chains. This is what the authors of *Blue Ocean Strategy* characterize as swimming in the "blue ocean," where there are few, if any, competitors (Kim, W. C. & Mauborgne, R., 2005). No disruptor is found in the "red ocean" crowded with similar competitors.

3. Avoid being average.

If your school is one of the elite, well-known few, with highly selective admissions, it is not average. However, the vast majority of colleges and universities do not fit this profile. They have to find other ways to distinguish themselves. A capstone student experience, an innovative curriculum, guaranteed internship placement or study abroad, digital career portfolios, or a unique pricing model represent just a few examples. While it would be ideal to find something that makes your institution distinctive throughout the nation or the world, that is highly improbable. A more attainable goal is to position your institution uniquely among your direct competitors.

4. Identify the potential for expansion.

As it relates to student enrollment growth, expansion opportunities are usually found within one or more of four domains: (1) thorough penetration of your existing primary market, where the institution and its academic programs have a strong presence, (2) the introduction of new programs into your primary market, (3) promotion of the institution and existing programs in a new market, and (4) diversification—new programs and new markets. Each domain has inherent risks and potential rewards. Risk levels are illustrated in *Figure 1* and are described here.

Primary market penetration possesses the lowest risk, requires the least investment of resources, and has the fastest return on investment. Depending on an institution's primary market, this domain also may produce only modest new enrollments. Option two, **mounting new programs in an institution's existing primary market**, has risks associated with conducting the proper market research to determine student and industry demand as well

as market saturation. Another common risk relates to the degree to which new program offerings are adequately promoted. An obvious upside to this domain is that the institution already has visibility in the market. **Taking the current program array to a new market** requires the time and resources to develop a presence where none has previously existed. Sending recruiters to a new territory once or twice a year is woefully insufficient. Creating such visibility requires a sustained physical presence with area recruiters or alumni volunteers, targeted advertising, networking with schools and other organizations in the region, and strategic partnerships. Finally, **diversification** carries with it the highest level of risk because it involves assuming all the risks of launching new programs in a market with no prior visibility. If executed effectively, however, this domain can generate an abundance of new students.

Figure 1: Market Expansion Risks

	EXISTING	NEW	
Low Risk	**Primary Market Penetration**	**New Program Development**	Moderate Risk
Moderate Risk	**New Market Development**	**Diversification**	High Risk

EXISTING · NEW · Markets · Programs

5. Disruption always comes at a cost.
It is true that your institution may create a disruption by leveraging existing technologies and human capital. Yet, no organization can avoid the cultural and real costs associated with unlearning old ways, creating new programs and business models, scaling innovations, or marketing a new approach. These costs must be weighed judiciously against potential

benefits of such a paradigm shift. Once a decision is made to pull the trigger, the change process must be managed carefully with the upfront inclusion of key stakeholders.

6. Equate disruption with innovation, not extinction.

The rise of educational disruptors can be unsettling. If disruption is simply perceived as a threat to the way of life in the academy or ignored, the results will be devastating for many higher education institutions. Conversely, if disruption pushes college leaders and enrollment managers out of their comfort zone and they reinvent their institutions, the educational experience of students will be greatly enhanced. In a time of creative destruction, the winners are those who exert extraordinary efforts to go beyond traditional norms, which is not always the early adopters of a new educational model or practice.

Some industries have witnessed longtime incumbents disappear into the ether. In other sectors, however, this has not been the case. For example, the rental car business has retained the same industry leaders for decades, even though many operational fundamentals have evolved or have been disrupted. Take the core value proposition of rental car companies—how they facilitate a customer's travel to a desired destination. Not that long ago, rental car agents would provide their customers with a map and sometimes, highlight the directions to follow. Then came GPS. The rental car companies responded by renting GPS devices. Many continued this practice even after smartphones with GPS capabilities became ubiquitous, and the service was no longer needed. In the near future, we can expect rental car corporations to offer self-driving cars, where smartphone GPS apps will not be required. The point is that rental car companies have not gone extinct. They have evolved using technological advances to improve the customer experience. Higher education institutions have similar opportunities.

7. Successful disruptors pursue four disciplines simultaneously.

The four disciplines translated into the higher education lexicon include low costs, relational connections with students, program innovations, and rapid time-to-market. Of these, student connections is the only discipline college and universities excel at consistently. To thrive in a future with a seemingly infinite number of nimble disruptive innovators, educators must compete in the other three disciplines as well.

What Actions to Consider

At the verge of a disruption, organizations have choices. They can attempt to weather the storm by mitigating risks associated with a disruption. They can become an innovative disrupter. Alternatively, they can partner with an emerging disruptor. Becoming a victim of disruption is the only invalid response.

Every college or university leader has experienced the agony of developing a strategic plan. Hours of listening sessions and laboring over every word in a planning document can distort the value of such an exercise. Consider a similar exercise focused on becoming an innovative disruptor. Thinking outside of conventional boundaries with a view to creating unexpected value for the students you serve would be exhilarating and perhaps, revolutionary.

After all, higher education institutions are blessed with some of the brightest minds on the planet. When untethered from traditional norms and archetypes, the collective intellect within the academy is a powerful source for ideation. Harness this creative talent.

Of course, a planning ideation exercise is just the beginning. In point of fact, innovative disruption is not an activity; it is a mindset. Many industry disruptors have faltered over the long haul because they failed to instill an innovative mindset throughout their organizational culture. For such a mentality to permeate an organization, innovations have to be recognized and rewarded and learning must occur from every unsuccessful attempt at innovation. A culture where innovation is valued begins at the top of the organization. Even though the senior leaders of an organization seldom generate the ideas for a disruptive innovation, their visible support for said innovations is crucial to create the conditions for disruption to germinate.

To drive positive, mission-centered disruption, college and university leaders must be intimately familiar with the problems within the higher education industry. An in-depth understanding of demographic shifts, geo-political forces, student and societal trends, technological advances, as well as budget and capacity constraints are but a few of the insights required to stay ahead of the next disruption or become a disruption innovator. This seems much like environmental scanning, which many institutions engage in routinely. However, often this practice is too focused on the past, not the future. Looking in the rearview mirror is mostly a reactive posture. In contrast, one of our clients has assigned a portion of a faculty member's time to trend spotting—observing what innovations are

emerging on the horizon and working with others to seize opportunities and mitigate threats. As a result, this institution is always forward thinking and strategic.

Sometimes those within a particular industry cannot see the foreshadowing of disruption. They may have outdated mental maps or are firmly ensconced in the way things are. For this reason, you should consider establishing a disruption team composed primarily of institutional and industry outsiders. Potentially, the team could be organized around an existing group like an advisory board. Once assembled, the team should be armed with the knowledge and nuances of the higher education industry as well as the challenges facing your own institution. This must be a transparent process that adequately prepares the team to brainstorm solutions. Leverage the objectivity of team members to question common higher education assumptions: What do students really need? What business are we in? How do we uniquely create value for those we serve?

As you journey down the disruption pathway, it is important to recognize and plan for the stages of disruption. Given that most industry disruptions are enabled by technology, it is not surprising that the technology field has mapped out the stages associated with the upending of an industry. While stages are native to a particular industry, there is transferability of the technology stages to higher education. Steven Sinofsky (2014, January) writes about four stages of disruption, which include:

1. Disruption of Incumbents
For colleges and universities, "incumbents" refer to your institution, traditional competitors and aspirants, as well as newly emergent entrants to the education space that have established a foothold in the market. Sinofsky's caution at this stage is not to react to or ignore disruptions in educational delivery or business models. Instead, be proactive. Alter your institution's trajectory.

2. Rapid Linear Evolution
Take bold ideas to market at a rapid pace or risk losing your competitive opportunity. Focus on removing barriers to fast ideation-to-market and streamline the process, where possible.

3. Appealing Convergence
As your disruptive innovation starts to evolve and gain traction in the student market, some incumbents will begin to notice and attempt to one-up your institution. At this stage, you

cannot afford to rest on your early successes. You must continuously improve your innovation in order to retain competitive advantage.

4. Complete Re-imagination

Competitors are closing in, and it is time to reimagine your innovation from the ground floor up. This is not another disruption but rather an evolution of the original disruption.

Without question, innovative disruption is exhausting, inherently full of trials and tribulations, and demanding on an institution's people and culture. But, if executed properly, it will be transformational.

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CHAPTER TWO
Attributes and Expectations of Today's College Students

As mentioned in *Chapter One*, technology is often a driver of disruption. However, disruption is ultimately made possible by the convergence of technological advances with the changing needs and preferences of one's customers. Higher education is an industry where the metamorphosis of college students has nearly kept pace with the technology revolution in recent times.

Generation X students, born between 1965 and 1976, have largely been replaced on campuses by Millennial (born 1977–1997) and Generation Z (born 1998–2010) students. To say they are digital natives is an understatement. For them, technology is more than a set of tools. It is a way of life.

In the near future, an increasing number of these students will live in smart homes where more than the thermostat, lights, music, and TV will be managed by technology. Moreover, they will likely be the early adopters of driverless cars, shopping for groceries remotely, and having robots in their homes and possibly in their residence hall rooms. They are already massive users of smartphone apps, cloud-based voice services like Amazon's Alexa, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence (AI) that support learning. And, of course, the Internet, itself, provides access to an infinite source of information and learning options on demand. Further supporting the notion that technology has democratized learning, a recent study conducted by The Center for Generational Kinetics (2017) revealed that eighty-five percent of Generation Z survey respondents had watched at least one online video in the past week to learn a new skill. Colleges and universities are certainly not the sole purveyors of knowledge for these learners.

Of these technological disruptors, other than the Internet, perhaps the most profound within the academy is AI. Augmenting learning through AI-enabled coaching, tutoring, and even the presenting of relevant information sources and tools to students is possible today. For example, the Cognii Virtual Learning Assistant is artificial intelligence software that provides real-time online tutoring and feedback, and IBM's Watson offers a coaching system that adapts to the individual learner based on his or her needs (Wheeler, D., 2016, January). Nevertheless, many experts in the field caution against viewing AI as a replacement for traditional forms of teaching and learning. Stefan Popenici and Sharon Kerr (2017, December)

remind us "that education is eminently a human-centric endeavor, not a technology-centric solution." Another researcher, Professor Roy, a robotics and AI expert at MIT, discovered that human learning is communal and interactive and thus, cannot be replaced by robots using AI, which acquire language and information in a formulaic and abstract manner (Beard, A., 2018, April).

Technology-enabled learning is an inescapable part of the educational environment now, and its use among students will multiply exponentially in the years ahead. Avoiding the inevitable is not a viable option for higher education. College leaders and faculty must embrace and fully leverage technology in order to remain relevant to the students they serve.

The Generation Z Context

Traditional-age students at colleges and universities today belong to Generation Z. Hence, it is important to understand their worldview and how they have been shaped by the events and circumstances through which they have lived.

The Internet generally and social media specifically have removed many barriers associated with time and space. Gen Z individuals have always had access to information anytime, anywhere and thus, expect immediate gratification for their efforts. They connect with people around the globe, and many seek to create their own personal brand through social media—posting pictures, videos, memes, and sharing their life story and ideas. Some even desperately search for their "15 seconds of fame" in a world where YouTube views can give them celebrity status and potentially a revenue stream from advertisers. Although, for most, social media is used primarily to stay connected with friends.

Generation Z youth have been dubbed "screenagers" to reflect their addiction to a range of devices but particularly their smartphones. Their continual access to social media and the Internet has impacted family dynamics, the nature of relationships and human interactions, how they spend their time and money, their worldview, as well as how they process information. It has shifted the balance of political and societal power from the few to the many. They also have witnessed how social media can be abused for political and financial gains. So, they have developed a healthy degree of skepticism for messaging generated from outside their inner circle. This includes politicians and traditional media outlets that allegedly produce so called "fake news."

Though the Internet and social media offer many benefits to society, Gen Z youth need coping skills to deal with the more nefarious activities leveraging these mediums (e.g., identity theft, cyber bullying, "catfishing" by predators). Some have the skills required to navigate these pitfalls but others become unknowing victims. Even without such unethical and illegal behaviors, an all-consuming digital world has arguably contributed to increased levels of teen depression, loneliness, suicide, and a plethora of other mental health and social issues. Just ask your student affairs and counseling staffs how these problems have manifest themselves on your campus.

While the Internet and social media have profoundly impacted Generation Z students, these are not the only factors that have shaped who they are. Within the United States context, they are the first generation to grow up with an African-American president as well as legalized same-sex marriage and marijuana. Many of their families were adversely affected by the Great Recession—contributing to their aversion to financial risk and debt. The only wars they have known have been conflicts without borders. They have always been keenly aware of the threat of terrorism abroad and at home. After all, they grew up in the wake of 9/11. Random violence, from the mass shooting in Las Vegas to bombings and multiple school shootings, has become eerily routine. The #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and climate change movements, among others, have influenced their perspectives along with the causes they support. Amazingly, within this mostly dark backdrop, they still have a positive outlook about their future and fervently believe they can make the world a better place.

Perhaps their resilience in the face of such adversity can be attributed to the high value they place on relationships and their willingness to work hard. Often referred to as the "throwback" generation due their pragmatic nature and fiscal conservatism, one can hypothesize that Gen Z may be better equipped to thrive in a complex world than their predecessors—Millennials. In fact, several generational experts believe that Gen Z shares more in common with their great-grandparents, the Silent Generation, than with Millennials (Lynch, A., 2015, July). Both Gen Z and the Silent Generation view life through a "glass half full" prism, value their families, like to create things, and believe in saving for the future.

A Comparison of Generation Z and Millennial Attributes

Generation Z currently represents traditional-age learners on college and university campuses, and Millennials encompass the vast majority of adult learners. Historically, adult

students have proven to be highly motivated, self-directed learners. They also tend to be practical and results-oriented. However, these are not the adjectives typically used to describe the Millennial generation. In fact, these terms are more often applied to Gen Z. It is perhaps too soon to predict a role reversal, with younger students displaying more focus and ambition than their older counterparts. And, of course, it is possible that Millennials have evolved with age and will exhibit similar attributes to Gen X and Boomers when they were adult learners.

Generation Z and Millennials are bound together by their shared passion for technology and a devotion to living digitally, yet few contiguous generations are more different. According to an article in the Huffington Post (Beall, G. 2017, November), Gen Z individuals are less likely than Millennials to have a driver's license or have dated by age eighteen and also are predicted to be less likely to have moved out of their parents' home or gotten married before age thirty. One potential cause of these relationship attributes is fear. Recently, I was paired up on a golf course with a total stranger. As the round of golf progressed, he shared that he had two sons in their early twenties (Gen Z), who were afraid to date. He maintained that their fear is founded on the presumption that dates are critiqued and posted on social media before his sons could return home. Public shaming. For a young person, this is a fate worse than living a single, solitary existence.

Even though there has been abundant scientific research discounting the human brain's capacity to multitask effectively, both Millennials and Gen Z persons believe they possess an uncanny ability to do so. With Generation Z, however, they are using up to five devices simultaneously to multitask. They are believed to process information much faster than other generations—accounting for a shorter attention span than even Millennials have (Beall, G. 2017, November). Nevertheless, Gen Z is highly focused and motivated. For example, in a study of middle and high school students conducted by Barnes & Noble College (2017), thirty-five percent of survey respondents indicated that they already have started their own business or plan to do so in the near term. Yes, they are entrepreneurs, in part because they have witnessed the few who have made it big.

Gen Z is largely composed of realists. They strive to be in control of themselves and value their safety. Unlike their Millennial counterparts, they are more likely to wear seat belts, less likely to smoke, drink alcohol, use illegal drugs, become pregnant as teens, or contract a venereal disease (Sparks & Honey, 2014, June). Above all else, they are independent thinkers and individualists, seeking to make mature decisions that reflect their true identity.

Unquestionably, they are influenced by the omnipresent digital world in which they live and the culture of their generation, but their parents have a different impact on them than those of Millennials, who were the "helicopter parents" every college administrator and faculty member dreaded. The parents of Gen Z kids supposedly learned from the mistakes of their predecessors. This new breed of parenting encourages independence, hard work, and self-directed discovery of knowledge (Sparks & Honey, 2014, June). Even so, Gen Z kids have a deep need to feel appreciated.

This generation, possibly the most diverse ever, tends to value different cultures, behaviors, and ideas even more than Millennials. For them, however, diverse people are such an ordinary part of life that they really notice diversity only when it is absent or a prejudicial injustice is perpetrated against them or another person. In part, they rail against such injustices because they see themselves as interconnected global citizens.

"As more of the world comes online, geographies will continue to shrink. Generation Z will become more global in their thinking, interactions, and relatability." (Jenkins, R., 2017, January). They have the ability to connect and collaborate with people from almost anywhere on the planet. For this reason, some experts believe that they have more in common with their global peers than with people from other generations residing in their home country. The Internet and social media have fostered this global sense of community among Generation Z members.

With every generation, the use of technology evolves. According to a Neilson study (2017, July), both Millennials and Gen Z have similar access to broadband Internet (84% and 83%, respectively) as well as to smartphones (both populations at 97%). How they use this access varies by generation. Gen Z is slightly more likely to stream music, movies, and TV shows than Millennials although Gen Zers are much more likely to visit YouTube on a daily basis (72% vs. 52% according to Civic Science, 2017). Daily use of social media channels is trending differently for each of these generations. While Facebook remains at the top among social media channels for both, Gen Z has been shifting away from Facebook in favor of Instagram and SnapChat (Civic Science, 2017). Furthermore, Millennials are the master of self-expression on social media and often share more than they should, while Gen Zers tend to safeguard their privacy more with their posts (Mantey, J., 2016, June).

The use of devices is also different between these generations. For example, Gen Z individuals spend more time per week on their smartphones than Millennials and less time

watching television (Kleinschmit, M., 2015, December). Gen Z also is more likely than their Millennial counterparts to own tablets, video game consoles, and surprisingly, DVD players (The Neilson Company, 2017, July). With that said, Gen Zers are consumed with their smartphones, using them for a range of activities about four hours a day. Interestingly, one study showed that text messaging does not rank in the top three mobile activities among Gen Z users (Chamberlain, L., 2018, April). They are moving to messaging apps such as SnapChat and Instagram Direct.

Expectations of Generation Z and Millennial Students

Both generations have high expectations for themselves along with the people and organizations with whom they engage. How these expectations manifest themselves often vary by generation. Case in point, Gen Zers have higher expectations than Millennials for things such as access to state-of-the-art technology, speedy delivery of services, and loyalty from businesses and organizations from which they purchase goods and services (Beall, G. 2017, November).

Many Millennials arrive at college feeling entitled and thinking that they pay your salary, and therefore, you exist to serve their needs. Conversely, Gen Z students feel privileged to receive a postsecondary education. Nonetheless, they expect faculty to be as technologically sophisticated as they are and to use technology in the classroom. Moreover, they expect faculty to engage them digitally, provide them with opportunities to co-create, and teach them how to become entrepreneurs and change agents (Povah, C. & Vaukins, S., 2017, July). As self-directed learners, they are predisposed to conduct their own research and rely less on friends and families for providing information than Millennials. They also want to learn by doing and expect their college education to be the pathway to a good paying job (Barnes & Noble College, 2017).

Even more than Millennials, Gen Zers are concerned about the cost of college and acquiring student debt. As fiscal conservatives, they are particularly interested in time-to-degree and return on investment. Addressing these interests through advising, career services, and faculty mentoring is paramount to reducing their anxiety and gaining their trust. Trust is the foundation to their loyalty at your institution. Gen Zers are prone to be loyal to organizations that demonstrate loyalty to them as consumers and students. If they do not experience said loyalty, their natural response is flight—transferring to another educational provider.

While most Millennials (adult learners) require flexible course schedules and course delivery options, Gen Z students seek freedom. They want the freedom to select their own schedules, pursue academic pathways of interest, and ultimately, be in control of their education. Individual attention and customization are important to Gen Zers as well.

Regarding their service experience, both generations have zero tolerance for delays, cumbersome or inefficient processes, and limited access to information and services. Even so, there are distinct differences for service preferences between Millennials and Gen Zers. For example, a study administered by American Express (Oster, E., 2017, May) revealed that Millennials prefer to discuss service issues over the phone, while Gen Z customers prefer to utilize online resources to resolve such problems. The common practices of providing services through a portal and a single institutional email address may not work as well as with Gen Z as it has with Millennials. Gen Zers are accustomed to routine updates through a variety of mediums—especially messaging apps. So, the highest probability of engaging Gen Z students with services is by using multiple communication platforms (Sparkcentral, 2017, July).

Given the significant differences between Gen Z and Millennials, higher education leaders should be vigilant in adjusting enrollment strategies, services, and possibly, instructional delivery methods to correctly address the needs and expectations of each of these populations. An in-depth examination of how best to respond to these generational differences will be covered in the chapters presented in Part Two and Part Three.

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CHAPTER THREE
Enrollment Challenges and Opportunities in the Environmental Context

While college and university enrollments are impacted by the disruption of higher education and the changing nature of the students themselves, there are other internal and external environmental factors that contribute to enrollment outcomes. An institution can control some of these factors while others can be influenced or taken into account only when planning. Though the signs of emerging environmental trends are often readily apparent, too many institutions fail to proactively mitigate threats and aggressively pursue the right strategic opportunities.

This chapter may provide some solace for those who draw comfort from knowing that their enrollment plight is a shared experience. However, common trends do not determine an institution's destiny. They simply help to explain the underlying nuances of a college's enrollment pattern. In reality, most schools have opportunities to alter their trajectory and defy a trend.

To do so, they must have a clear grasp of emerging trends along with an understanding of the drivers for student decisions to enroll and persist. Such a data and research focus is not mere rhetoric or a mantra. It must become a part of the DNA of an institution—embedded in teaching practices, curriculum design, course scheduling, service delivery, facilities planning, capacity management, budget prioritization, hiring practices, performance evaluations, and enrollment strategies, among others. With the right intelligence, an institution can be strategic and learner-centered.

Critical research questions to consider when decoding the higher education environment as it pertains to student enrollment include:
❖ Who do you serve today and will you serve tomorrow?
❖ What are their learner needs?
❖ How can the institution better align with learner needs?
❖ How do you ensure access to a high quality, affordable educational experience that leads to credential completion and employment or advanced education?

With these questions in mind, this chapter illuminates national trends that often positively or negatively impact student enrollments. The trends presented herein consist of enrollment

patterns and behaviors, college completion trends, demographic trends, pricing and affordability, along with related implications. When considering these trends, there are two important caveats you should keep in mind. First, national trends do not necessarily reflect local or regional trends. That level of analysis is critical to understanding the environmental factors that have the highest impact on your institution's enrollment. Second, most of the trends depicted in this chapter are looking backward at historical data, or they represent a limited picture of the future.

Recent Enrollment Patterns

Over the last four years, enrollments have been declining in every higher education sector except for public four-year universities. Hardest hit with enrollment declines has been the for-profit institutions. Increased federal scrutiny of for-profit institutions, which began in 2011 when the Obama administration discovered abuses in everything from inflated job placement claims to predatory financial practices, is the primary cause of their decline (Channick, R., 2016, December). As recently as 2017, *The Atlantic* predicted that several for-profits would be closing their doors in the wake of losing access to federal student loans (Deruy, E., 2017, January).

Enrollment declines also have been significant at two-year publics. Many community and technical colleges saw their enrollments peak in 2010 but begin a steady decline thereafter. An improving economy and job market are the obvious explanations for this shift, but some believe there are other contributing factors such as rising costs, student loan debt, and unclear linkages between a two-year education and careers (Smith, A., 2016, October). Another theory is that the 2010 peak in enrollment was artificially inflated due to dire personal circumstances brought about by the 2008 Great Recession. This hypothesis assumes that post-2010 enrollments are simply a market correction—returning two-year schools to more normal enrollment levels.

The enrollment patterns by sector are depicted in *Figure 1*. Percent changes in enrollment reflect the period from Fall 2014 to Fall 2017.

Figure 1: Enrollment by Sector (Title IV, Degree-Granting Institutions)
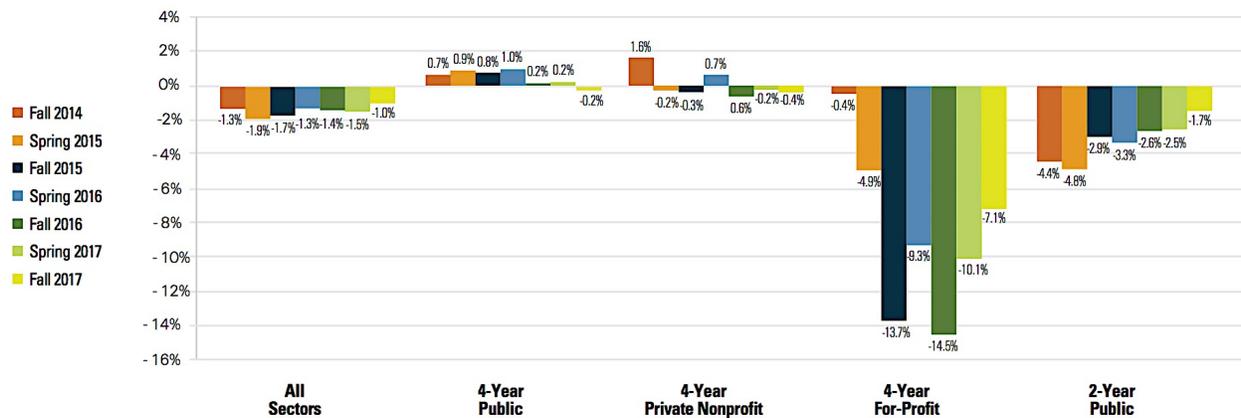
Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017, December

A more granular analysis of these enrollment trends reveals that some student segments have impacted overall declines more than others. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017, December) data comparing Fall 2016 and Fall 2017, enrollment of students seeking bachelor's and graduate degrees actually increased slightly while the largest percentage and numerical decline was among the "other undergraduate" category, which includes students pursuing undergraduate certificates and diplomas, teacher preparation, and special non-credential programs. Across all sectors, the enrollment decrease was solely attributable to students enrolling part-time. During this same period, demographics played a major role in enrollment declines. Adult (age 25 and older) first-time college student enrollments declined at a much steeper rate than their traditional-age counterparts (-13.3% vs. -1.0%, respectively). Men were a slightly larger contributor to enrollment declines than women.

Other discernable differences in enrollment between Fall 2016 and Fall 2017 reported by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017, December) include variations by the state where an institution is located and programs of study. Institutions with locations in multiple states suffered more than others with a 9.1% decline. Of those institutions located in a single state the highest rate of decline was 4.9% (Wyoming), but several saw enrollment decreases of more than 3.0% (Alaska, Arkansas, Hawaii, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, North Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia). Arizona, Texas, and Utah experienced the highest percentage of enrollment growth since Fall 2016.

Regarding enrollments by programs of study at four-year universities, the largest percentage declines were in liberal arts and sciences, humanities, general studies, and undeclared majors; public administration and social service; family and consumer sciences/human sciences; foreign languages, literatures, and linguistics; philosophy and religious studies; personal and culinary services; mechanic and repair technologies/technicians; and precision production. At two-year colleges significant percentage enrollment declines were in education; family and consumer sciences/human sciences; personal and culinary services; public administration and social service; English language and literature/letters; and legal professions and studies. Given that two-year institutions supply a pipeline of students to four-year universities, the programs of study that declined in both sectors represent a serious challenge for these programs at four-year institutions. Offsetting enrollment losses in these programs at both types of institutions have seen substantial growth in computer and information sciences and support services as well as in biological and biomedical sciences.

Population Demographic Trends

As of the writing of this book, the U.S. population is over 327 million, and the world population has exceeded 7.4 billion. Though these numbers reflect steady growth, there is more to the story.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), international migration is projected to become the primary driver of U.S. population growth for the first time in nearly two centuries. Unless current and future U.S. immigration policies and political rhetoric thwart this predicted growth, the U.S. population will become considerably more racially and ethnically diverse as well as older by 2060 as the growth rate slows. *Figure 2* illustrates the overall projected population growth in the U.S. while *Figure 3* shows population projections for select racial/ethnic groups, and *Figure 4* reveals population forecasts for select age groups.

Figure 2: U.S. Population Projections 2016–2060 (numbers in thousands)
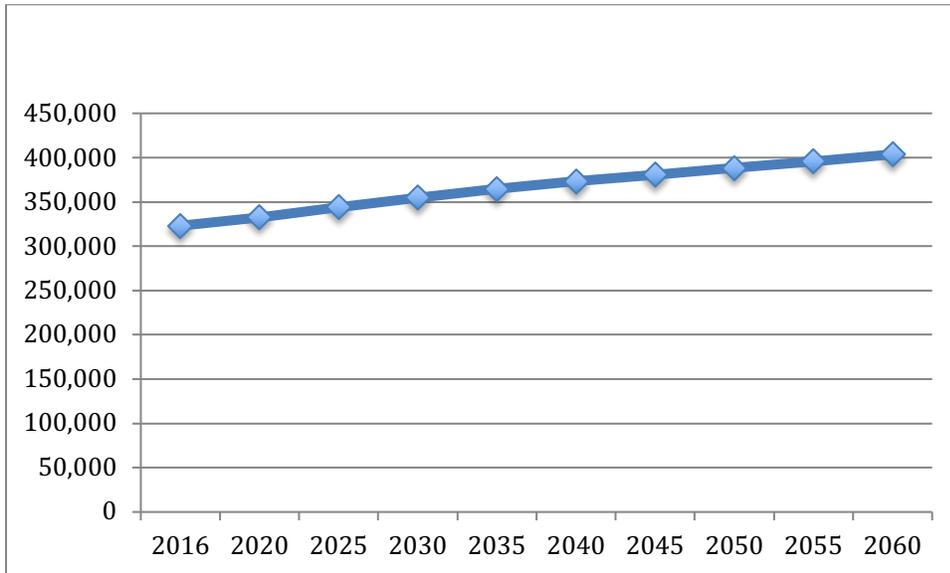
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017

Figure 3: U.S. Population Projections by Race/Ethnicity (numbers in thousands)
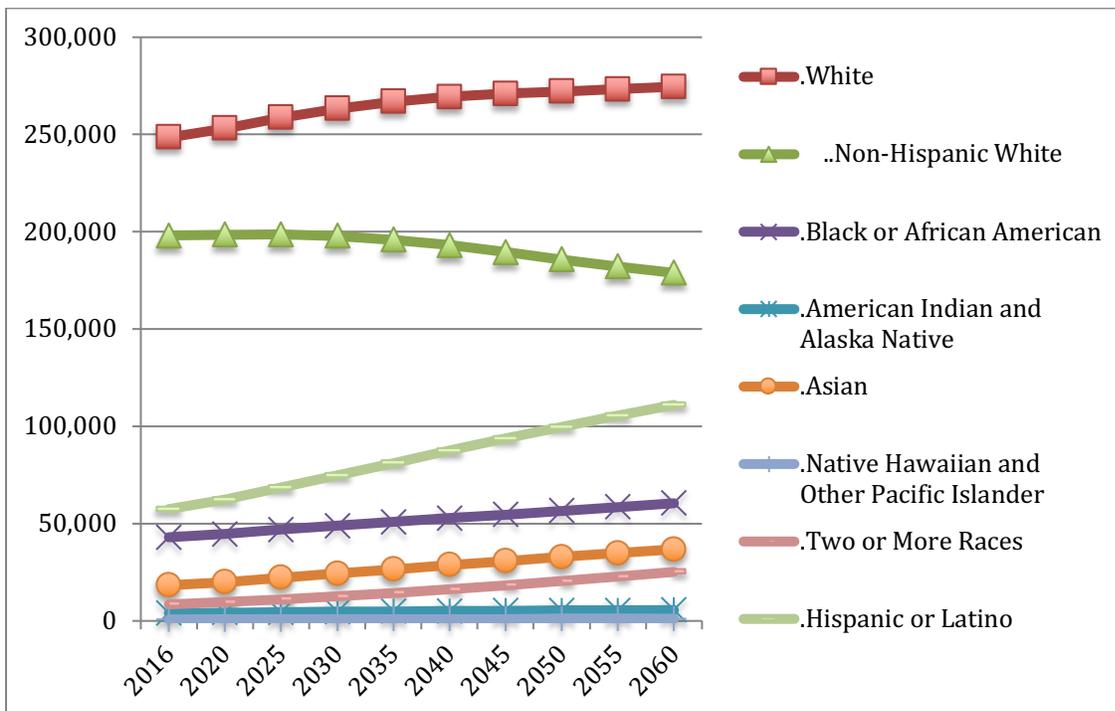
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017

Figure 4: U.S. Population Projections by Age Group (numbers in thousands)
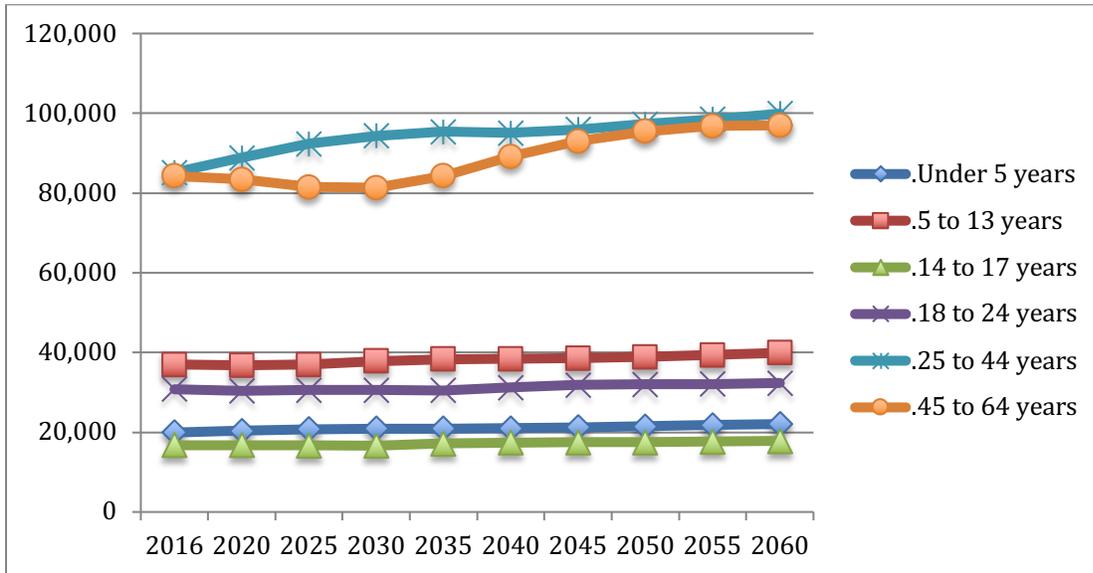
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017

These projections suggest overall population growth through 2060 with variations by race/ethnicity and age. As extensively publicized by the media and demographers, the fastest growing racial/ethnic group is expected to be Hispanics/Latinos. Currently, this group constitutes 17.8% of the U.S. population, making them the largest racial or ethnic minority in America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). For colleges, this presents an affordability problem in that a significant portion of this population is undocumented and thus, are ineligible to receive federal financial aid and in most states, state-provided financial assistance. Blacks and Asians are predicted to grow at more modest rates. Although it varies by state and age group, the non-Hispanic, white population is projected to decline during this period.

Figure 5 shows the highest percentage of Hispanics and Latinos relative to each state's overall population. The majority of this population resides in Western states, Florida, and select East Coast states—primarily in large urban areas. Given the projected exponential growth of this population, colleges located in these regions of the country should reap the benefits of said growth—assuming affordability is not an insurmountable barrier and college participation rates increase.

Figure 5: Percentage of the Hispanic and Latino Population by State
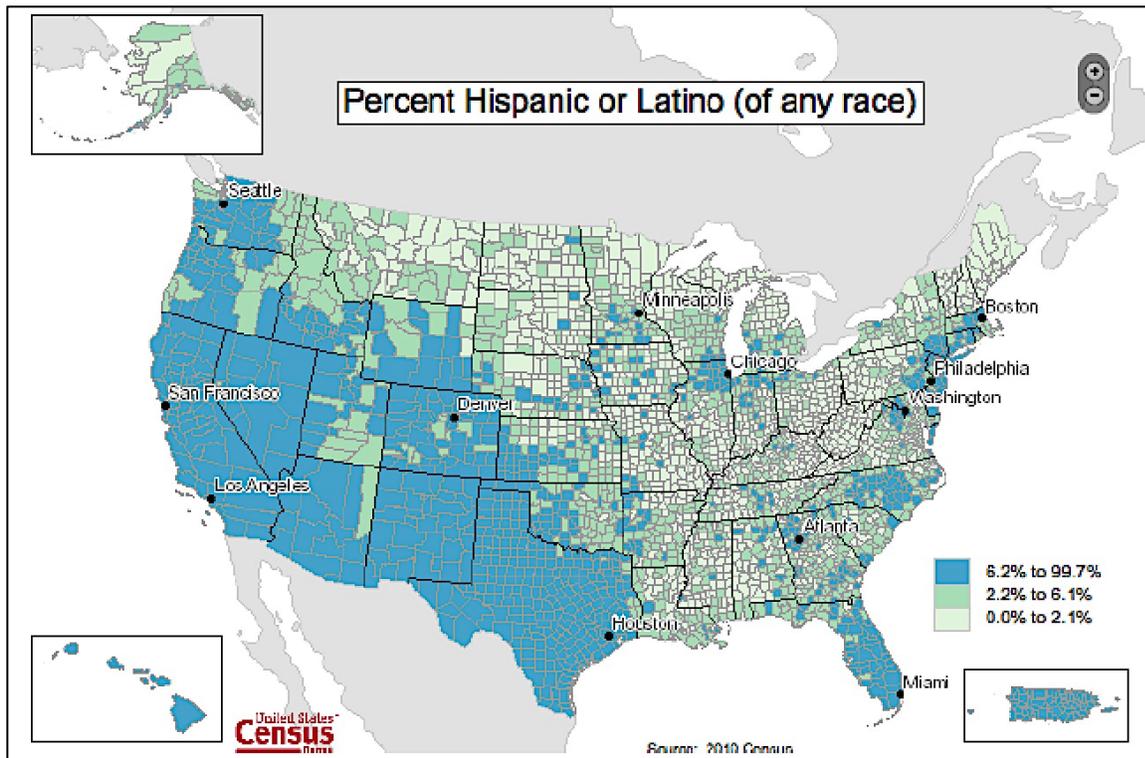
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

As *Figure 6* depicts, the highest percentage of whites relative to a respective state's overall population are concentrated in Northern states. Assuming these states will have a growing white population of college bound individuals, colleges in these jurisdictions should enjoy corresponding enrollment increases.

Figure 6: Percentage of the White Population by State
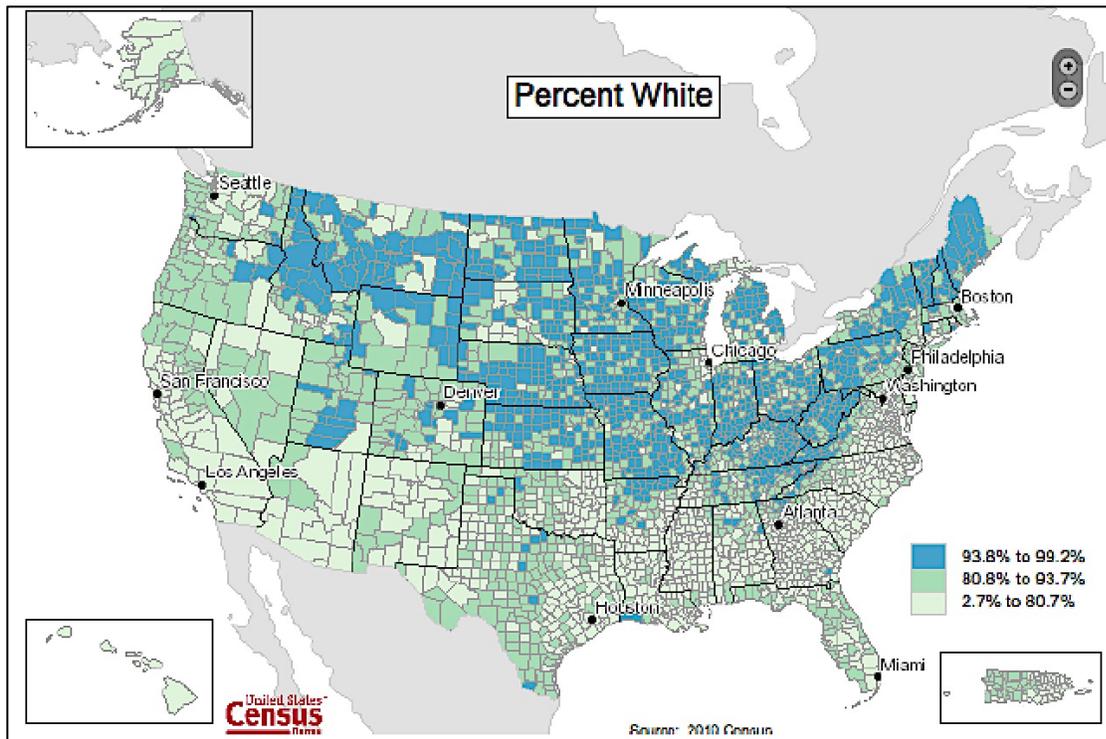
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

The two populations with more modest growth projections, blacks and Asians, are somewhat dispersed across the U.S. The highest concentration of blacks is in Southern states and urban areas in other states, primarily on the West and East coasts, Illinois, and Michigan. The Asian population is more widely dispersed with high density on both coasts. With the exception of states with a significant percentage of Hispanics, Latinos, and whites, institutions in these regions will struggle to maintain or increase enrollments.

In terms of age, most of the population growth is expected among those who are forty-five and older—not the target population for most colleges and universities. Another growth population is individuals ages twenty-five to forty-four. This is an opportunity for institutions that are oriented to serve the adult learning population.

Though a U.S. map by age was not available, the median age map presented in *Figure 7* does allow for directional inferences. A slightly higher distribution of older adults exists in

Northern and Midwestern states, Florida, and Texas. Other states have more college-age residents per capita and thus, theoretically better enrollment opportunities.

Figure 7: Median Age by State
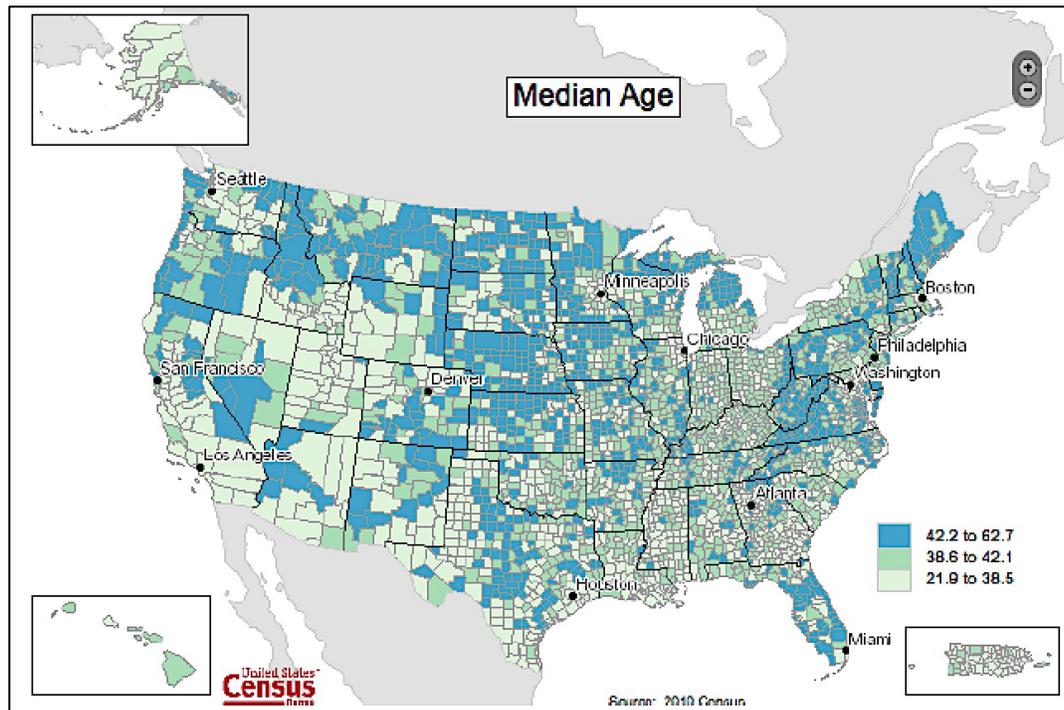
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

A meta-analysis of demographic trends suggests that colleges in most regions of the country have both enrollment opportunities and threats by population. The key to improving your enrollment position in the context of state and local demographics is to seize the opportunities and mitigate the threats, where possible. If you do not have dedicated personnel monitoring these trends and conveying findings to the institution's leadership, building this capacity is a logical place to start. For those who practice demographic trend analysis and apply learnings to enrollment strategies, you possess a critical competitive advantage.

High School Graduate Trends

Nationally, the number of high school graduates will fluctuate over the next decade or so. During this time, there will be three years of growth, 2024–2026 (WICHE, 2016, December).

Figure 8 illustrates the actual number of high school graduates and projections from 2000 through 2030. Growth and decline of high school graduates varies by state from 2013 until 2030 as shown in *Figure 9*. But overall, the number of high school graduates will decline by 4.0% during this period.

Figure 8: Total U.S. High School Graduates (2000–2030)
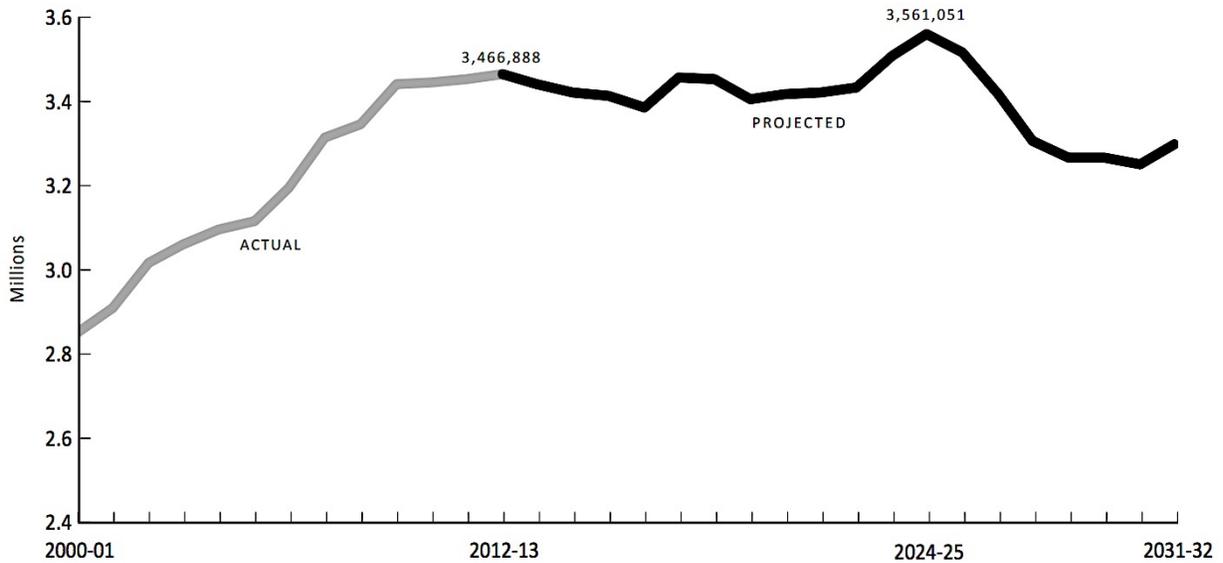
Source: WICHE, 2016, December

Figure 9: Percent Change in U.S. High School Graduates by State (2013–2030)
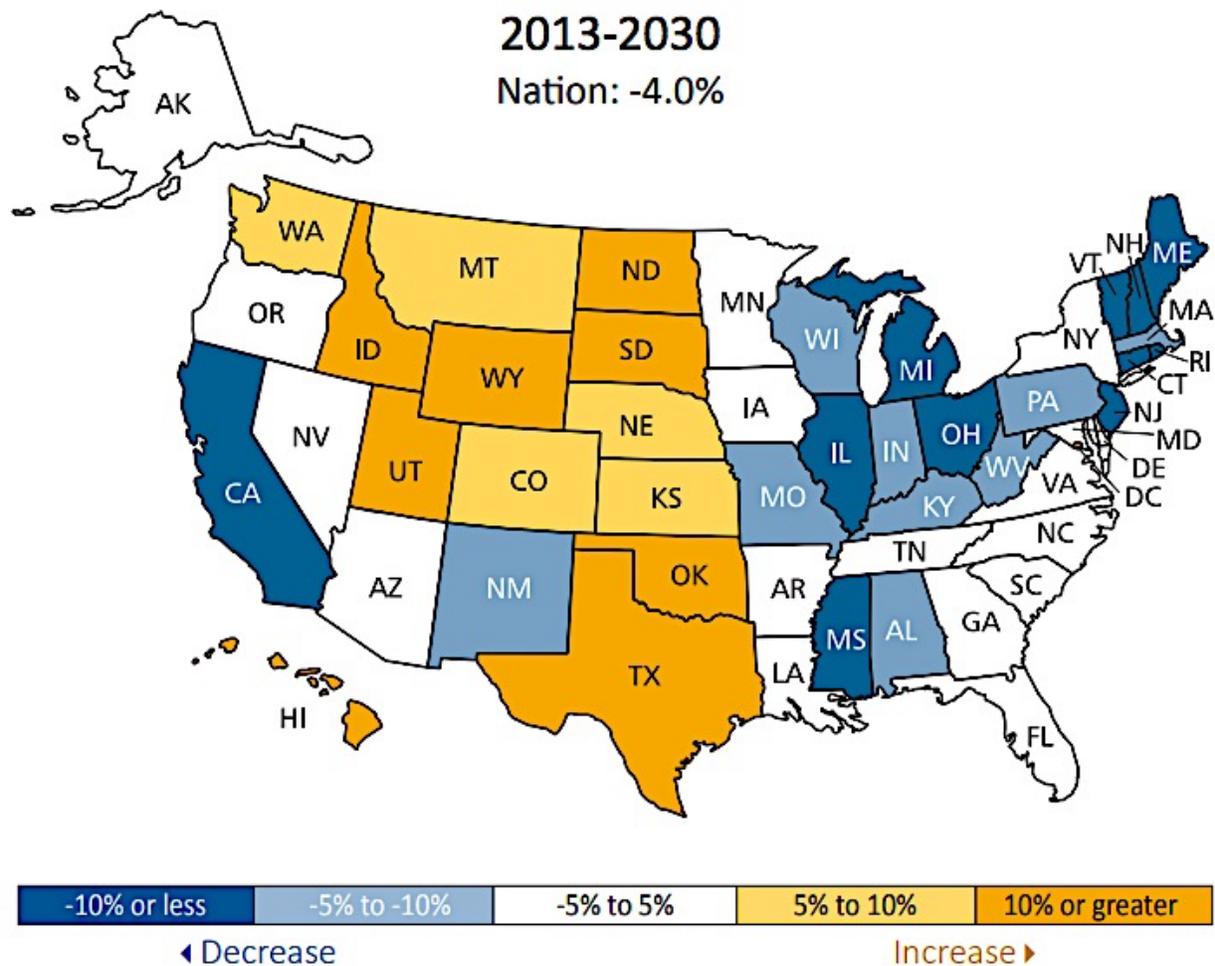
Source: WICHE, 2016, December

According to WICHE (2016, December), virtually all the Midwest and Northeast states will continue to experience declines in the number of graduates, with a number of these states seeing graduating classes 15 to 25 percent smaller than just 15 years earlier. Conversely, the sizes of graduating classes in Texas and many of the Western states are projected to continue increasing. In many Southern states, the number of graduates will be relatively stable, while other states in the region will experience declines.

Conceivably, the most significant changes in high school graduates are related to the race/ethnicity of these individuals. Similar to the population projections presented earlier in this chapter, the number of white high school graduates is predicted to decline, and the

only significant growth will be among Hispanic high school graduates. However, these projections do not account for the Trump administration's policies on immigration.

Figure 10: Total U.S. High School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity (2000–2032)
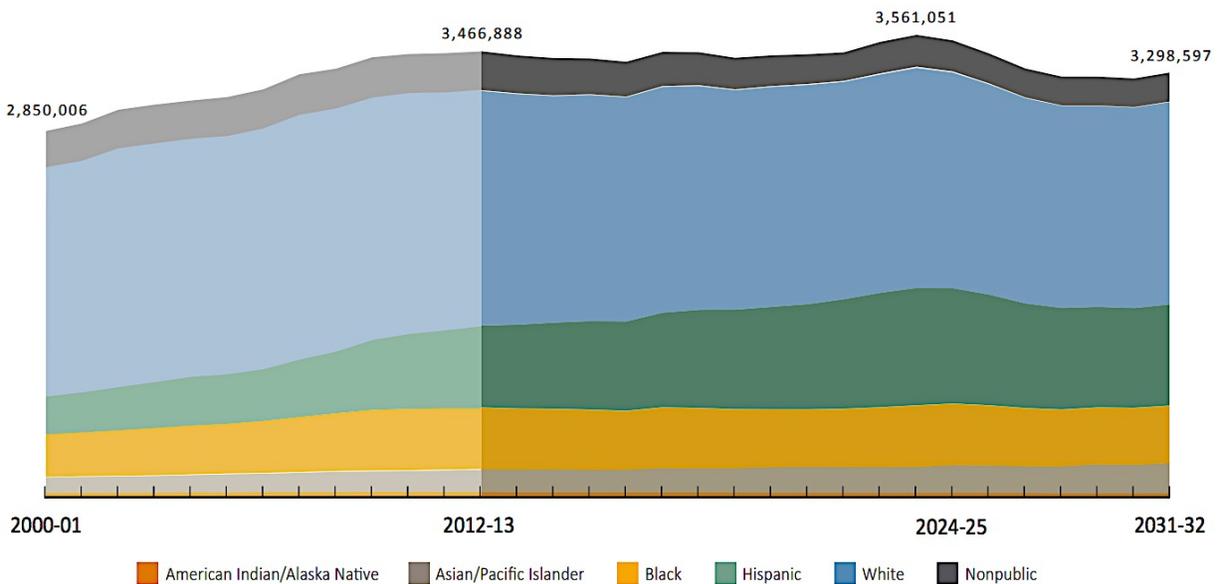
Source: WICHE, 2016, December

Predictions by region vary, but the decline in white high school graduates and increase in Hispanics are expected in all four regions. From 2013 until 2030, the Midwest is predicted to experience an increase of some 25,000 Hispanic graduates and a decrease of over 75,000 white graduates. In the Northeast, the projections are similar, with an increase of more than 25,000 Hispanic graduates and a decrease of nearly 100,000 white graduates. The West region will see a decrease of 40,000 white high school graduates during this period, but the number of Hispanic high school graduates will surge by 60,000 in 2024 and then plummet to the 2013 level by 2030. In the South, the number of Hispanic graduates will peak in 2024 with nearly a 150,000 increase relative to 2013 before dropping to a 100,000 increase by 2030. By the end of this period, the number of white graduates in the South will likely decrease by almost 50,000.

Two factors that may offset these anticipated declines somewhat are the high school graduation rate and the college-going rate. The high school graduation rate has been increasing modestly, reaching 82.3% in 2016 (Hildreth, B., 2017, June). Furthermore, the

college-going rate has increased from 63.0% in 2000 to 70.0% in 2016 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, January). Assuming these factors continue a positive trajectory, they will provide modest relief to institutions struggling to make enrollments.

Student Population Segments

A study conducted by University Business (2016, December) of admissions, enrollment, and financial aid leaders conveyed a modest degree of optimism for student enrollments in the future. The results, shown in *Figure 11*, may actually reveal respondent aspirations rather than reality. In 2016, for example, more than two-thirds of private institutions and over half of public institutions failed to meet their enrollment and net revenue goals (Hildreth, B., 2017, June).

Figure 11: Anticipated Student Population Changes
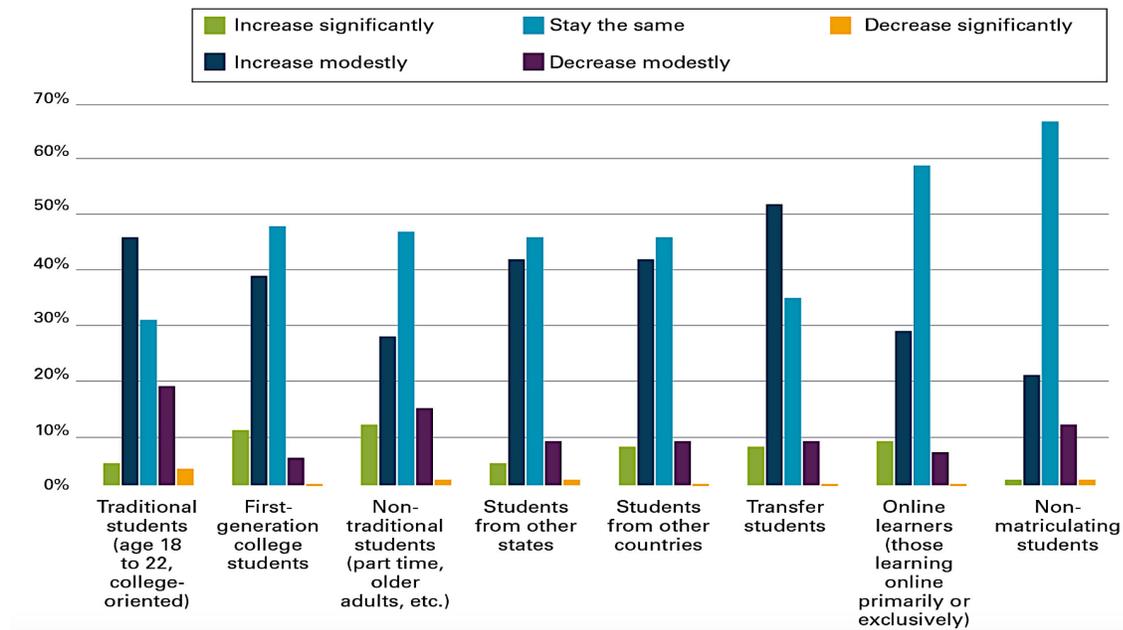
Based on the projections of **high school graduates**, it is unlikely that this population will increase at most institutions. Traditional-age students are becoming less likely to leave their home state to attend college and adult learners, collectively, have never ventured far from home to seek a postsecondary credential, so growing **out-of-state enrollments**, particularly for public institutions charging out-of-state tuition, will be feasible only for the few schools that possess a national reputation or have unique academic offerings. For a number of years,

the U.S. experienced increases in **international students**, especially at the graduate level. As of Fall 2016, the number of international students studying in the U.S. reached a record high of 1.08 million (a three percent increase over the prior year). However, first-time international student enrollments declined by three percent (Institute of International Education, 2017, November). This is likely an early sign that current immigration policies as well as restrictions on international travel and the perception abroad of the United States government will cause a decline in international student enrollments in the future. Moreover, given that most **transfers** to four-year universities come from two-year institutions and their enrollments are shrinking, the pipeline of transfers also will shrink. Unless an institution can increase its market share of these segments, enrollments of traditional-age students, out-of-state students, international students, and transfers will actually decline.

On a more positive note, three of the students segments presented in *Figure 11* have growth potential: adult learners, first generation college students, and online learners. Given that the population of individuals age twenty-five to forty-four is expected to grow, the pool of potential **adult learners** will be larger in many regions than it is today—creating the conditions for potential growth. The number of **first generation college students** is on the rise as well. This is particularly good news for public two-year and four-year institutions because seventy-six percent of first generation students attend these colleges and universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017, September). However, the retention of this population is a daunting challenge. A report from the Institute of Education Sciences found that fifty-four percent of first generation students left college without a degree (Smith, A., 2017, September). With respect to **online learners**, some 5.8 million students nationally took an online course—continuing a consistent thirteen-year growth pattern (Online Learning Consortium, 2016, February). Of these, approximately half are taking courses completely online. Due to the propensity of Millennial and Generation Z students to seek convenience and because they are technology savants, the number of online learners will likely continue on an upward trajectory.

Missing from *Figure 11* is **post-baccalaureate students**. Projections released by the National Center for Education Statistics (2017, May) suggest that post-baccalaureate enrollment will increase by twelve percent between 2015 and 2026. This includes master's and doctoral students as well as students in programs such as law, medicine, and dentistry. Assuming the projections are accurate, many institutions with graduate and professional programs will benefit, particularly if they offer programs that are in high demand and they have the capacity to grow these programs.

College Readiness

In general, there are two distinct but highly correlated factors that contribute to academic success in college—the readiness of students upon entry and performance once enrolled. According to The Nation's Report Card (2015), just twenty percent of high school seniors are performing at grade-level in math and only thirty-seven percent in reading.

Each year some two million students take the ACT. The 2017 ACT Benchmark Report indicated that just twenty-seven percent of test-takers met the benchmark in all four areas: science, math, reading, and English. Benchmark proficiency predicts that a student has a fifty percent chance of making a B or higher grade in related college courses. The breakdown by ACT subject area is presented in *Figure 12*.

Figure 12: ACT Benchmark Proficiency Rates
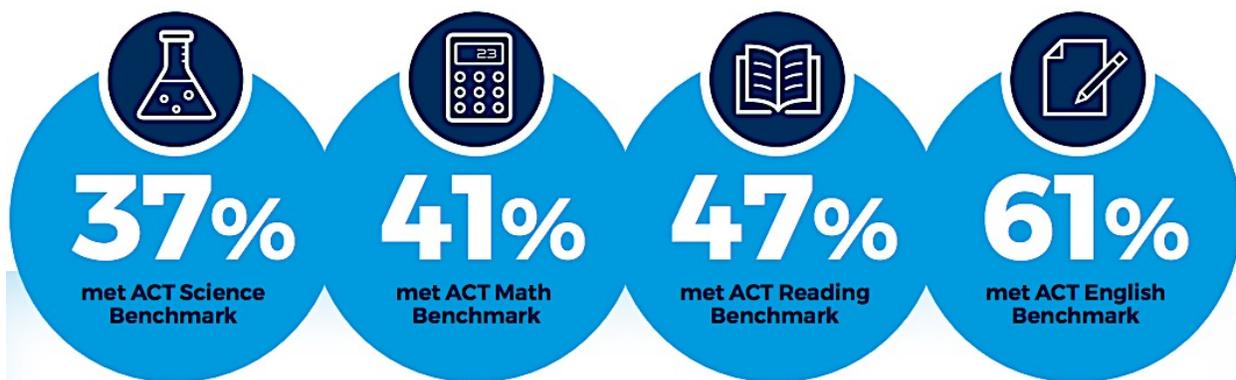
The College Board (2017) also has approximately two million SAT test-takers. Their benchmarks predict a seventy-percent chance of earning a C or better in related college courses during the first semester of enrollment. Seventy percent met the benchmark in evidence-based reading and writing while only forty-nine percent met the benchmark in math.

Admittedly, standardized tests are not the only measure of college readiness. In a paper written by the Educational Policy Improvement Center, four elements of a comprehensive definition of college readiness were presented (Conley, D., 2007, March). These include (1) key cognitive strategies (e.g., critical thinking and problem solving), (2) academic knowledge and skills (e.g., writing, research, core academic subject areas), (3) academic behaviors (e.g.,

self-awareness, self-monitoring, self-control), and (4) contextual skills and awareness (understanding of how college operates as a system and culture). While some of these factors can be assessed during the admissions process, many cannot.

As colleges and universities have become increasingly egalitarian in their missions, growing from just over fifteen million in 2000 to more than twenty million in 2017, it is not surprising that a higher proportion of students are entering higher education with academic deficiencies (Statista, 2018). The question is whether or not institutions are adequately meeting the developmental needs of students with academic deficits.

College Completion

College completion begins with first-to-second year retention. Since 2001, the percentage of first-time students who return in the second year changed only minimally even though there has been a proliferation of retention efforts on most campuses over the past sixteen years (ACT Institutional Data File, 2017). For example, freshman-to-sophomore year retention at four-year publics has ranged from a low of 70.6% to a high of 74.0%. Four-year private institutions have experienced a similar pattern during this time frame with a low of 71.8% and a high of 75.5%.

Table 1 shows the highest and lowest freshman-to-sophomore year retention rates from 1983 to 2017 by institutional type and the highest degree level offered. Ph.D. granting institutions followed by master's granting privates have demonstrated higher first-to-second year retention rates—at least in part due to higher admissions standards at many of these universities. Given their open access mission, it is not surprising that two-year public colleges have the lowest freshman-to-sophomore year retention rates.

Table 1: Freshman to Sophomore Retention Trends, 1983–2017

	Highest Percent	Lowest Percent	Current Percent
Two-Year Public	57.4 ('17)	51.3 ('04)	57.4
Two-Year Private	72.6 ('92)	55.5 ('08, '12)	64.6
BA/BS Public	70.0 ('04)	64.2 ('14, '15)	64.5
BA/BS Private	74.0 ('89)	67.3 ('10, '12, '13)	72.6
MA/MS Public	71.6 ('06)	68.1 ('89)	69.9
MA/MS Private	78.0 ('85)	69.5 ('13)	73.4
PhD Public	79.0 ('16)	72.9 ('08)	79.0
PhD Private	85.0 ('16, '17)	80.2 ('12)	81.2
All			68.8

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2017

Student progression (retention and persistence) from year to year beyond the second year and one classification to the next also impact completion rates. On the strength of SEM Works' analysis of progression at hundreds of postsecondary institutions, there is minimal variance between years, with each cohort tracking in a similar pattern to the one before it.

At public and private two-year colleges, recent completion rates (graduation in three years or less) are well below the peak in the late eighties and early nineties. Since the years that followed included a relatively strong economy and job market in the nineties followed by the Great Recession in 2008 and then a recovering economy and low unemployment rates, it does not appear as if the state of the economy has been the driving factor regarding lower completion rates. *Table 2* depicts the highest and lowest completion rates at two-year colleges from 1983 to 2017.

Table 2: Two-Year College Graduation Rates in Three Years or Less, 1983–2017

	Highest Percent	Lowest Percent	Current Percent
Public	38.8 ('89)	21.9 ('14, '15)	22.0
Private	66.4 ('90)	40.2 ('15)	46.9
All	44.0 ('89)	22.7 ('15)	23.1

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2017

As seen in *Table 3*, the freshman-to-sophomore year retention rate at four-year institutions displayed in *Table 1* does not always correlate with their respective completion rate. Four-year public Ph.D. granting institutions fall back to graduation rates more similar to their four-year public peers. Moreover, four-year private universities outperform their public counterparts on this measure.

Table 3: Four-Year University Graduation Rates in Five Years or Less, 1983–2017

	Highest Percent	Lowest Percent	Current Percent
BA/BS Public	52.8 ('86)	36.0 ('13)	36.9
BA/BS Private	58.5 ('13)	53.3 ('01)	57.9
MA/MS Public	46.7 ('86)	37.0 ('00)	40.0
MA/MS Private	58.4 ('88)	53.5 ('01)	54.8
PhD Public	51.2 ('16)	45.0 ('01)	51.9
PhD Private	51.9 ('17)	62.4 ('14)	63.2
All			

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2017

Regardless of the retention and completion rates presented here, all but highly selective institutions and a few less selective schools fall well below what the public expects on these measures. Here, the public includes students, parents, legislators, employers, and perhaps others—raising questions about the value of higher education. As stated in *Chapter One*, low college completion rates are fueling the disruption of higher education, particularly when compared to the high cost of a postsecondary education.

College Pricing and Affordability

Affordability is a relative term. It is defined by two independent variables: (1) the cost of a good or service, and (2) a person's ability to pay the requisite price. Consequently, the cost of higher education today is affordable for some but not for others. The exponential rise in tuition and fees over the last thirty years has far exceeded price increases in other industries. *Figure 13* illustrates the pricing trend in higher education since 1987–88.

Figure 13: Average Published Tuition and Fees in 2017 Dollars by Sector
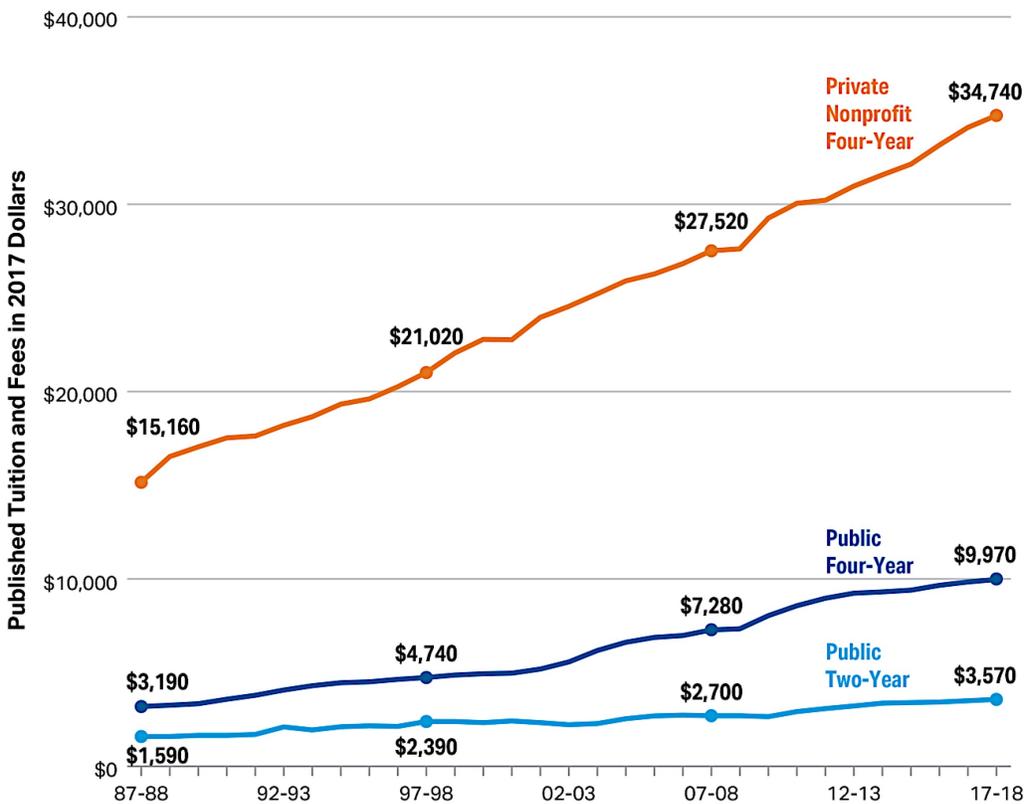
Source: The College Board, Trends in College Pricing, 2017

While the gap in college pricing between a public and private education has widened, the percentage increase at public four-year schools has actually outpaced those at private four-year, nonprofit institutions (The College Board, Trends in College Pricing, 2017). Declining state and local support for public higher education in all but a few jurisdictions is considered by many to be the cause of these steep increases (*Figure 14*). As suggested in *Figure 15*, two-year public colleges in most states have not been immune from declining state support either.

Figure 14: 2015–16 State and Local Funding for Higher Education by State, 10-Year Percentage Change
(Adjusted for inflation)
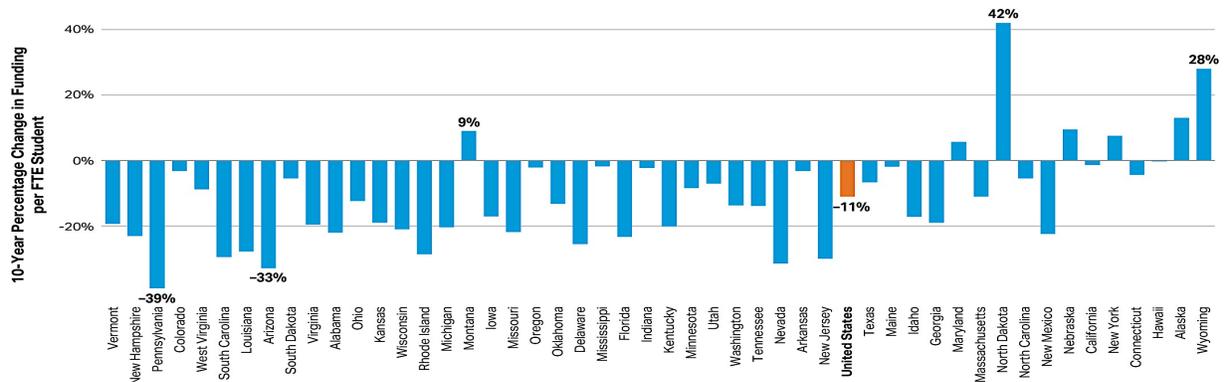
Source: The College Board, Trends in College Pricing, 2017

Figure 15: In-District Percentage Increases in Tuition and Fees by State Over the Last Five Years
(Adjusted for inflation)
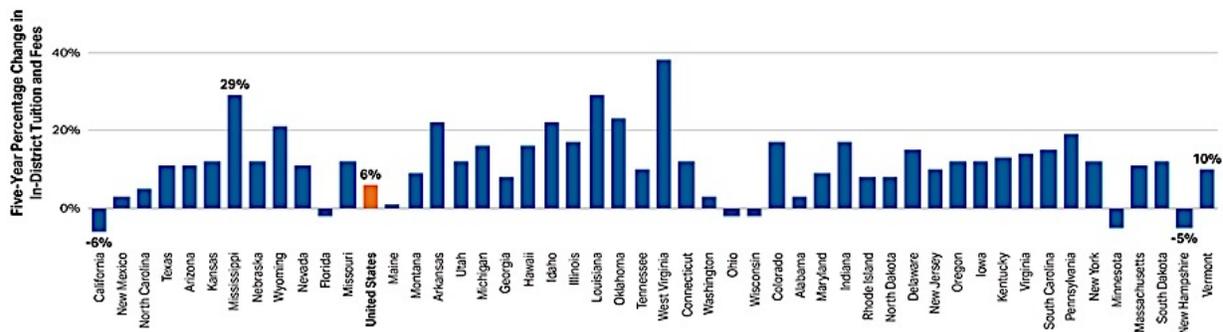
Source: The College Board, Trends in College Pricing, 2017

The equalizer for rising college costs is student aid. Even though student aid has not kept pace with increasing costs, *Table 4* shows that federal, state, institutional, and other aid sources have grown by fifty-five percent (in 2016 dollars) from 2006–07 to 2016–17. However, the types and sources of student aid have shifted. According to The College Board (Trends in Student Aid, 2017), since 2010–11, the proportion of total aid from state grants and private and employer grants has remained fairly constant (8% and 13%, respectively). During this same period, federal grants have declined from forty-four percent of total aid to thirty-two percent. Compensating somewhat for this decline, institutional grants now compose forty-seven percent of total aid versus thirty-two percent in 2010–11. Federal subsidized loans were thirty-six percent of total aid in 2010–11 but make up only twenty percent of total aid today. All other types of loans increased as a proportion of total aid over the past seven years. With that said, the proportion of total aid comprised of grants has been increasing while the percentage of loans has declined since 2010–11. In 2016–17, grants represented fifty-five percent of total aid for undergraduates while loans were only thirty-six percent of the total. For graduate students, the trend is similar; however, the proportion of total aid that is comprised of loans is much higher than for undergraduates (sixty-four percent in 2016–17) compared to thirty-two percent of aid in the form of grants.

Table 4: Trends in Total Aid and Nonfederal Loans (in millions)

	Academic Year										Preliminary	10-Year
	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	% Change
Federal Aid												
Grants												
Pell Grants	$15,157	$16,956	$20,011	$33,515	$39,381	$35,763	$33,676	$32,427	$30,935	$28,797	$26,562	75%
FSEOG	$911	$890	$828	$822	$836	$784	$770	$755	$741	$739	$739	−19%
LEAP	$76	$75	$70	$70	$67	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Academic Competitiveness Grants	$286	$357	$372	$535	$611	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SMART Grants	$242	$237	$219	$401	$478	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Veterans and Military	$3,225	$3,278	$3,763	$8,650	$10,851	$10,710	$12,255	$12,368	$12,479	$12,733	$12,900	300%
Total Federal Grants	**$19,898**	**$21,792**	**$25,262**	**$43,994**	**$52,224**	**$47,257**	**$46,701**	**$45,550**	**$44,154**	**$42,269**	**$40,201**	**102%**
Loans												
Perkins Loans	$1,914	$1,598	$1,052	$914	$946	$1,010	$1,061	$1,207	$1,172	$1,054	$1,054	−45%
Subsidized Stafford	$29,580	$33,617	$36,134	$42,542	$44,828	$43,219	$29,201	$27,241	$24,911	$23,145	$21,715	−27%
Unsubsidized Stafford	$28,793	$31,643	$44,225	$52,038	$52,080	$50,018	$59,341	$56,995	$53,261	$51,141	$49,852	73%
Parent PLUS	$9,615	$8,890	$8,411	$9,949	$11,691	$11,798	$10,316	$10,594	$10,824	$12,061	$12,610	31%
Grad PLUS	$2,472	$3,557	$4,733	$6,352	$7,682	$7,967	$7,987	$8,353	$8,433	$8,913	$9,630	290%
Total Federal Loans	**$72,374**	**$79,305**	**$94,555**	**$111,794**	**$117,227**	**$114,013**	**$107,906**	**$104,389**	**$98,601**	**$96,314**	**$94,862**	**31%**
Federal Work-Study	$1,152	$1,125	$1,066	$1,087	$1,075	$1,036	$1,014	$1,010	$991	$990	$990	−14%
Education Tax Benefits	$8,850	$8,910	$13,530	$21,010	$23,710	$21,480	$19,350	$19,010	$18,150	$17,860	$17,860	102%
Total Federal Aid	**$102,274**	**$111,132**	**$134,413**	**$177,885**	**$194,236**	**$183,785**	**$174,971**	**$169,959**	**$161,897**	**$157,432**	**$153,912**	**50%**
State Grants	$8,719	$9,123	$9,211	$9,756	$10,051	$9,854	$9,865	$10,096	$10,419	$10,596	$10,596	22%
Institutional Grants	$30,939	$32,976	$34,661	$39,169	$42,304	$44,377	$47,544	$49,776	$52,357	$55,614	$58,683	90%
Private and Employer Grants	$12,350	$13,310	$13,600	$13,900	$14,670	$15,010	$15,170	$15,250	$15,320	$15,680	$15,940	29%
Total Federal, State, Institutional, and Other Aid	**$154,282**	**$166,541**	**$191,884**	**$240,710**	**$261,261**	**$253,026**	**$247,551**	**$245,081**	**$239,993**	**$239,322**	**$239,131**	**55%**
Nonfederal Loans	$23,900	$25,800	$12,700	$9,100	$8,400	$8,700	$9,600	$9,900	$10,300	$11,000	$11,600	−51%
Total Student Aid and Nonfederal Loans	**$178,182**	**$192,341**	**$204,584**	**$249,810**	**$269,661**	**$261,726**	**$257,151**	**$254,981**	**$250,293**	**$250,322**	**$250,731**	**41%**

Source: The College Board, Trends in Student Aid, 2017

As posited in *Chapter Two*, Generation Z students have an aversion to debt in general. Student loan debt is no exception, and it has been on the rise for some time. In the 2000–01 academic year, fifty-six percent of bachelor's degree-seeking students had loan debt with an average debt per borrower of $22,100. Just fifteen years later, sixty percent have debt with an average of $28,400 per borrower (The College Board, Trends in Student Aid, 2017). For many of these students, the amount of loan debt required to attend their first choice institution has reached a tipping point. Their backup school, which costs less and requires less debt, becomes the school they attend.

Family income is another important variable regarding college choice and affordability. The data represented in *Figure 16* suggest that students residing in the South, persons who are black or Hispanic, students who are younger than thirty-five, and individuals who come from less educated families will likely have fewer degrees of freedom when selecting a college.

Figure 16: Median Family Income by Select Characteristics, 2016
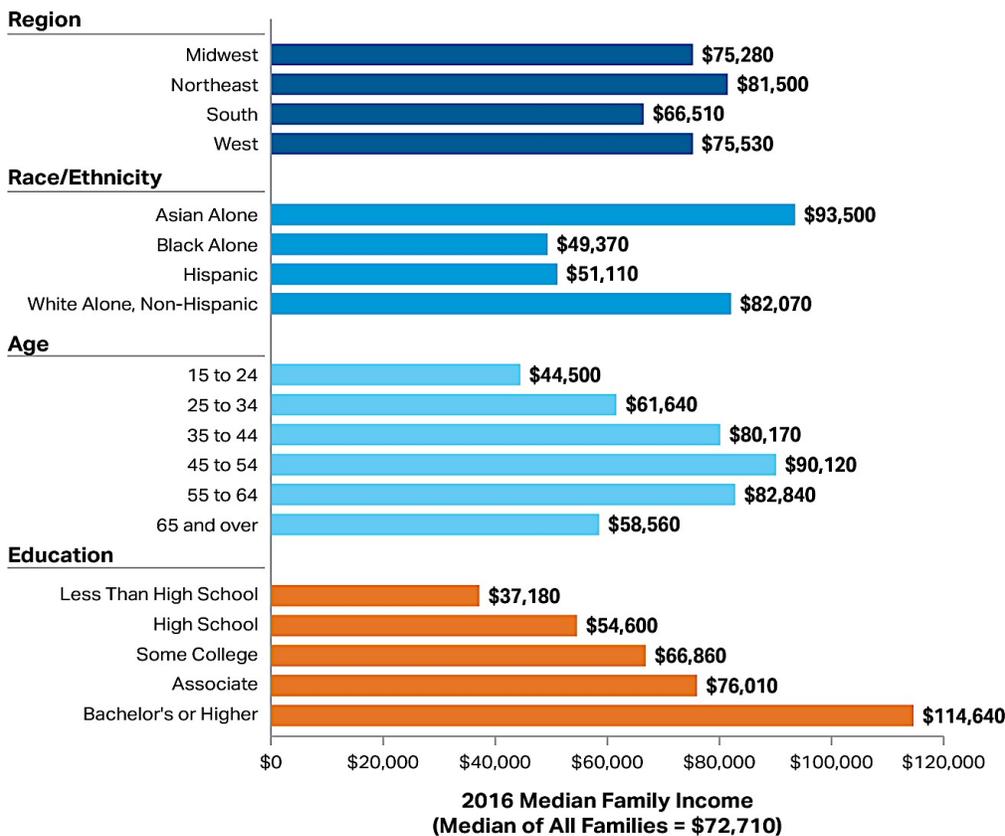
Source: The College Board, Trends in Student Aid, 2017

In summary, many colleges and universities are pricing themselves out of the market. That is to say, the number of students who can afford their cost and are willing to assume significant loan debt is shrinking. Additional federal, state, and local support for higher education would reduce the burden of paying for college on students and their families, but that relief appears unlikely in the near-term. Price reductions, pricing freezes, pricing guarantees, and other pricing strategies will help students at the few institutions that engage in these practices. College credits earned through dual enrollment has cut the cost of degree completion significantly for a growing number of students. Though questions exist about the sustainability of free community college, this is another example of creatively attempting to solve the affordability challenge. In truth, there is no one solution to this issue. Higher education leaders, politicians, private sector employers, philanthropists, and others must continue to look for answers. The future of our country depends on having a highly educated citizenry.

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PART TWO

Academic Program Innovations

Aligning Academic Programs with the Market

Educating Millennial and Generation Z Students

Effective Promotion of Academic Programs

INTRODUCTION

Academic Program Innovations

Understandably, you may be asking yourself, "Why is an entire section of a student enrollment book dedicated to academic programs?" The answer is that no institution can out market or recruit the programs it has. Academic programs are the primary product students are seeking. To support this point, a recent study of new college freshmen conducted by EAB showed that academic programs were the top queried item on institutional websites when these students were exploring postsecondary schools (Olsen, A., 2018, March).

The quality and array of programs, along with the teaching methods deployed, play a significant role in retention as well. Logically, if students see value in their program of study, they are more inclined to persist. The benefits of remaining with a program of study that ignites an individual's passion will often outweigh the costs of staying enrolled.

Academics are natural innovators. However, program innovations are often thwarted by internal bureaucracies, a lack of data to inform innovations, institutional politics, a lack of incentives or funding, or paralysis caused by an inherent desire to maintain the status quo. Whatever the underlying reason, program innovation is not for the "faint of heart." Even a staple of the academic enterprise, program reviews, often are more about justifying the existence of a program than an in-depth examination of a program's value to students and their future employers.

The term, "innovate or die," may be too drastic a characterization for the context at most institutions. Nevertheless, programs must innovate to remain relevant and add value to students who will face exponential changes over their lifetime. Whether innovations relate to curriculum, teaching methods, or instructional delivery methods of existing programs or the creation of new programs, such innovations are vital to sustaining healthy enrollments.

Enrollment managers who fail to engage with academic leaders and faculty are missing the single most significant opportunity to bolster enrollments. Unquestionably, academic programs are the domain of faculty, yet enrollment managers can play a supporting role. This support can take many forms, but at a minimum should include actively promoting academic programs, providing feedback and data on student demand, presenting competitor trends, engaging in broader environmental scanning, and analyzing recruitment and retention at the

program level. These insights offer much needed information to academic decision-makers. Without it, they are often "flying blind," and the best intentions can lead to disastrous results.

In *Part Two* of this book, we examine how to align academic programs with the needs of the market. We also explore how best to educate Millennial and Generation Z students considering their learning styles, attributes, and worldview. Lastly, strategies for effectively promoting academic programs will be reviewed.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Aligning Academic Programs with the Market

Chasing program-related market opportunities can be a slippery slope. Given the rapidity of changing market demand and the cyclical nature of some markets, driven primarily by job opportunities, it is difficult to discern where to invest institutional resources. In this chapter, recommended methodologies for strategically investing in program innovations will be presented.

First, however, it is important to note that not all innovations require the development of new programs or extensive overhauls of existing programs. For example, some programs are appropriate for the adoption of online or blended delivery, competency-based education, open learning, experiential learning, project-based learning, simulations, gaming, or other pedagogical applications. A related pedagogical approach, active learning, has been around for decades. In fact, I vividly recall studying the benefits of active learning in my doctoral coursework in higher education curriculum and instruction in the early nineties. Admittedly, it has taken years for this seismic shift to infect academic culture, but the metamorphosis that has transpired is revolutionary. The "sage on the stage" has been gradually supplanted by faculty who engage their students in active learning; coach and facilitate rather than lecture; customize the learners' experience based on their needs and learning styles; and leverage technology to enable learning. By fostering a learning environment where students are encouraged to collaborate, create knowledge, synthesis and apply information, strategize, and even find entertainment in the learning experience, faculty create the conditions for improved student success (Tapscott, 2008).

Some program innovation efforts have been even more modest than these. One institution simply changed the names of fifteen of their programs and experienced enrollment increases in all of them. Others have engaged in interdisciplinary coursework and programs. Many also have infused foci across the curriculum such as communications, leadership, and ethics. I believe the time is right to consider other options for curriculum integration, namely emerging technologies and entrepreneurship. Both are aligned with societal changes and the interests of Millennials and Gen Zers.

The Academic Program Lifecycle

Somewhat like material products, academic programs tend to have a lifecycle. While this lifecycle is driven by customer (student) demand like commercial products, it also is influenced by industry demand (jobs for college graduates). However, unlike the private sector, the academy is often slow to respond to the market demand with new programs and extremely reluctant to do away with programs that have reached the end of their life cycle and are irreversibly in decline. The latter can limit an institution's capacity to engage in the former.

Figure 1 depicts the academic program lifecycle stages. The processes for new program creation and existing program renewal are frequently defined and even systematized for academic leaders and faculty at the institutional or departmental levels. Yet, there is seldom a clearly defined role for enrollment managers in supporting these efforts. Enrollment managers may not fully understand the pedagogy or curriculum associated with a program, but they know the market and the underlying data and research. Failure to capitalize on their knowledge and expertise leaves most program innovations at-risk.

Figure 1: Academic Program Lifecycle Stages
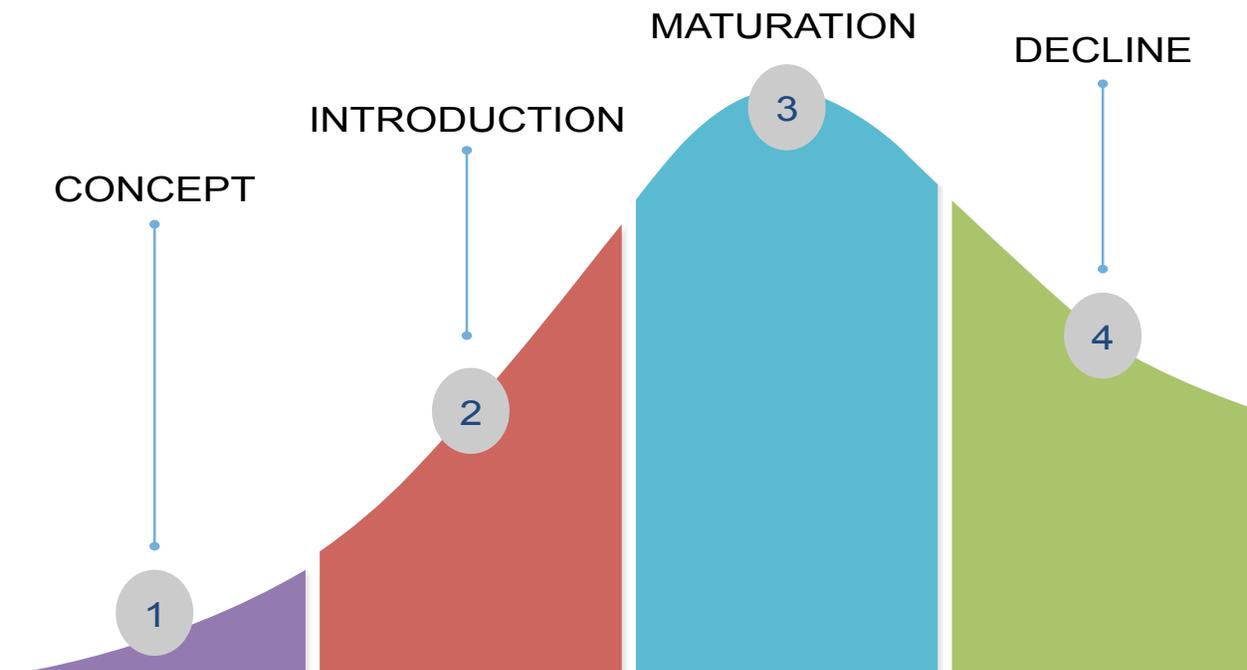
At the **concept stage**, enrollment managers can provide valuable insights regarding the environmental context, student demand, market size, market saturation, competitor positioning, and target audiences, just to name a few. In particular, launching new programs without their input inevitably leads to less than optimal results. To illustrate this point, a large urban institution introduced thirty new programs to the market over a three-year period. Twenty-seven of them quickly died. The financial and reputational cost to the institution was huge. Essentially, these programs failed because the necessary market research was not conducted and programs were mounted based on what faculty wanted to teach rather than the needs of the market. Also, they did not promote the programs sufficiently—opting for a "field of dreams" approach instead, build it and students will come.

Whether or not they are providing this strategic intelligence to program decision-makers at the concept stage, during and prior to the **introduction stage**, enrollment managers should collaborate with academic leaders on program-specific marketing and recruitment planning, a review of admissions and other policy implications, as well as service delivery. The probability of successfully enrolling students in a new program or an existing program that is undersubscribed is significantly lower without their involvement. In my consulting practice, I have met with many admissions recruiters who have disclosed that they heard about a new program or existing program innovations in the newspaper. How can they effectively promote these programs under these conditions?

The **maturation stage** of the lifecycle can be quite protracted. In fact, a long maturation stage is a sign that a program is aligned with the needs of the market. During this stage, the role of enrollment managers is to support the program's success. This can take many forms: enrollment projections, raising the academic profile of enrolled students, shaping the composition of enrolled students, continuing to recruit students for the program, promoting the program's student benefits and outcomes, bolstering the reputation of the program, supporting retention efforts, and in some cases, managing the enrollment to align with program capacity.

Finally, in the **decline stage**, it is important for enrollment managers and others to accurately diagnose the causation for low enrollments. Typically, there are two possible reasons for low program enrollments. Either the program has not been promoted sufficiently or it no longer meets the needs of the market. If the former is the correct diagnosis, an investment in program marketing is the right institutional response. In my experience, however, the latter is more often the correct diagnosis. In these situations, there are three

options to consider: (1) expand to new markets, (2) engage in program innovation, or (3) sunset the program. None of these alternatives are simple to execute and for that reason, require visible leadership and broad consultation.

According to author Dr. Lynda Wallace-Hulecki, foundational to ensuring program relevance and vitality throughout the program lifecycle is the need for research and analyses (Wallace-Hulecki, L., 2014). Elaborating further, she describes the following:

❖ **Environmental scanning** can prove useful in identifying gaps and opportunities for new program development, untapped or underserved markets for expansion of existing programs, and potential threats to enrollment by competitors, to name a few.

❖ **Market research** may provide value-adding insights on target population segments in relation to their education objectives, learning needs, instructional delivery preferences, and service expectations; the reputation and perceived competitive positioning of a college and existing programs; as well as the testing or validating of the market potential of new program ideas.

❖ **Enrollment and retention analyses** can aid in monitoring and tracking the flow and performance of students by program relative to expected standards of performance.

❖ **Student attrition/causation studies** provide insights on attrition causation factors and in assessing the impact of intervention strategies employed.

❖ **Capacity analyses** are useful in assessing options for optimizing the use of available resources (e.g., human resource, space, financial, technology).

❖ **Program assessment** brings a systemic perspective in determining program relevance, performance, and quality.

❖ **Cost-benefit and risk analyses** consider both the financial and nonfinancial impacts of programs relative to desired outcomes.

Investing Strategically in Program Innovation

Nothing is strategic unless it informed by data and research. Furthermore, strategic investments in program innovation are long-term. They should not be focused on short-term enrollment gains. Every investment of this type should be with a view to creating a sustainable competitive advantage in the market.

To position an academic program strategically, consider the construct presented in *Figure 2*. Is there identifiable and sizeable student demand? Are there sufficient career and job

opportunities for graduates of the program? Does the program have adequate instructional capabilities to deliver a quality program? Does the program have the capacity to scale to meet demand and enrollment goals? Is there a sustainable competitive advantage that can be achieved in the market? Do the potential benefits of mounting a new program or reviving a declining program outweigh the costs of doing so? The answers to these questions can be found in institutional data, primary and secondary research, and stakeholder consultations.

Figure 2: Academic Program Innovation Construct

STUDENT DEMAND	INDUSTRY DEMAND	PROGRAM CAPABILITY	PROGRAM CAPACITY	COMPETITIVE OPPORTUNITY	COST/BENEFIT
Aligned with	Aligned with	Aligned with	Aligned with	Aligned with	Aligned with
• Identifiable and sizeable student demand	• Career/job opportunties for program graduates	• Program capabilities are adequate or can be created at modest cost	• Program capacity is scalable or can be created at modest cost	• Sustainable competitive advantage is feasible in the marketplace	• Potential ROI (holistically defined) outweighs potential risk

To determine a program's status with respect to these measures consider the following criteria: (1) academic cost effectiveness, (2) academic prospects, (3) academic vitality, and (4) graduate outlook. The variables to be used in evaluating each criterion are presented here.

❖ **Student Demand:** Assess the institution's current and future ability to attract prospective students into the program. The measures to be used can be found in institutional data and include:
  ✓ Number of test score senders
  ✓ Number of inquiries
  ✓ Number of applicants
  ✓ Inquiry to applicant yield rate
  ✓ Applicant to enrolled student yield rate
  ✓ Number of students enrolled

❖ **Industry Demand:** Explore the job opportunities for graduates from the program. The Bureau of Labor Statistics and organizations like EMSI and Burning Glass Research provide much of the needed data.
   ✓ Jobs availability vs. number of graduates
   ✓ Industry career trends
   ✓ Industry employment projections
   ✓ Graduate wages

❖ **Program Capability:** Determine if sufficient capability exists or can be created within the program to offer a high quality educational experience to students. Program and institutional stakeholders are the primary source of information for these variables.
   ✓ Availability of qualified faculty
   ✓ Financial means to hire and retain qualified faculty
   ✓ Sufficient instructional supports
   ✓ Sufficient advising and student supports

❖ **Program Capacity:** Determine the capacity of the academic program to grow. Program and institutional stakeholders as well as institutional data are used to inform the following:
   ✓ Faculty/student ratio
      o Is there room to grow section sizes without diluting the quality of instruction?
   ✓ Funding for additional sections
      o Do funds exist to increase the number of sections offered?
   ✓ Number of graduates vs. number of new students
      o How effective is the program at getting students through the pipeline to completion?
   ✓ Classroom/lab/studio capacity
      o What is the current space utilization?
   ✓ Online and blended instructional delivery
      o Does the program have the ability to teach the program completely online or in a blended format?

❖ **Competitive Opportunity:** Assess the competitive context. Program stakeholders have valuable insights related to many of the items presented here, but their feedback should be combined with institutional data and national data from organizations such as the National Student Clearinghouse and benchmark studies like the National Community College Benchmark Project.
   ✓ Number and types of competitors in the market space offering similar programs

- ✓ Competitor enrollments vs. student demand
- ✓ Competitive advantages and disadvantages relative to others in the market
- ✓ Existence of niche opportunities
- ✓ Potential to disrupt the market with a unique program offering
- ❖ **Cost-Benefit:** Evaluate the cost effectiveness of offering the academic program relative to the benefits to students, industry, and the institution. Institutional data and stakeholder input supply the needed information to assess the following:
  - ✓ Revenue/FTE a program generates vs. the cost of program delivery
  - ✓ The volume of students impacted by the program
  - ✓ Expressed or unmet needs of industry

New Program Innovation

Creating new academic programs takes time and institutional resources (human and financial). Moreover, it is a protracted exercise at most colleges and universities—preventing rapid idea-to-market scenarios. These inherent internal challenges are further exacerbated by external factors. For instance, it is predicted that by 2025 eighty percent of the jobs that will exist have not yet been created (Elmes, J., 2017, February). The rapidity of change in industry makes identifying the right new programs challenging, if not impossible.

Nonetheless, academic leaders are compelled to initiate new programs in order to remain relevant and generate necessary student enrollments. Since 2012 when enrollments began to slump, public and private institutions in the U.S. have added 41,446 new degree and certificate programs (Marcus, J., 2018, August). Most of these new programs have not increased enrollment revenue enough to compensate for the cost of mounting said offerings. To avoid this potential downside, due diligence in development of new programs is required. As cited earlier in this chapter, due diligence begins with conducting extensive **research** (e.g., environmental scanning, market analyses, and competitor analyses) along with following quality standards established by the institution or adopting national models such as the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) or Quality Matters (QM).

Informed by research, program stakeholders then engage in **idea generation**. Whether through structured discussions or informal brainstorming, program ideas must be strategic in nature and aligned with the mission of the institution, the strengths of faculty, enrollment and revenue goals, as well as the needs of the market (students and industry). The ideation stage may include a SWOT analysis (internal strengths and weaknesses along with external

opportunities and threats). The academic program innovation construct presented in *Figure 2* also might serve as a usual tool to guide idea generation. Once the initial ideas are formulated, they must be carefully vetted with relevant stakeholders to determine the feasibility and desirability of pursuing one or more of the ideas identified. Vetting should include a risk assessment—comparing known or expected risks against potential benefits of proceeding. Constructs such as the Stage-Gate Model may be useful at this and future stages of new program innovation. For example, the Stage-Gate Model describes proven success drivers, provides a process to follow, and identifies go/no go decision points (Edgett, S. J., 2015).

At most colleges and universities, various governing bodies and institutional leaders must review and approve new program ideas. So, the next stage of the process involves **developing a business case** for the proposed program. Dr. Wallace-Hulecki (Wallace-Hulecki, L., 2014) posits that a new program business case should include:

1. **Evidence of Demand:** This is a concise statement of the student, industry, and/or community needs you seek to address, supported by research and data that substantiates potential demand in evidence-based terms.
2. **Potential Opportunity:** This portion of a business case answers the question, "How will the new program remedy the identified problem/need?" It should be succinct while providing enough detail to describe the proposed program direction.
3. **Competitive Advantage:** The potential unclaimed or underserved niches that define the competitive differential advantage of the program are highlighted, such as program attributes, campus attributes, pricing, instructional delivery methods, existing marketplace reputation and positioning, as well as program benefits and outcomes.
4. **Strategic Fit:** Any investment of institutional resources must be aligned with the college's long-term strategic goals, academic development directions, and aid in addressing associated enrollment and financial imperatives.
5. **Alignment with Capacity:** Indications should be provided of the existing capacity conditions to offer a quality learning experience within the academic unit responsible for the program, as well as the service units that will support its effective launch and student success (e.g., institutional marketing, admissions/recruitment, career services, registrarial services, library, student success services, teaching and learning). If existing capacity is deemed insufficient, affordable options for ramping up capacity should be identified.

6. **Cost-Benefit Analysis:** One essential ingredient of a cost-benefit analysis is a financial comparison of estimated "total" costs to deliver the program versus expected revenue based on enrollment targets. However, the cost-benefit analysis should not be limited solely to financial indicators. Rather, a holistic perspective should be taken to include the nonfinancial benefits to students, industry, and the community as well.

7. **Antecedents for Success:** Other required resources and conditions should be identified for the successful implementation and sustainability of the program initiative.

The aforementioned business case elements could be used as **decision criteria** to determine whether the proposed program is a "go" or a "no go." Regardless of the decision criteria adopted, it is prudent to weight the criteria in alignment with institution priorities and resources. Following the evaluation of a program's potential, one of several decisions is possible. For instance, the decision may be to proceed with the program following the normal protocols or to fast track the program. The decision may be to request revisions or to incubate as pilot offering in Continuing Education. Alternatively, the decision may be to abandon the proposed program idea.

Assuming the new program is approved, the next step is to **flesh out the conceptual details** associated with the program. Typically, this stage of the process begins with identifying desired learner outcomes and degree requirements. Next, an assessment framework is designed to measure the stated outcomes. While both of the steps may appear premature, it is critical to begin with the end in mind. Leveraging the defined learner outcomes and degree requirements, the curriculum is developed. Obviously, this is no small feat and requires faculty time and expertise and possibly, support from a curriculum development specialist. It is fairly common for faculty engaged in curriculum development to be given release time for this purpose. Along with the design of the curriculum, the methods of instructional delivery must be defined (e.g., in-class, online, blended, using enabling technologies, experiential learning, open labs, project-based). Finally, a pathway for the program launch should be established (e.g., target audiences, program promotion, recruitment strategy). When these steps are completed, the program is ready to launch.

Existing Program Innovation

A staggering forty-eight percent of existing academic programs in the U.S. produce ten or fewer graduates per year (Marcus, J., 2018, August). Such programs may have reached the decline stage of their lifecycle or, possibly, never entered the maturation stage. Though many

of these programs may supply service courses to fulfill general education and other program requirements, many do not. For the latter and possibly the former, this practice is not sustainable in the best of times, much less in an era when funding and resources are tightly constrained. Consequently, existing program innovation and sun setting must be strategic priorities for colleges and universities.

Not surprisingly, many of the models and processes described for new programs can be tweaked and applied to existing programs. But, an existing program review can be political and often involves deeply ingrained beliefs about the quality of the current program and passionate perspectives regarding retaining the status quo. For this reason, effective change management practices are required to engage in innovative thinking about program possibilities. These practices include visible leadership support for innovation, a compelling rationale for change, consultation with key stakeholders, institutional support and direction for the program review process, and open and ongoing communication regarding expectations, timelines, and deliverables.

Generally speaking, academic programs should be prioritized for review and innovation based on academic strategic directions and enrollment potential. The first pass at program prioritization should be a high-level assessment of program performance. *Figure 3* depicts program classifications related to performance. Usually, program performance is measured by quality indicators such as strength of the faculty (e.g., credentials, industry expertise, service, research, scholarship, and teaching), pedagogical soundness of the curriculum and teaching methodologies, and student performance relative to the achievement of learning outcomes. Enrollment factors also may be applied as performance measures and include the number of entering students, the total number of program students, course completion rates, and retention and graduation rates. Graduate outcomes like job placement rates, careers related to the discipline, the number of unemployed and underemployed graduates, and employer feedback on employee readiness and productivity in the workplace. In measuring performance, some institutions include factors such as the regional or national distinctiveness of the program, the competitive positioning of the program, student and industry demand for the program, the cost to deliver the program compared to the revenue it generates, and institutional investments made in the program. Sometimes the chosen criteria used to measure performance are weighted to emphasis strategic priorities of the institution.

Figure 3: Program Performance Matrix

Target for review ONLY IF capacity and enrollment opportunities exist; otherwise, continue the program in its current state.

Medium priority for program review UNLESS untapped enrollment opportunities are identified.

High Performing

Moderately Performing

High priority for program review. Without appropriate innovations, the program will not thrive.

Consider program elimination and redeploying resources to other programs.

Low Performing with Potential

Under-performing

It is important to note that like new program innovation, the innovation of existing programs is as much outwardly facing as it is internally focused. The external environment, especially student and industry demand as well as the competitive context, are essential considerations when innovating any program. For existing programs, other opportunities for innovation exist outside of the program itself. Illustrative examples include:

❖ Strong linkages with K–12 education and business
❖ Partnerships or consortiums
❖ Articulation agreements with other institutions
❖ Interdisciplinary courses with other programs
❖ Cross-disciplinary student projects
❖ Themes integrated across the curriculum (e.g., communications, ethics, entrepreneurship, leadership, technology) that require support from other academic and administrative areas
❖ Internships, co-ops, field experiences, clinicals, or service learning

Indeed, the possibilities for new and existing program innovation are seemingly infinite. Two recognized experts in the field, Daniel Seymour and Jonathan Fife, assert that for program innovation to occur institutions must create and sustain a climate of innovation, hire innovative people, identify a clear strategy for innovation, and develop the means to look outward (Seymour, D. T. & Fife, J. D., 1998). Senior leaders and enrollment managers can proactively create these conditions for innovation.

A recent study sponsored by Pearson suggests that higher education is entering into a new wave of innovation, which they call "demand driven education" (Deegan, J. & Martin, N., 2018). The resultant report argues that emerging career trends will require "specific knowledge and skills, especially complex thinking and interpersonal capabilities." Because the pathway to future careers is unlikely to be linear in nature, people will need to engage in lifelong learning—requiring a significant commitment from workers but also reform among postsecondary institutions to support the need for continuous learning.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Educating Millennial and Generation Z Students

From an enrollment management perspective, the teaching and learning enterprise matters for two important reasons. First, the educational experience of students is the primary value your institution deliveries to those you serve. It is what is marketed to prospective students; it defines an institution's distinctiveness; and it ultimately demonstrates the outcomes achieved by your graduates. Second, student retention and completion are directly correlated to the perceived and real value of students' academic experience. If the experience is truly seen as value-added, students will be more likely to persevere through emerging trials and tribulations in order to persist.

A comment received from a recent article I posted on LinkedIn suggested that individual faculty determine the nature of education delivered to students. Beyond prescribed degree and course requirements, this is a true statement. The classroom is and should be the domain of faculty. Unquestionably, most faculty inherently desire for their students to be successful. Under optimal conditions, the probability of learner success increases when there is alignment between teaching methods and student learning styles and preferences. Therefore, the ideal conditions for learning among the vast majority of today's college students, Millennials and Gen Zers, should be considered alongside proven pedagogical approaches.

As is widely known, both generations of students live in exponential times where technology, information, society, and their lives are changing at a pace unlike any other time in human history. In part, due to this rapidity of change, their attention spans are limited and attempts at multitasking are the norm. Expecting these students to be passive recipients of knowledge through traditional lectures simply is not realistic. Even with traditional lectures, they have unprecedented access to information and can easily fact-check the content presented in real time. So, to engage Millennials and Gen Zers, teaching practices must continue to evolve and must do so at a much faster rate than has heretofore been the case.

Essentially, today's students expect to fully leverage technology in their learning, collaborate with other students while taking on-campus and online classes, learn by doing, and co-create knowledge. Given the nature of these students, learning best occurs when it is fast-paced and engaging. Stereotypically, they are self-directed learners, who prefer degrees of freedom in

their educational pursuits. Constrained and overly structured learning environments diminish their ability to learn. Hence, their learning will be optimal only if educators create the right conditions in the classroom and in other learning environments. The remainder of this chapter explores the conditions that foster Millennial and Generation Z learning.

Integrating Technology into Learning

Even the best technologies can distract from learning. And, both generations are dependent upon technology, not always in healthy or productive ways. Nevertheless, technologies do provide an array of learning applications that did not exist a decade ago. The proper use of these technologies can dramatically enrich the learning experience. For example, Skype, video conferencing, and webinar tools can be leveraged to connect with classmates, instructors, as well as discipline and industry experts across the globe. Human connections can be enhanced through such technologies, and learning becomes more accessible to the masses, anytime from anywhere—thus, extending learning opportunities between classes and throughout one's lifetime.

Possibly, the most ubiquitous form of technology used in postsecondary institutions today is **learning management systems** (LMS). Even so, many of these systems are underutilized. LMS accounts may not be assigned to every class or used consistently to promote student learning and success. In a recent white paper produced by D2L, an anonymous author recommends five ways to maximize an LMS (D2L, 2018). Consider these and other means of fully optimizing this technology.

1. **Mobile-first for the busy student.** Using responsive design, all course materials can be accessed and viewed from any device, appearing as they were originally intended (e.g., PDFs, PowerPoint presentations, videos).
2. **Track and monitor student progress.** Analyzing real time data, instructors and advisors can identify student issues early enough to engage in early interventions. Common issues include low engagement with the LMS, late or missing class assignments, and a lack of participation in student projects and discussions.
3. **Constant contact and feedback.** Personal contacts from the instructor, feedback on assignments, personal reflections, and peer interactions are among the strategies adopted for execution within an LMS.

4. **Feeling connected to a community of learners.** Typically through discussion groups, students gain a sense of belonging to a peer group. Students offer each other encouragement and support.

5. **Self-pacing with outcomes-based education.** As cited earlier in this chapter, many in this generation are self-directed learners desiring to move forward with their education at their own pace. An LMS has the potential to offer the freedom and flexibility they are seeking.

Learning management systems represent just one means of advancing student knowledge. **Technology-enabled simulations, gaming, virtual and augmented reality, and data analysis** are but a few of the options available to faculty as they reimagine instructional delivery. The U.S. National Education Technology Plan, for example, states that instructors can use data gathered about student learning to customize feedback and interventions as well as to evaluate the efficacy of new teaching practices and technologies (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology, 2017, January). One example of this is found in real-time polling that demonstrates how well students grasp key concepts. Data gathered from polling applications can be used to revisit course content, reconceptualize the delivery of course content, provide individualized feedback and support to students who struggle with key concepts, and customize the learning experience.

Regarding emerging technologies for teaching and learning, a recent article published by Campus Technology outlined several trends in educational technology for 2018 (Kelly, R., 2018, January). Among these, the following are specific to the teaching and learning enterprise:

❖ **Immersive Learning.** Primarily, the technologies referenced are virtual reality and gamification.

❖ **Digital Course Materials and Assignments.** Examples include instructional videos and the use of open access materials created for edX MOOCs.

❖ **Enterprise-wide Video**. This consists of video platforms that allow for recording, managing, and delivering videos.

❖ **Mobile Tech and the Internet of Things**. Mobile devices are ubiquitous in our society and thus, expand the opportunities for how, where, and when people learn.

❖ **Learning Space Design**. Learning spaces are being redesigned to accommodate interactions with technology and people (e.g., moveable furniture, writable surfaces, capabilities for multimedia creation and presentation).

It is true for most Millennials and Gen Zers that it can be difficult to capture and retain their attention. So, in some instances, technology may need to be employed to increase the "edutainment" level of instruction. These are visually oriented learners, so the use of videos, graphics, and interactive learning tools will help to stimulate their interest. Also, they live on social media and are masters of Internet searches. Both may have a place in class communications, professor/student interactions, or class assignments. Consider, for example, content-related blogs, social media forums for a class, and class projects that involve online research.

With so many technology solutions available to instructors, it may be difficult to know where to begin. Like all technology solutions, those designed to enhance learning should not drive the pedagogy. Instead, they are simply tools to accomplish teaching and learning objectives. So, begin with these objectives in mind. For instance, if an objective is to internationalize the curriculum, identify technologies that support global connections and allow students to virtually experience international cultures, politics, commerce, etc. If an objective is to provide students with real world experiences, an instructor might rely on simulations and virtual reality technologies. Similarly, a teaching and learning objective focused on the analysis and interpretation of Big Data will require access to large data sources and possibly, artificial intelligence tools.

Regardless of the technologies adopted, they must be applied properly to impact teaching and learning. In many ways, the use of technology in the classroom transforms the role of the instructor from being a lecturer to more of a facilitator of learning—coaching and guiding students through the learning journey. For some, particularly more seasoned faculty, this is not an easy or even natural transformation. They may require support from colleagues, teaching and learning centers, and others to make this quantum leap. In the end, it is a personal commitment to improve teaching and learning that matters.

Adopting new technologies is often like entering into uncharted waters. For instance, the rules for engaging with students via social media are murky and require adherence to instructor/student boundaries and common sense. Teaching students how to validate and appropriately cite information found on the Internet is also a prudent strategy. For most of the other technological tools available for teaching and learning, there exists ample research regarding best practices. It is advisable to review best practices and lessons learned before adopting any technology.

Enhancing In-Class Learning

Perhaps the most studied and practiced enhancement to teaching college students in recent times is the art of **active learning**. At its core, active learning is a student-centered approach to education that involves students doing things and then reflecting on these activities. "Active learning practices may range from simple methods such as interactive lectures and class discussion to case study analysis, role-playing, experiential learning, peer teaching, and flipped lessons. Active learning may involve problem-based, visual-based, collaborative, project-based, or game-based learning." (Misseyanni, A., Lytras, M. D., Papdopoulou, P. & Marouli, C., 2018). As such, active learning is not limited to a classroom setting. Active learning can occur through class assignments and projects, through internships, and in outdoor settings, among others.

Robert Beichner, a physics professor at North Carolina State University, pioneered the concept of the **active learning classroom** in the mid-nineties (Negrea, S., 2018, April). Since then, the concept has grown incrementally at a slow pace—somewhat because of a reluctance among the professorate to adopt this mode of teaching but the cost of retrofitting classrooms has been a more limiting factor. Furniture such as roundtables and technology, primarily AV equipment, represent the costs associated with transforming a traditional classroom to one that fosters active learning. However, many experts report that low-tech environments produce similar outcomes as long as teaching methods focus on engaging students in learning.

A similar teaching methodology is **experiential learning**. Like active learning, this teaching method focuses on students experiencing learning through hands-on activities and then reflecting upon those experiences. Professor David Kolb, the person most associated with the theory of experiential learning, views it as a continuous process of experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (McLeod, S., 2017). Conceptualization and experimentation are what differentiate experiential learning from active learning. In the conceptualization of this learning cycle, the student uses their reflections to imagine a new idea or a modification of an existing abstract concept. From the derived concepts, the student then experiments by applying what was learned to real world scenarios.

Experiential learning is often interdisciplinary in nature and involves classroom learning as well as field-based learning. While there are critics of experiential learning, most researchers have concluded that the benefits outweigh the trade-offs with traditional classroom learning. Some of the cited benefits include the following (Holdings, K., 2014, October):

❖ **Accelerates learning** by requiring students to use critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making skills.
❖ **Provides a safe learning environment** by employing trial and error methodologies.
❖ **Bridges the gap between theory and practice** by practicing what is taught, which plays a critical role in retaining concepts and ideas.
❖ **Produces demonstrable mindset changes** through an open-ended approach to exploring abstract concepts.
❖ **Increases engagement levels** with collaboration and active participation.
❖ **Delivers exceptional return on investment** by influencing feelings and emotions as well as knowledge and skills, which leads to enhanced learning retention.
❖ **Enables personalized learning** because students are largely in control of their own learning.

Yet another common methodology is the **Universal Design for Learning** (UDL). By design, UDL is an extremely flexible method of instruction. It takes into account students who come from different backgrounds and cultures, variation in student learning styles and abilities, as well as accommodations for students with disabilities. The core principles for UDL include: (1) presenting information and content many ways, (2) differentiating ways in which students can demonstrate what they have learned, and (3) incorporating multiple means of student engagement to stimulate interest and provide motivation for learning (National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2014).

Although these three methods of student learning barely scratch the surface of the full array of learning strategies applied in higher education today, they illustrate approaches that align with the learner needs and preferences of Millennials and Gen Zers. All three engage the learner, are customized to the learner, and give students a modicum of control over their learning. Moreover, active learning and experiential learning embrace the notion of hands-on learning and real world application of knowledge, which appeals to both generations.

Enhancing Online Learning

Between 2012 and 2016, the number of students in the United States who did not take any online courses decreased by 8.4% while the number taking at least one online class increased by 24.7% percent (Lederman, D., 2018, January). According to Lederman's analysis of data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the percentage of students taking online courses exclusively increased by 29.1% during this same five-year period. Moreover, nearly one-third of all U.S. students enrolled in at least one online course in the fall of 2016. Needless to say, online enrollment is big business, and it represents one of the few learner segments that has grown in the midst of a dearth of students.

Even though online offerings often lead to increased institutional enrollments, higher credit hours earned, and enhanced flexibility for students, it is not right for all students or all disciplines. Regarding disciplinary fit, online instruction must be aligned with sound pedagogy in the discipline and learning objectives. With respect to student fit with online delivery, many studies have shown equal or better academic performance of online students versus those taking the same classes face-to-face on measures such as grades and course completion. Conversely, studies like the one completed a year ago by the Brookings Institution suggest that certain populations of students do not fare as well in online courses. This study revealed that lower performing, at-risk students taking online courses had lower grades and higher dropout rates than their peers in the same courses (Roll, N., 2017, June). However, with any such study, it is difficult to account for all the variables associated with academic performance and persistence (e.g., class participation, student effort, the motivation and self-directed nature of students). Perhaps a better way to target future online learners is to examine the attributes of students at a given college or university who have been successful in online courses in the past. Commonly identified success attributes include students who are self-directed and self-motivated, possess strong time management skills, are effective communicators, and are willing to stay connected with classmates and the instructor.

Online courses and programs are certainly not a solution for the enrollment woes at many institutions. In fact, five percent of institutions account for almost half of all online enrollments across the nation (Babson Survey Research Group, 2017). To generate new enrollments, online offerings must address pent-up student demand, exploit a competitive opportunity or gap in the market, reflect program and faculty strengths, and be marketed extensively to the right audiences in the right ways.

Of course, enrollment success with online offerings will be short-lived if courses are of inferior quality or ineffective teaching methods are deployed. Tech savvy Millennial and Generation Z students will not necessarily thrive in courses just because they are delivered via technology. To facilitate the success of online learners, faculty should consider proven practices and established principles.

A special report issued by Faculty Focus identifies ten basic principles for online teaching that include (Ragan, L. C., 2018):

1. **Show up and teach.** Just because a course has been authorized and developed for online delivery, do not assume that the course teaches itself.
2. **Practice proactive course management strategies.** Examples include monitoring class assignment submissions, reminding students of upcoming deadlines, and communicating regularly with students.
3. **Establish patterns of course activities.** Convey the structure of the course and expectations related to pace of activities and student engagement.
4. **Plan for the unplanned.** Have a strategy for informing students when unforeseen circumstances arise.
5. **Response requested and expected.** Commit to a rapid response to student inquiries and to providing academic feedback.
6. **Think before you write.** Be as concise and clear as possible in all student communications.
7. **Help maintain forward progress.** Promote student motivation and focus related to course tasks and active participation.
8. **Safe and secure.** Protect student data and rights to privacy.
9. **Quality counts.** Ensure the quality of the online learning experience (e.g., content resources, instructional design strategies, and instructional technology performance).
10. **Click a mile on my connection.** Work with others to confirm the reliability for the technology infrastructure (e.g., learning management system, tech support).

Other pedagogical approaches to online teaching consist of focusing on active learning, utilizing a variety of multimedia tools, keeping lesson segments brief (e.g., ten minutes per segment), using visuals and white space to break up content that is text heavy, and employing effective teaching strategies, just to cite a few. All of the aforementioned are from the faculty perspective. It is useful to consider student perspectives as well. Though most

student perception studies are dated and have a limited sample size, one notable study illuminates what many students are seeking with online instructional delivery. The study revealed that students would benefit from instructors adapting to their needs, providing meaningful examples, facilitating the course effectively, motivating students to do their best, delivering a valuable course, communicating effectively, and showing concern for student learning (Young, S., 2010, June).

Whether online is the best learning modality for them or not, an increasing number of Gen Z and particularly Millennial students are choosing online courses and will continue to do so. Therefore, it is incumbent upon educators to deliver the best online learning experience possible. Proactive efforts to support and motivate these learners will improve their academic performance, course completion, and longer-term, their retention and credential completion.

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CHAPTER SIX
Effective Promotion of Academic Programs

At most colleges and universities, academic program marketing is relegated to a descriptive web page, a listing in a school's viewbook, program brochures that are not widely distributed, talking points from a recruiter with limited program knowledge, and word-of-mouth. No successful company promotes their products in this way. So why do postsecondary institutions operate in this manner?

In part, the minimalist approach to program promotion is due to the sheer volume of programs relative to the bandwidth of marketing staff, resource constraints, and competing priorities. When program marketing does occur, it is often descriptive in nature rather than focused on promoting distinctive features, benefits, and outcomes associated with programs. Truthfully, most programs are not very distinctive when compared with competitor programs, so it is difficult to position discrete academic offers effectively. It is possible, however, by focusing on the all-important **quality indicators**: the expertise of faculty, student experiences and accomplishments, alumni outcomes and success stories, third party validation of program quality such as accreditations, employer feedback, and rankings.

To address the problem of limited marketing resources (human and financial), consider **strategically focusing program marketing efforts** where they have the highest potential for ROI, primarily increased enrollments. Within this context, a four-tier approach to program marketing is recommended in which each tier will receive a prescribed level of marketing support. The four tiers consist of a Standard Tier, an Enhanced Tier, a Top Investment Tier, and New Programs and New Initiatives Tier. Examples of what may be included in each tier are presented here.

Standard Tier
- ❖ Web page enhancements with a marketing orientation
- ❖ Program highlights in the communications flow to prospective students
- ❖ Presence/table at recruitment events
- ❖ A 5-year rotation for program video updates
- ❖ One testimonial of each: student, graduate, employer (gathered in a three-year rotation)

Enhanced Tier
- ❖ Web page enhancements with a marketing orientation
- ❖ Web homepage banner ad (appears once every two months)
- ❖ Program highlights and a message from the dean or department chair describing program features, benefits, and outcomes in the communications flow to prospective students
- ❖ Presence/table at recruitment events
- ❖ A 3-year rotation for program video updates
- ❖ Two testimonials of each: student, graduate, employer (gathered in a three-year rotation)
- ❖ A contact plan for possible outreach effort to key target audiences
- ❖ Additional mentions on the institution's social media pages with 3 boosts per year

Top Investment Tier
- ❖ Web page enhancements with a marketing orientation
- ❖ Web homepage banner ad (appears on a monthly basis)
- ❖ Program highlights, a message from the dean or department chair describing program features, benefits, and outcomes, and student and alumni testimonials in the communications flow to prospective students
- ❖ Presence/table at recruitment events
- ❖ A 2-year rotation for program video updates
- ❖ Two testimonials of each: student, graduate, employer (gathered in a two-year rotation)
- ❖ A percentage of the institution's digital advertising would be program-specific, focusing on top tier programs
- ❖ A contact plan for possible outreach effort to key target audiences
- ❖ Additional mentions on the institution's social media pages with 3 boosts per year

New Program and New Initiatives Tier
- ❖ Marketing/communication plan developed jointly by Admissions, Distance Education, Marketing, instructors, and the dean or department chair
- ❖ Web page (create)
- ❖ Web homepage banner ad (appears on a monthly basis)
- ❖ Program highlights, a message from the dean or department chair describing program features, benefits, and outcomes, and student and alumni testimonials in the communications flow to prospective students
- ❖ Targeted digital advertising
- ❖ Presence/table at recruitment events

❖ Create a program video prior to launch; update 1–2 years later based on instructor input
❖ Employer testimonials—three or more (why needed, type of careers, demand)
❖ Admissions and Distance Education will seek out relevant high school instructors, workforce development and other prospective partners to share program information and seek speaking opportunities for faculty and others
❖ Additional mentions on the institution's social media pages with 3 boosts per year
❖ A mutually agreed upon à la carte menu of some options that may be deemed more effective for the program

Of the examples conveyed above, **the most important is a program's web page** along with strategies to drive traffic to the page. To achieve a compelling marketing presence, program web pages must move beyond just descriptive information about the admissions and degree requirements, a program overview, and a narrative about the curriculum. While these are essential elements of any program web page, they do not necessarily sell the program to potential students. Marketing-oriented features of a program page should include most, if not all, of the following:

❖ **A strong value proposition** (how will completing this program position the student for career and life success)
❖ **Program selling points** (distinctive features, benefits, and outcomes)
❖ **What the student will learn** (learning outcomes)
❖ **Who will the student study with in the program** (faculty bios that include their expertise, accomplishments, scholarly interests, and teaching philosophy)
❖ **Unique opportunities that exist associated with the program** (e.g., hands-on learning, faculty mentoring, clubs and organizations, field experiences, internships)
❖ **Student success beyond the classroom** (e.g., admission rates to graduate and professional schools, employment rates, types of careers available in the field, average salaries in related careers, job outlook in related industries, and students and alumni success stories)

All of these elements should be presented using as few words as possible. It is more effective to tell a program's story using visuals. For example, the pages might include video vignettes and action-oriented imagery that bring the programs to life. The use of infographs is another effective technique. A couple of institutions, namely Western Governors University and Concordia University Nebraska, have adopted a page from the Amazon playbook. They show student-generated star ratings (a scale of one to five stars) for each of their academic

programs. These ratings have immediate credibility with site visitors and shift control of a program's reputation from ranking guides and organizations to student consumers of the educational product.

Academic programs must be promoted through marketing channels other than the website. Everyone wants a program brochure. Unfortunately, these have minimal impact on student enrollment decisions unless they are included in the institution's broad distribution of marketing collateral. Similarly, social media posts have minimal impact unless a program or the institution has a significant number of active followers. Even sharing engaging program videos on popular channels such as YouTube, Instagram, and SnapChat can produce marginal results if the potential audience is not of sufficient size. Regardless of the promotional medium, the number of viewers/recipients is what matters most—followed closely by targeting the right audiences with the right messages. This is where your Marketing and Admissions teams can provide support and guidance. They are the experts regarding how best to reach prospective students.

Many faculty and academic leaders view marketing as an isolated activity designed to promote their programs. This kind of insular approach can actually be counterproductive. It may initially generate new student enrollments, but longer term, disconnected from an institution's overarching brand, the image of the school and its programs suffers. Remember that student enrollment decisions are based largely on what they perceive the value-added and totality of the experience will be. Consequently, it is imperative that program marketing be aligned with the institution's brand. Consistency of message, look, and feel matter in terms of penetrating the psyche of Millennial and Generation Z students and compelling them to act.

With that in mind, brand messaging for any college or university is simply a symbolic representation of how the institution seeks to position itself among competitors. Although a tagline may not be memorable as a standalone message, it provides a framework for corresponding **selling points and proof points**. When repeated consistently over time, these underlying tenets of the message begin to influence how prospective students and others view the school. In the broader context, selling points refer to program messages that align with and reinforce the institution's brand message. The associated proof points provide concrete evidence to validate the claims made through the selling points and thus, are essential to the credibility and believability of the brand and program messages.

Messaging is most effective when it resonates with the intended audience. Before designing program marketing materials, it is prudent to **understand the audience** you seek to attract. What are their demographic attributes? What is their geographic distribution? What is their academic profile? What are their learner needs and preferences? What will motivate them to consider your program of study? What barriers might they have to enrolling in your program? What marketing channels should be leveraged to best reach them? The answers to these questions and others can be used to create **prospective student personas** that will inform targeted messaging as well as marketing strategies. Using data and insights gleaned from your current and former students who have been successful in the program is the most strategic way to create prospective student personas. This approach ensures that marketing efforts are designed to attract students who will perform well academically, persist, and graduate, not just fill seats in a classroom.

Armed with personas, **message segmentation** is possible. The real power of any marketing initiative is in tailoring messages by target audience. So, for example, messaging may be slightly different for traditional-age students versus adult learners, in-state versus out-of-state students, high ability students versus those with average ability, or students seeking a face-to-face academic experience versus potential online learners. Precision messaging of this sort connects with prospective students in meaningful ways and thus, has a higher probability of influencing their decision to enroll.

Understandably, few academic programs, departments, or even divisions have the expertise or time to engage in marketing efforts with this level of sophistication. Outsourcing is an option, but more often, the primary responsibility for **program promotion is dependent upon ongoing collaboration between the program area and the Marketing Department**. In this scenario, program faculty are the content experts. They know their programs, their students, and their graduates better than anyone else. Nevertheless, they rely on the marketing expertise of trained professionals to harvest and convert faculty-generated content into marketing-oriented collateral. Marketing professionals are usually adept at creating persona profiles, developing tailored messages for different audience segments, and identifying the best marketing channels to reach these audiences. They also are tasked with implementation, tracking and measuring marketing strategy performance, and reporting results to program faculty and other stakeholders. Put simply, a faculty-driven model of program promotion or a marketing-directed model will be less effective than a collaborative approach.

Equally as important as messaging and the use of marketing channels is **relational marketing**. In the context of program promotion, relational marketing refers to relationship connections between faculty and prospective students along with institutional and program interactions with these students. The latter is principally about providing good customer service (e.g., timely responses to inquiries, returned phone calls, rapid turnaround of admissions decisions, presenting a welcoming environment for visitors). As described in the next chapter, *Chapter Seven*, the former refers to meaningful encounters between faculty and prospective students. Frequently, these encounters consist of conversations about a student's academic and career interests, program fit, program features and benefits, opportunities associated with the program, and program requirements. At some institutions, these encounters also include academic advising, an interpretation of placement tests, and the development of an educational plan. Though these approaches are outside the realm of traditional marketing, they are effective yield strategies.

With respect to Millennial and Generation Z prospective students, it is important that traditional and relational program marketing be authentic and learner-centered. By nature, they are skeptical of all marketing, especially if the messaging is contrived, generic, or too sales-oriented. A service-oriented approach that demonstrates you have the best interest of the student in mind is far more palatable to these individuals.

PART THREE

Student Recruitment, Retention, and Progression

Recruiting Millennial and Gen Z Students

Retaining Millennial and Gen Z Students

## Maximizing Progression Throughout the Student Lifecycle

INTRODUCTION

## Student Recruitment, Retention, and Progression

In a recent study, chancellors, presidents, and provosts identified enrollment declines as their biggest worry in 2017 and beyond (University Business, 2016, December). Their concerns are founded on the enrollment reality at many postsecondary institutions. In fact, for a growing number of institutions, a day of reckoning already has come, namely through closures and mergers.

The enrollment declines among specific populations of students cited in *Chapter Three* are compounded by a dwindling number of high school graduates projected in many states. These trends are already impacting all sectors of higher education. Data provided by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017, December) show that from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016, first-time traditional-age (age 18–24) student enrollment declined by 1.5% across all sectors and by 2.3% between Fall 2016 and Fall 2017. Enrollment of first-time nontraditional adults (over age 24) dropped by a much higher percentage. For this population, the decline across all sectors from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016 was 7.6%. From Fall 2016 to Fall 2017, the decline was a staggering 13.3%.

As conveyed in *Chapter Three*, freshman-to-sophomore year retention rates have not improved much over the last sixteen years, and even though graduation rates have varied significantly since 1983, lately they have trended toward the lower end of the range encompassing the last thirty-four years (ACT Institutional Data File, 2017). Given that freshman-to-sophomore year retention rates have remained fairly stable, downward trending graduation rates are likely attributable to progression after the start of the second year of college. *Figure 1* illustrates year-to-year success and progression of first-time, full-time degree-seeking students who began college in the fall of 2011. In *Figure 2*, the same information is presented for first-time, part-time degree-seeking students. Not surprisingly, the six-year outcomes are disproportionally negative for part-time students compared to their full-time enrolled peers. Part-time students are considerably less likely to be enrolled in college and to have graduated from their starting institution. Enrollment patterns matter.
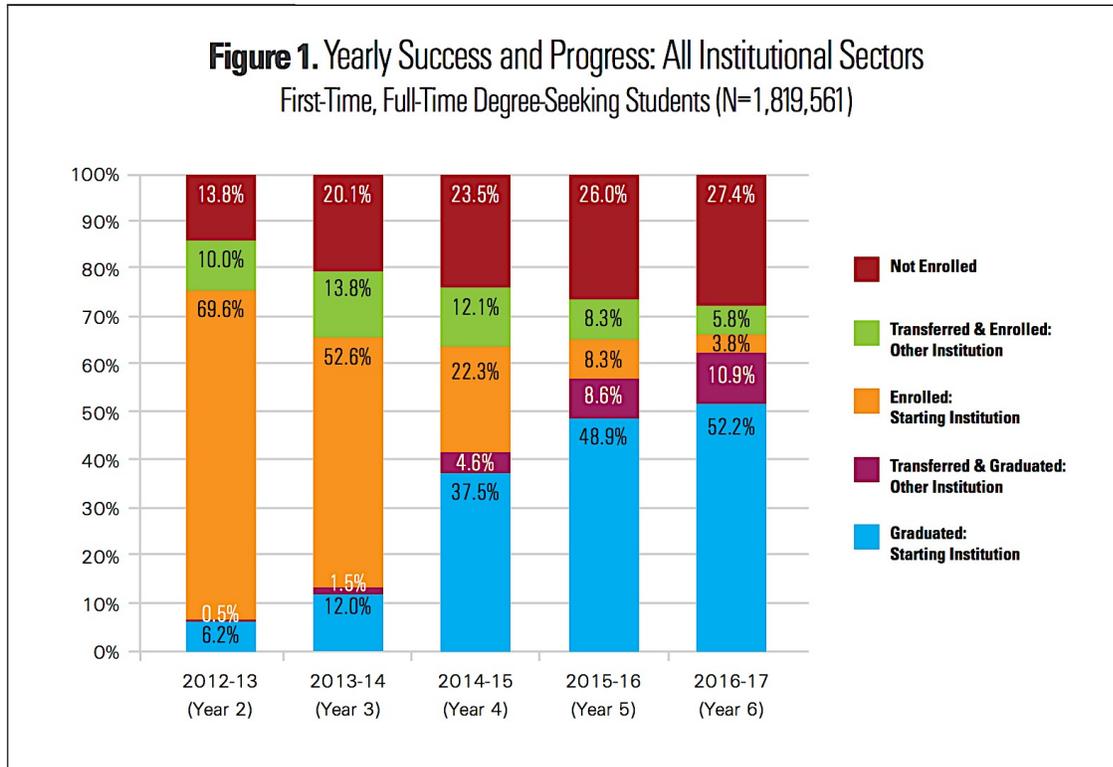
Figure 1. Yearly Success and Progress: All Institutional Sectors
First-Time, Full-Time Degree-Seeking Students (N=1,819,561)

Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018

Figure 2. Yearly Success and Progress: All Institutional Sectors
First-Time, Part-Time Degree-Seeking Students (N= 411,944)
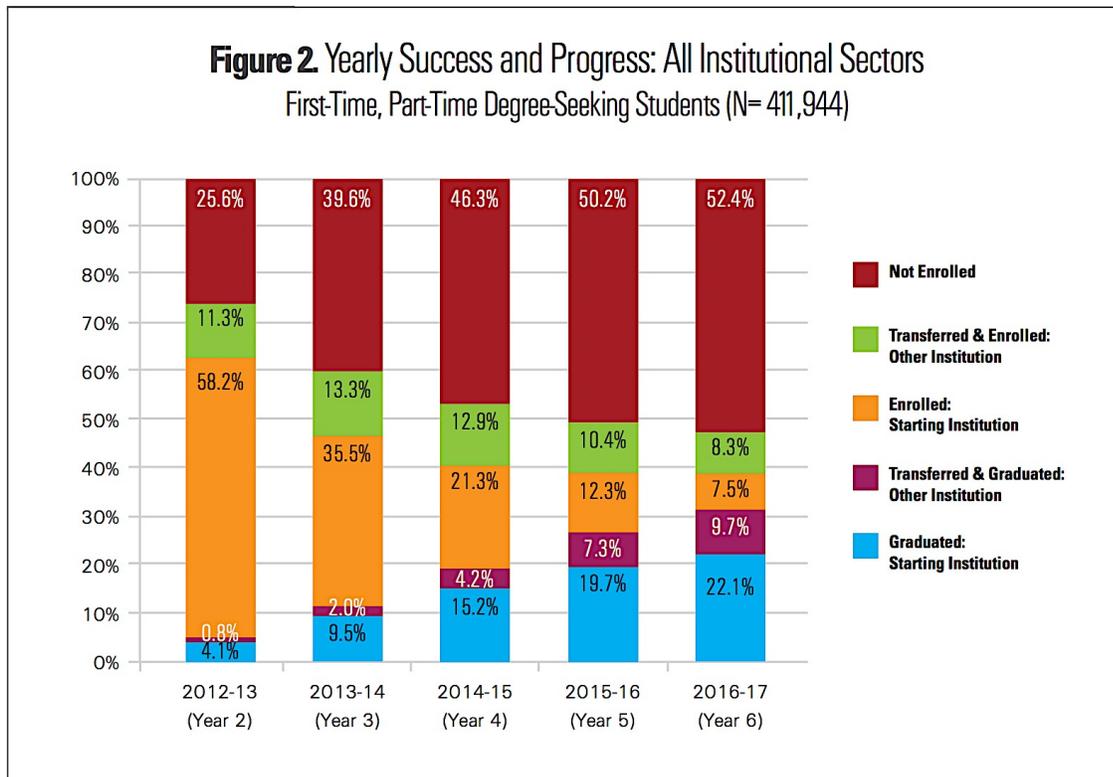
Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018

For many prospective and current students, your institution's most daunting competitors are workforce opportunities, life circumstances, and not seeing the value of a higher education credential. To improve recruitment, retention, and progression outcomes, it is imperative to continuously demonstrate the added value of earning a college credential—both short-term as well as over one's lifetime. There is an abundance of secondary research that supports this claim—running the gamut from lifetime earnings to engaged citizenship to enjoying happier, longer lives. More importantly, your institution possesses ample evidence to validate this claim (e.g., student and alumni success stories, employment rates, alumni salaries by discipline, employer feedback). These are the proof points that will convince an increasing number of students to choose your college or university initially and persist through to completion.

The chapters in *Part Three* are intended to disclose insights related to student recruitment, retention, and progression methods and strategies. Specifically, the focus here is on the alignment of methods and strategies with the needs and expectations of Millennial and Gen Z students.

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CHAPTER SEVEN
Recruiting Millennial and Gen Z Students

A theme throughout this book has been the impact of technology on students and the learning environment. Indeed, high-tech solutions are essential elements in the modern-day recruitment toolkit. Technology, however, must be blended with high-touch and high-show strategies to maximize recruitment opportunities.

In *Chapter Two*, the fact that Millennials and Gen Zers are technology savants was established. This means that today's students will not be impressed by your technology or surprised by your automated responses, customized communications, and online services. They expect these and more. For this reason, **high-tech solutions** need to be viewed as a means of engaging prospective students, collaborating with them, and ensuring their experience with your institution is seamless and intuitive. Technologies, such as college websites, virtual tours, and customized publications, also allow prospective students to experience your institution without actually being on campus. Internally, technological solutions often lead to improved organizational efficiency and performance. Having the right technologies, implemented in the right ways is vital to recruitment success.

High-touch strategies address a much more fundamental need—the human element. Millennial and Gen Z students crave human connections and not just through social media. Several years ago, my oldest daughter was considering colleges and narrowed her list down to two very different types of institutions, one small private college and a medium-size public university. The tipping point for her was when a faculty member reached out and invited her to have coffee. They met, and the journey to find the right school was over. This personal encounter made the difference. Interestingly, building personal relationships with prospective students has always been an effective strategy but perhaps, has never been more important than it is today.

High-show refers to how an institution looks and feels to a student. The grounds, the facilities, the people, and even the sense of campus culture collectively form the first impressions of your school. Having conducted focus groups with thousands of students through the years, I am still struck by the power of first impressions, whether they are created through a campus visit, a recruitment event, a phone call, or marketing materials.

Often, the students I interview cannot articulate discreet specifics about that first impression. They simply say, "It just felt right." They found their institutional fit.

Throughout this chapter, strategies related to each domain (**high-tech, high-touch, and high-show**) will be presented. Strategies include those that exist but also consider what may be possible in the future. With respect to the latter, the world of student recruitment is evolving rapidly and the most successful institutions will be those that anticipate and plan for what is next.

High-tech Solutions

Irrespective of the technology applied to student recruitment, there are implications associated with Millennial and Gen Z characteristics that should be considered. For instance, both populations have short attention spans. Therefore, marketing and communications must be concise and compelling—conveying a powerful message within eight seconds or less. Because today's students prefer visuals to reading, messaging should be primarily through photography, brief videos, graphics, infographs, and the like. In essence, visuals provide a form of "edutainment" that engages Millennial and Gen Z students.

Where content is required, it must be authentic. If these students feel like you are marketing to them, they will be less receptive to consuming the content and responding with the desired action (e.g., request information, schedule a campus visit, apply for admission). Instead, approach content from a service perspective, helping them evaluate college options, learn about your institution, or complete the enrollment process. It also is prudent to offer opportunities to collaborate with you and other influencers as a result of viewing your content. More broadly, create ways that prospective students can share their experiences with your school. An example of this is depicted in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1: Sample Prospective Student Sharing Strategy

In a recent session with a client, a dean asked me, "What is the best way to communicate with prospective students?" He was hoping for a single solution. Because today's students have access to far more marketing and communication channels than any prior generation, the inconvenient truth is that you will reach the masses only by using multiple platforms. Communicating across multiple platforms is particularly important as it relates to critical information such as open house invitations, application deadlines, and financial aid and scholarship messaging. Many campuses have implemented Client Relationship Management (CRM) systems to automate cross-platform communications. According to a study conducted by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers (2014), 59% of CRM users reported that their institutions have been "moderately successful" in implementing these systems. At issue for many in this study was the lack of a communications strategy and/or insufficient staffing capacity to optimize the CRM.

Even with optimal use of systems, we must recognize that these students are bombarded with marketing messages from higher education institutions as well as the private sector, so penetrating their psyche with your message requires more than just reaching them through various channels. Consistency and frequency of messaging are equally as important as reach. But, none of these matter if messaging fails to be relevant. Translation… the messaging must be focused on the prospective student, not the institution.

Over time, the effectiveness of each marketing and communication channel diminishes. Traditional advertising mediums, for example, are significantly less effective for Millennials and Gen Zers than they were for earlier generations. In large part, this is due to their limited use of traditional media along with their skepticism of information presented through these channels. Naturally, channel preferences vary by generation and change over time. For example, Facebook is still relatively effective with Millennials and older generations but less so with Gen Zers. As mentioned in *Chapter Two*, text messaging also can be useful in reaching all generations, but Gen Z has shifted more toward messaging apps. The experience of many institutions shows that text messaging should be used sparingly and should focus on reminders, invitations, and enrollment steps rather than marketing per se. Moreover, while prospective student preferences for mail and email are declining, they still add value to the marketing and communication mix. Irrespective of the digital channels leveraged, marketing and communications must be smartphone enabled, especially an institution's website.

Research conducted by SEM Works and others reveals that an institution's website is where most future students begin their college search. Accordingly, institutions should continually work to enhance their web presence by incorporating six fundamental elements: a compelling value proposition, key selling points, audience relevance, audience engagement, calls to action, and visual impact. A brief description of each follows.

❖ **Value Proposition.** As described in *Chapter Six*, a value proposition concisely conveys (through text and potentially visuals) what the institution promises to do for the students it serves, usually in terms of outcomes.

❖ **Selling Points.** Also highlighted in *Chapter Six*, selling points distinguish a college and its programs from competitors. They typically promote distinctive features, benefits, and outcomes associated with the institutional experience and the pursuit of a specific program of study.

❖ **Audience Relevance.** Audience relevance refers to addressing each primary student segment in a way that resonates with the population and compels them to act (e.g.,

request information, visit, apply, enroll). Audience pathways should go beyond admission requirements and the enrollment process to include audience-targeted success stories and exceptional outcomes, testimonials, factoids, relevant opportunities, and visual images representing the population (photography and video).

❖ **Audience Engagement.** Website visitors engage with relevant content, visuals, multimedia, and social media. More atypical examples include scholarship competitions, topical webinars, Facebook Live broadcasts, and URLs personalized and customized for an individual student based on the interests he or she has expressed.

❖ **Calls to Action.** Calls to action represent what an institution desires prospective students to do as a result of visiting the site. The three most critical calls to action are request information, visit the campus, and apply. These three should be present on virtually every page throughout a website, thus, prompting immediate action.

❖ **Visual Impact.** A simple, elegant design with ample "white space" and visual navigational cues are desirable. Photographs should be high resolution, engaging, and allow the site visitors to visualize themselves at your institution. Videos should be brief (three minutes or less) and convey a compelling story about the school or bring an academic program to life.

The best website in the world is rendered less effective if there is an insufficient number of site visitors. Placing concise, memorable URLs on publications and other marketing collateral and website links in all electronic communications is a practical first step in promoting website traffic. Beyond these actions, colleges and universities should actively pursue four other ways to generate website visitors:

1. Invest a small budget in **Google AdWords** using phrases like affordable college education, flexible college education, and career-focused college education.
2. Create **digital ads** for free or low cost placement on feeder high school and community college websites as well as sites frequented by adults in the region.
3. Create digital ads for **social media targeting** (e.g., using Facebook set geographic parameters by county, zip code, or radius; then narrow the parameters by including filters like age, high school attending, apps they use, include parents). Note that similar targeting features exist with other social media channels such as Twitter and Instagram.
4. **Search Engine Optimization** (SEO) is the organic way to grow site visitors. This requires routine attention to the site—ensuring key search words are in place, publishing student projects and faculty papers, back linking with related organizations, just to name a few. The goal is to have your institution on page one of search tools like Google.

Getting prospective students to the website is only part of the challenge. Keeping them engaged with the site once they visit is equally important. To improve site visitor engagement, analyze web page traffic stats to address bottlenecks/roadblocks, information/navigation usability issues, time on the site, and responses to calls to action. This rich data can be used to enhance the site and influence audience engagement.

The aforementioned strategies may sound logical but are often difficult to implement. Most college and university websites are massive—limiting an institution's ability to create and sustain a marketing-oriented web presence. Consider leveraging website analytics to identify the finite number of pages most frequently visited by the outside world. By investing limited organizational capacity on these web pages, you will ensure that the pages most likely to influence college choice appropriately promote your school.

Social media is believed to be another effective way to recruit students. However, SEM Works' research, as well as studies conducted by others, does not validate this belief. In fact, the research shows that while social media is wildly popular among today's college bound students, it is not how they prefer to communicate with colleges and universities. It is noteworthy that their preference to engage with higher education institutions becomes more positive once they have been admitted. Two theories that may explain this phenomenon may be that (1) social media is viewed as their personal space and outsiders are not welcome, and (2) colleges and universities have not adopted effective strategies for leveraging social media. Regarding the latter, most institutions post stories, information, invitations to recruitment events, photos, and videos. Though these are acceptable practices, they often exclude conversations with prospective students. In this medium, conversation is king. Conversation strategies need to focus on engaging prospective students with current students, faculty, staff, and possibly alumni in a meaningful dialogue. A growing number of schools have created a student social media team exactly for this purpose.

To this point, this chapter has focused exclusively on marketing and communications strategies using technology. However, there are many more technologies available to support student recruitment. Most institutions, for example, are rich with student data. Whether these data are housed in standalone systems, integrated systems, a data warehouse, or elsewhere, they represent insights that can transform a recruitment operation from tactical to strategic. First, however, the right research questions need to be identified, and then the corresponding data must be collected, analyzed, and acted upon. Though some

institutions struggle with harvesting data from their various systems, the more pervasive issues relate to analyzing the implications of said data and having stakeholders possessing the will to act on findings. Institutional researchers, enrollment analysts, and data scientists have the skillset required to conduct the analysis, but often, the organizational bandwidth and/or the existence of positions dedicated to student enrollment analysis are lacking. Without the capacity for analysis, recruitment initiatives are informed by the way it has always been done, what others are doing, or gut instincts. None of these alternatives shift the recruitment enterprise from an art to a science.

There are many institutions that use predictive modeling (the practice of using historical data to predict future outcomes) to ascertain which prospects are most likely to enroll. Some also use predictive analytics to guide scholarship-awarding practices. Like the analysis of student data referenced above, these tools are useful only if they inform strategies. To illustrate, users of predictive modeling techniques sometimes do not adjust strategies around who receives their most expensive print publications or their most time-consuming contacts. Predictive analytics have been proven to show that not all prospects are equal in terms of their probability of future enrollment. Time and other resources should be primarily dedicated to those who can be influenced to enroll.

Predictive analytics have existed for some time, but the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to improve the scale, speed, and applications of predictive algorithms is relatively new to the higher education sector. Essentially, AI is a type of machine learning focused on creating systems that automate "intelligent" processes—enabling computers to do things without human intervention (Magnetic, 2017, September). A few institutions have begun using AI for admissions and recruitment purposes. In the domain of student recruitment, AI is already being used by several marketing automation and CRM systems to automate and tailor communications to prospective students. While a growing number of admissions offices have turned to Big Data to gain competitive advantage and surgically target students who are likely to be interested in their institution, at least one has combined Big Data with AI. Saint Louis University partnered with The College Board and ACT to link AI with the 120 points of data produced from the questionnaire students complete when registering for the SAT or ACT to more effectively target the University's purchase of student lists from these companies (Selingo, J., 2017, April).

Even some for-profit companies have developed AI solutions for colleges and universities. One example is a company that uses AI to monitor website behavior. They claim that real-

time website behavior is a more accurate predictor of future student enrollment than traditional predictive algorithms that use historical data. Furthermore, they believe that website behavior is a better method of identifying potential students than traditional list purchases.

Forecasting the future is a risky endeavor. So, I start here with the things that are fairly certain. First, the use of AI and Big Data will expand. Institutions that do not have the interest or capacity to pursue these technological opportunities for recruitment purposes will fall farther behind their competitors. Second, the adoption of chatbots to assist students through the admissions and financial aid processes and answer other questions about institutions will become prevalent. There already are a number of institutions using this technology (Cortez, M. 2018, March). Third, CRM systems will evolve using AI enhancing the customization of recruitment communications. Fourth, an increasing number of prospective students will select an institution using technology-based options rather than face-to-face interactions with admissions personnel. Fifth, social media and the Internet of Things, where devices share data with one another, will present admissions officers with student information far beyond what they have access to today. This will lead to recruitment opportunities as well as ethical dilemmas.

Less obvious predictions about the future of student recruitment include the possibilities of admissions packets delivered by drones, admissions recruiters and faculty visiting a student's home via hologram, virtual assistants that guide students through the enrollment process, and blockchain technology may yield ways to track students beyond anything imagined to date, just to name a few. The potential for technology innovations is virtually unlimited. The real question is how colleges and universities will choose to use emerging technologies. One can posit that the competitive environment will drive these decisions.

High-touch Solutions

First as practitioner and later as a higher education consultant, I have been involved in recruiting students for more than thirty-three years. Student recruitment practices have undergone a sea change during this time, but the one thing that has not varied is the importance and impact of personal connections with prospective students. Authentic relationships still influence school choice, particularly among Gen Z students, who long for human interaction.

As with any relationship, trust is fundamental to a meaningful rapport with a prospective student. Trust relationships, in a higher education context, are built on an expressed concern for the student's best interest, not in selling one's school or academic program. The attributes of an effective institutional trust agent include:

❖ Active listening skills
❖ Ability to treat students as individuals
❖ Capacity to display empathy for the student
❖ A knowledge-base that fosters the provision of accurate information
❖ Demonstrated institutional, program, and service competencies as a trusted subject matter authority
❖ Commitment to delivering on promises
❖ A passion for adding value to the student experience

Don Hossler (Hossler, D. & Hoezee, L., 2001) and many of his coauthors have adopted the metaphor of a courtship to describe the relationship between higher education institutions and future students. Using this metaphor, consider how prospective students progress from minimal or no awareness of an institution and its programs to a commitment to enroll. The relationship begins with cordial encounters, then dating, and eventually a marriage of sorts. For the most part, this relationship is not developed through marketing collateral or recruitment communications. Rather, it involves the nature of personal interactions.

While personal encounters with admissions staff are important, research reveals that these relationships are less valued by prospective students on the front end of the recruitment process and more valued from the point of admission forward. At the post-admission stage of the pre-enrollment lifecycle, future students need a guide through the maze of institutional bureaucracies, particularly those associated with financial aid and the steps to enrolling. In their role as institutional navigators, admissions staff provide a highly valued service.

Earlier in the recruitment process as well as throughout the pre-enrollment lifecycle, others can provide a more valued relationship connection. The right connections with faculty, current students, alumni, and academic advisors often engage prospective students in relationships that have a powerful influence over their college choice. With that said, few institutions fully leverage these influencers. For example, SEM Works' research shows that while faculty contacts are important they rarely happen prior to enrollment. Likewise, the first contact with an academic advisor may not occur until orientation or even after the

student enrolls. Student ambassador programs are pervasive but often are not maximized for relationship building purposes, other than giving campus tours. In places where alumni volunteer programs exist, the programs frequently are not carefully managed (e.g., ongoing training, information sharing, strategic use of volunteer time, volunteer recognition, feedback loops).

To illustrate the effective use of these influencers, a few examples are depicted in *Figure 2*. As with any strategy, attention to the quality of implementation will determine the results.

Figure 2: Sample Influencer Strategies
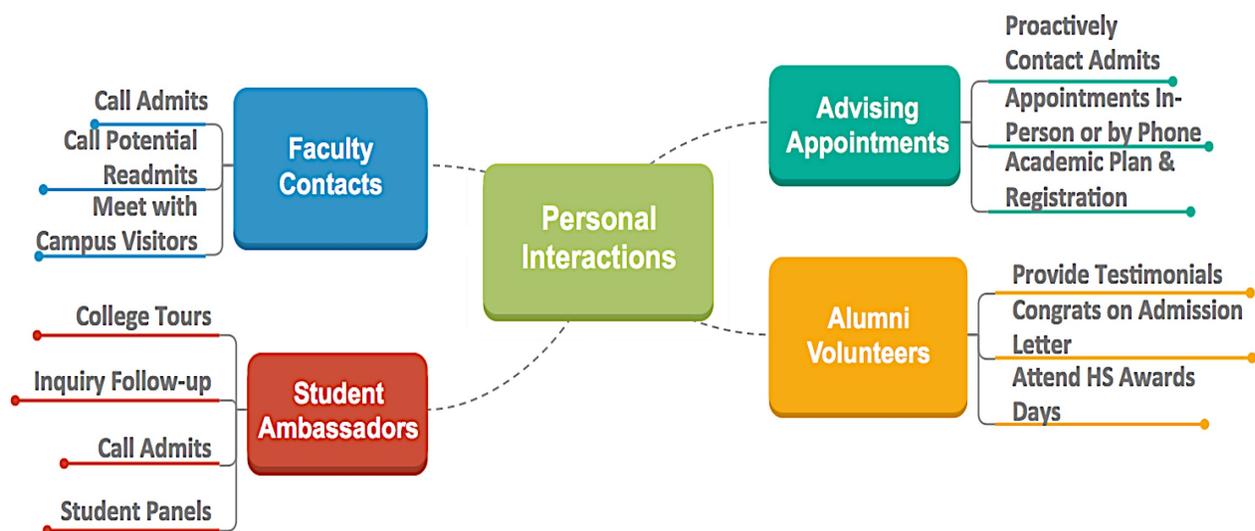
High-touch solutions are not revolutionary in terms of in-person meetings. However, colleges and universities have leveraged emerging technologies, such as text messaging, phone calls, social media, and CRM systems, to augment face-to-face personal interactions. Some schools also have used tools like FaceTime, Skype, web chat, and video conferencing to engage prospective students. So, it is not a far reach to imagine that admissions and marketing may soon reach out to future students via virtual reality tools, online gaming systems, and even AI bots.

High-show Solutions

As previously suggested, first impressions have a significant impact on college selection. Though first impressions often occur through an institution's website or the receipt of marketing materials, the campus visit is where first impressions matter most. For this reason,

it is imperative to engineer the campus visit experience from the ground floor up, with a focus on engendering an emotional connection with your school.

Another one of my daughters was set on the university she wanted to attend. She had followed their basketball program for years and was an avid fan. She wore their school colors, followed them on social media, and even shared her university plans with friends. However, that all changed when we visited the campus. The student tour guide was aloof and did not convey a passion for the school. Within fifteen minutes of the campus tour, my daughter looked at me and said, "Dad let's go." Needless to say, she did not attend that university. It is enlightening to view the college selection process from a parental perspective.

The context in which I first became aware of the notion of high-show experiences was Disney. In their amusement parks, they strive to ensure that guests have a high-show experience by engaging many of their senses positively—what they see, hear, taste, smell, and touch. Ultimately, Disney seeks to create a memorable experience that guests will share with others and desire to repeat throughout their lifetime. Campus visit experiences should be designed in a similar fashion.

Engineering a campus visit begins with promoting the visit through an institution's website, marketing materials, advertisements, and prospective student communications with a compelling call to action and where possible, a preview of the visit experience via a virtual tour. Driving traffic to the campus visit must be a strategic priority.

Next, the pre-arrival experience should be engineered with multiple reservation options (e.g., online forms, phone-in reservations, mailed invitation response forms). Once a reservation is received, the school should have a rapid acknowledgement response that includes a visit confirmation, directions to campus, links to area hotels, recommended questions to ask or a checklist of things to evaluate on the visit, a visit agenda, and ideally, a tour guide profile and the opportunity to engage with the tour guide pre-visit. *Figure 3* shows how one university provides the latter.

Figure 3: Sample Tour Guide Profile

Upon arrival, there should be clear signage to the starting point for campus visitors along with welcome signage or banners. Reserved parking should be provided for visitors—preferably with their name on an assigned parking spot. There should be a clearly marked pathway from parking to the visit launch point.

The location and environment also are important. To increase ease of access, the visit should be located near the front of campus or in a spot where traffic logically flows. Think of the proper environment as a place that is akin to inviting a guest into the living room of the college or university. It should be aesthetically pleasing with warm, non-institutional paint on the walls, no desks or counters separating staff from visitors, plants, and visuals on the walls such as school photos that tell a story or student testimonials and graduate outcomes. The use of school swag also can engender excitement. Many schools have a marquee board or LED screen that identifies visitors by name—making them feel welcomed. One of our clients has a wall that guests sign, which gives them a sense of ownership and pride.

All of the aforementioned stimulate the visual senses. Consider soft background music to engage auditory senses and refreshments to arouse the senses of taste and smell. The latter

is particularly effective if refreshments reflect the institution (e.g., Ohio State's buckeye, York College's Peppermint Patty). The sense of touch also can be engaged through interactive screens such as a campus map or social media feed.

The campus visit experience should commence with a warm and personal welcome from a staff member and a conversation to uncover the specific interests and needs of the prospective student. Often, this is followed by a video or multimedia presentation designed to provide an overview of the institution and set the stage for the campus tour. All such presentations should be content light and visual heavy. From this point forward, the entire visit should be customized to each prospective student. What majors and extracurricular activities are they interested in pursuing? What are the attributes of the best-fit school for them? What do they want to learn from the campus visit? Are they planning to apply for financial aid or scholarships? What has motivated them to consider your school?

As much as possible, it is desirable to have visitors experience your institution through hands-on activities such as attending a class, participating in a class project, taking photos or video of the campus tour, or shadowing a student ambassador. Actually experiencing some aspect of the college in this way is aligned with this generation's desire to collaborate and feel a part of something.

To create a truly memorable experience, you must find ways to WOW them—possibly by creating a positive surprise or signature moment. A few exemplars of such a WOW factor include:

❖ A yellow bag given to visitors at Fort Lewis College. The bag signifies that the person is a campus visitor, and everyone on campus has been trained to stop what they are doing and welcome the person.

❖ Slippery Rock University has four rocks on the campus tour. Each rock represents an opportunity for the tour guide to share personal and institutional stories about a year in the life at the institution (freshman through senior years).

❖ High Point University has valet parking at open houses, designated picture spots for campus visitors, and an ice cream trunk that comes through campus twice a day.

❖ Winthrop University hosts engaging mini classes during open house; for example, how to throw a clay pot.

❖ North Greenville University's president reserves time in his schedule to meet individually with campus visitors.

Reflecting on my personal story visiting a campus with my daughter, the tour guide is critical to shaping a positive visit experience. I am a staunch advocate for having students give tours rather than staff. However, they must be carefully selected, trained, and evaluated. Specifically, they must have active listening skills, effective communication skills, storytelling capabilities, adequate institutional knowledge, time management skills, and capacity to manage group dynamics. They also must be aware of how they represent their school by their attitude, attire, professional presence, and on-time arrival for the tour. Few students possess all of these attributes on day one; hence, the reason ongoing training and professional development are required. A beginning of year retreat and tour shadowing are woefully insufficient. They must have the ability and tools necessary to convey the personality of your institution.

Your institution has a lot riding on the tour experience. Many private universities, for example, often use the term "Money Walk" to describe the tour route. For these institutions, the tour is when a multi-thousand dollar decision is being made. Consequently, the tour route is given priority for clean up at the beginning of every day, as well as investments in signage, landscaping, and facilities renovations.

Following the campus visit, best practices suggest that there should be follow-up to close the deal. This could include a personal note from the tour guide, a call or email from a faculty member met during the visit, or an alumni contact. Regardless of the follow-up method, there should always be an opportunity for the prospective student to evaluate the visit. Assessing satisfaction with the visit is important but even more valuable is assessing the impact of the visit. How did the visit experience move the decision needle?

First impressions on the campus visit should never be left to chance. Engineering a visit experience involves systematically managing "moments of truth" with your institution. Carlzon (1987) coined the phrase "moments of truth" in his book by the same name. The application of this phrase to higher education simply means that your school has thousands of "moments of truth" with those you serve every day—including during the campus visit. Each of these "moments of truth" is a measure of how well you are delivering on the promise of your brand. With each encounter, trust in the brand is either enhanced or eroded. Failure to carefully manage these "moments of truth" renders a brand and its inherent promise worthless—often with severely negative consequences to the image of the institution.

Some campuses have experimented with self-guided tour mobile apps, including those that use GPS. A few have deployed virtual reality mobile apps, so that students can experience a tour from anywhere. Although I am not aware of any schools that have deployed this, technology exists for a robot to give a campus tour. But, approaches like these eliminate the human element—the opportunity to connect with a tour guide and others while visiting a campus. Technology is not always the best solution.

In order to maximize recruitment opportunities with Generation and Millennial students, colleges and universities must deploy high-tech solutions that engage these individuals in a customized, intuitive manner. Schools must emphasize high-touch personal relationships with both generations—understanding that these connections are important to Millennials but are vital for Gen Zers. And finally, the high-show strategies are essential. Millennials are searching for "cool" products and services, while Gen Zers seek "cool" experiences. To be successful, colleges and universities must recognize and organize to respond to such generational differences.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Retaining Millennial and Gen Z Students

Students from all generations often struggle to overcome academic deficits, financial difficulties, social and institutional adjustments, psychical or psychological issues, and other personal challenges. With that said, Millennial and Gen Z students possess barriers to student success and persistence that are somewhat unique, or at least, more acute among their respective generations. For example, Generation Z students often struggle to:

❖ Find their identity in a new environment
❖ Determine the institutional fit with their personality, values, and goals
❖ Overcome loneliness and a feeling of isolation
❖ Deal with food insecurities, housing insecurities, and homelessness
❖ Reduce their dependency on social media and their parents
❖ Cope with emotional and social issues
❖ Multitask with balance
❖ Decode and relate to professors
❖ Recognize the value of liberal arts classes
❖ Learn in a structured environment

Millennials have some of these same challenges. These students are older than Gen Zers and therefore, are more likely to have competing family and work obligations. This also means that they are more likely to enroll part-time and stop out. In general, **part-time students** are retained, persist, and complete at significantly lower rates than their full-time counterparts. Building on the figures presented in the introduction to *Part Three, Figure 1* shows the first-year retention and persistence rates of part-time and full-time students nationwide across all higher education sectors. In *Figure 2*, six-year completion rates for the Fall 2011 entering cohort at four-year and two-year institutions are presented. Note that students who participated in "mixed enrollment" (some part-time and some full-time) fared better than those who were enrolled "exclusively part-time."

Figure 1: First-Year Persistence and Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity
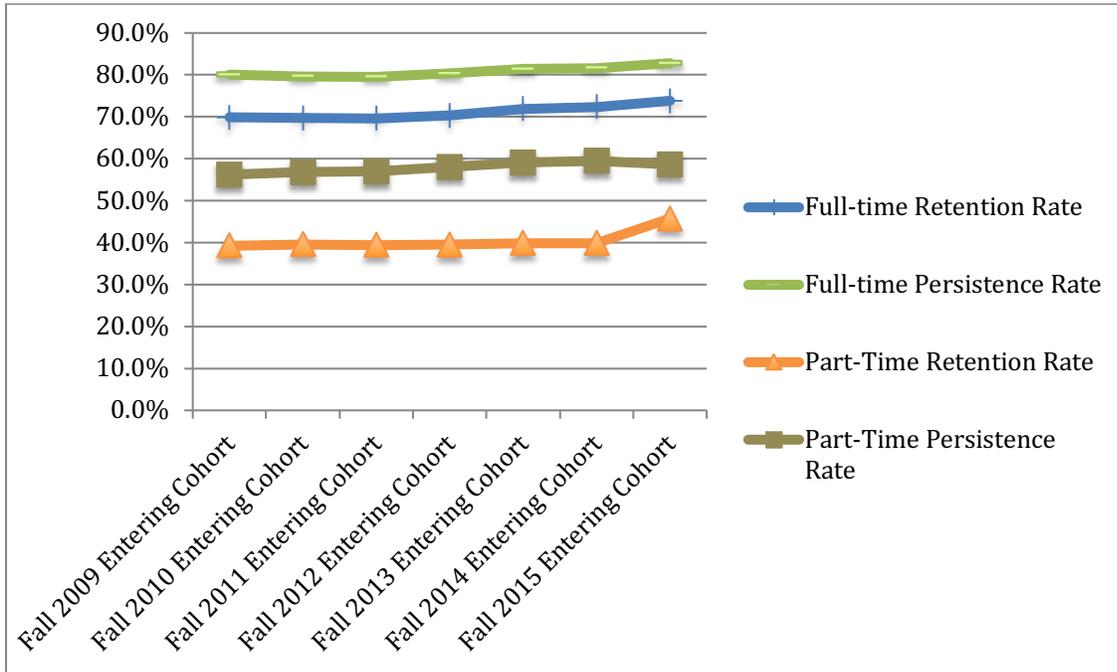
*Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017, June*

Figure 2: Six-Year Completion Rates by Enrollment Intensity
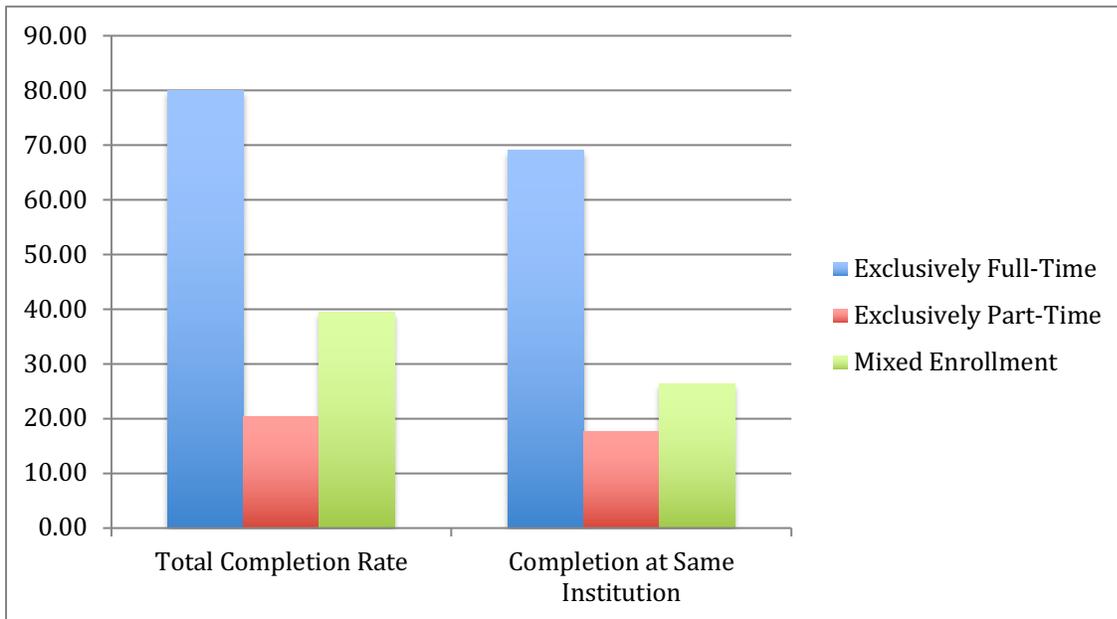
Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017, December

Interestingly, **age** also is factor that impacts **retention, persistence, and completion** likely due to family and work obligations, as previously stated. However, the age issue is not generational in nature. Gen Zers in their early twenties have only slightly higher first-year retention and persistence rates than Millennials over the age of twenty-four and complete at a lower rate. Generation Z students age twenty and younger have the highest rates on all three indicators. *Figure 3* depicts the first-year retention and persistence rates of students by age range across all higher education sectors. Six-year completion rates for the Fall 2011 entering cohort at four-year and two-year institutions are represented in *Figure 4*.

Figure 3: First-Year Persistence and Retention Rates by Age at College Entry
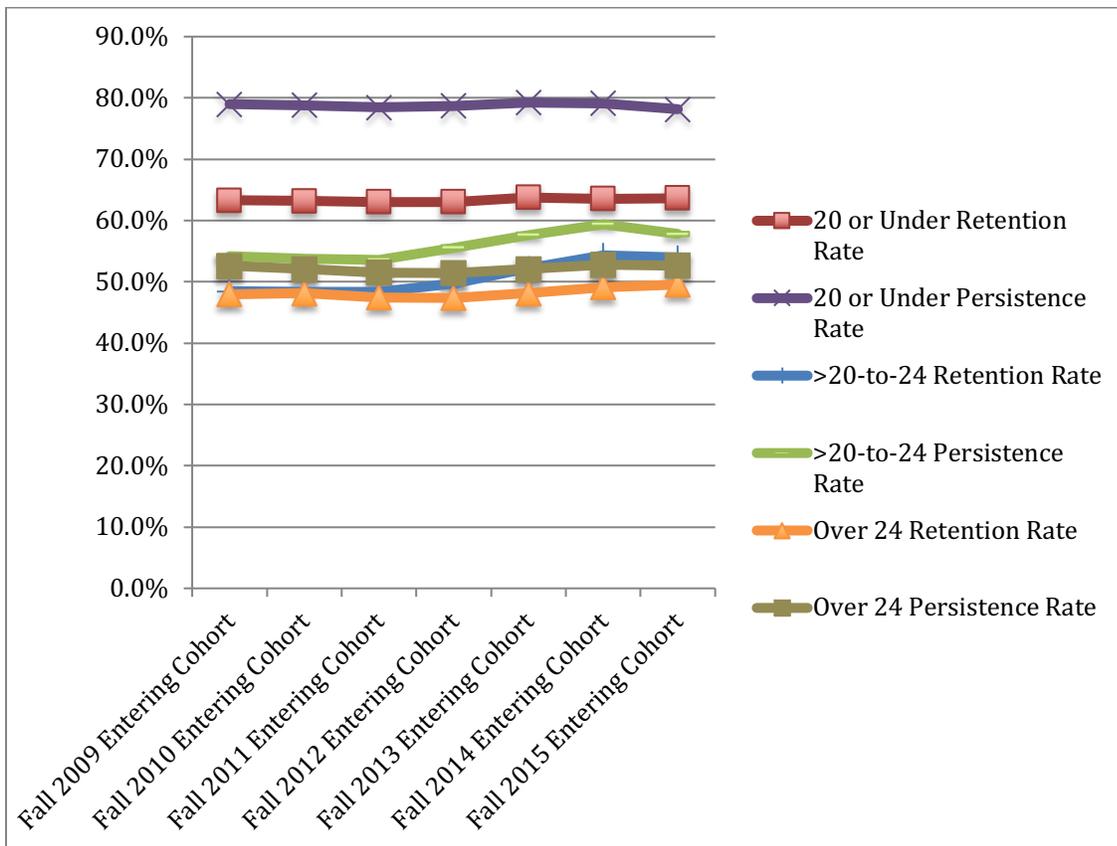
*Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017, June*

Figure 4: Six-Year Completion Rates by Age at College Entry
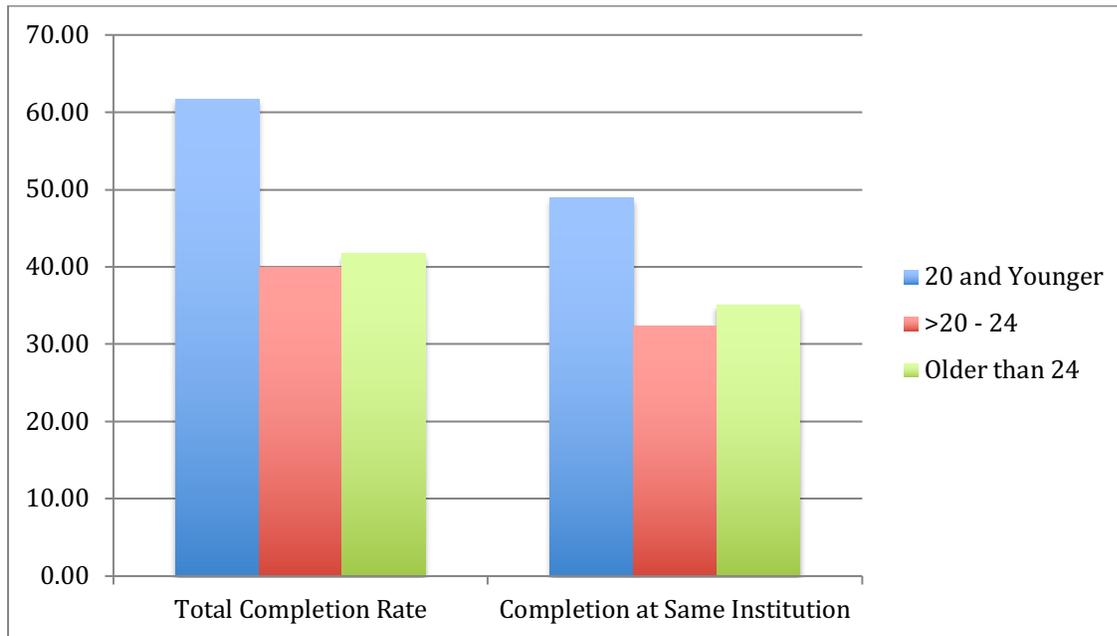
Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017, December

Though race and ethnicity as well as characteristics like socio-economic status and being a first-generation college student also distinguish groups with respect to these outcome indicators, such factors are not easily disaggregated by generation. Consequently, they are not presented here.

Other risk factors for Millennials that are cited in the literature include unrealistic goals, goal clarity, self-confidence, low levels of self-esteem, lack of motivation related to academic performance, rising student debt burden, and an overwhelming need to stay connected via technology (Horton, J. 2015, June; Wang. J. & Boone, P., 2014; Oblinger D. & Oblinger, J. L., 2005). Obviously, Millennials are a complex generation, and the stereotypes mentioned here, as well those for Gen Zers, do not account for individual differences. What they do suggest, however, are general themes and risk factors that fit a large portion of these student populations. Accordingly, colleges and universities should organize strategies that address these potential impediments to student success and persistence.

Both generational groups exhibit struggles with food security, housing security, and homelessness. According to a study published by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 36% of university students and 42% of community college students are food insecure; 36% of university students and 46% of community college students are housing insecure; and 9% of university

students and 12% of community college students are homeless (Goldrick-Rab, S., Richardson, J., Schneider, J., Hernandez, A., & Cady, C., 2018, April). Some of the ways these issues manifest themselves include: students who cannot afford to eat balanced meals or do not have enough money to buy food; attend class hungry; unable to pay the full amount for utilities; moved in with other people due to financial problems; thrown out of their home; and sleep in cars, abandon buildings, or other places not meant for housing. Other than community college students being disproportionally affected by insecurities associated with these basic needs, the study shows that females, blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics, Pell Grant recipients, U.S. citizens or permanent residents, students whose parents' educational attainment level is less than a bachelor's degree, students who are enrolled part-time, students who are age twenty-one and older, students with children, students who are divorced or widowed, students who live off-campus and/or do not have a college meal plan, and students who are working twenty or fewer hours per week are more likely than their peers to face these insecurities. Needless to say, students facing these life circumstances struggle to stay in school.

Given the complex nature of Millennial and Gen Z students, there is seldom a single strategy or intervention that will result in long-term positive change for these individuals. Therefore, effective retention strategies must be **holistic, protracted, and customized** around the diagnosed risk factors of an individual student. In most cases, such retention efforts are human resource–intensive and thus, require institutional investments far beyond what exists on many college and university campuses today. The underpinnings for retention strategies that actually work are described throughout the remainder of this chapter.

A Holistic Approach to Student Retention

In the context of student retention, the term "holistic" has many meanings. The **first** relates to the complex nature of students and their risk factors. For instance, interpreting a student's low grades as a sign that academic ability is the core issue could be misguided and result in a referral to tutoring without other accompanying interventions. In fact, poor academic performance is a visible symptom, but the root cause may or may not be the individual's academic ability. Often, academic performance, class attendance, class participation, social engagement, and other symptoms represent and sometimes mask much deeper issues such as time management problems, drug or alcohol abuse, relationship or family issues, financial difficulties, as well as a host of other impediments to success. The point here is that, without the correct diagnosis, the wrong remedies recommended to students will have only marginal impact.

For this reason, student warning signs should be assessed holistically—considering the whole person. Student development theory provides the conceptual framework for holistic assessments of risk. Scholars like Arthur Chickering, Alexander Astin, and Vincent Tinto have researched and written about this methodology extensively. Moreover, virtually every higher education administration and student personnel services graduate program has taught these theories to future practitioners in the academy for decades. So, this is not new. The necessary background and expertise exist on most campuses, but such assessments take time, and time is at a premium. Lean staffing in critical areas with ever-increasing work demands make such efforts extremely challenging. Colleges, universities, and their students would benefit greatly from ensuring sufficient organizational bandwidth is in place to diagnose student issues holistically.

The aforementioned is associated with the **second** definition for the term "holistic"— coordination across organizational boundaries. As a consultant, with the possible exception of efforts to address basic needs such as food and housing, I have rarely visited a school and found that they did not have an adequate array of student supports and retention strategies. However, units responsible for implementation often perform related tasks within balkanized organizational silos. They do not work collaboratively on the diagnosis of student risk factors, which are frequently multi-dimensional and thus, can seldom be fully addressed by a single department or person. Whether leveraging a retention management system, institutional data and research, or a simple referral mechanism, collaboration among a cross-organizational team of retention advocates is required to develop a holistic solution to prevent student failure and attrition.

Together, retention advocates should develop protocols for risk diagnosis, a bundle of supports and interventions for a single student, and a customized student success plan that integrates campus-wide solutions seamlessly. But, this is just the first phase of the journey. A more protracted follow-up process is addressed later in this chapter.

The **third** translation of "holistic" refers to the student lifecycle. While there exists an abundance of national data on first-year retention and completion, minimal trend data are available for the second, third, and fourth year of the student progression through institutions. In point of fact, most colleges and universities lose at least half of the students, who do not eventually graduate, after the second year commences. Schools should definitely focus on first-year retention but not with less intensity in subsequent years of enrollment.

Indeed, many of the attrition causation factors are different after the first year, yet student issues emerging in the second year and beyond can lead to equally devastating consequences for students and the institutions.

Finally, the term "holistic" also references three stages of student retention: prevention, intervention, and recovery. Although not specific to student retention, a fourth recommended stage relates to the transition of students out of the institution into a career or an advanced degree. *Figure 4* presents these stages along with types of supports and indicators that some of the strategies that emerge in the cells of this matrix should be for the general student population while others should be targeted to a particular student group or an individual. Regarding the latter, the matrix provides a useful framework for bundling supports for a single student throughout the various student retention stages. Each stage is described in more detail following *Figure 4*.

Figure 4: Student Retention Matrix by Stage

Type of Support	Levels of Intervention	Prevention (Pre-Enrollment Stage)	Intervention (Enrollment Stage)	Recovery (Enrollment Stage)	Success Transitions
Academic	Targeted				
	General				
Social	Targeted				
	General				
Well-being	Targeted				
	General				
Adjustment	Targeted				
	General				
Financial	Targeted				
	General				

The **prevention** stage refers to ensuring the opportunities and conditions are in place for students to avoid risks associated with their success. By nature, many prevention strategies are front-loaded in the student experience, when they are the most vulnerable. This is the area where there is the highest probability of improving student success and retention.

Examples of potential prevention strategies include: assessment, goal setting, connection of goals with academic requirements, goal-based milestones, pre-enrollment advising, the development of an academic plan, orientation, extended orientation, career exploration, career planning, career coaching, success communications, a student success plan, mentoring, and wraparound supports like a first-year seminar. To further illustrate, one of our clients has engaged faculty, who are teaching first-year courses, by getting them to commit to three prevention-type strategies: (1) learn and use the name of every student within the first week of class, (2) take attendance, and (3) provide some form of academic feedback within the first three weeks of class. Simple but it has proven effective. Regarding issues related to food and housing insecurities and homelessness, some campuses have created food pantries with the support of organizations like the College and University Bank Alliance and Challah for Hunger; facilitate student exploration of public assistance options, many in partnership with the national nonprofit Single Stop; award scholarships that include living expenses; identify host homes for homeless students along with partnerships with local agencies like the Housing Authority (Goldrick-Rab, S., Richardson, J., Schneider, J., Hernandez, A., & Cady, C., 2018, April).

In the **intervention** stage, an intervention occurs when there are early signs of students at-risk. Early alerts are managed through a retention management system, faculty and staff referrals, or direct faculty/student or staff/student engagement. Such interventions are most effective if done early enough to impact a student's behavior, performance, or situation. By far, this stage is when most retention strategies and supports are deployed. Some common initiatives during the intervention stage consist of: early risk identification, directly addressing barriers to continued enrollment, a student success plan, tutoring, financial aid support, personal counseling, and wraparound supports such as advising and mentoring.

Recovery strategies are designed to help students get back on track once they have been impacted by a policy such as Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) or academic probation. These strategies also can be adopted to assist students who voluntarily stopped out and desire to return. Recovery efforts are designed to help students overcome obstacles to success and to ensure they are on a clear path to completion. Like the other stages, customized success plans that include the appropriate mix of academic, personal, and financial supports along with student goals and related milestones are prudent. Two specific examples follow.

❖ Develop a SAP campaign to encourage students to file a SAP appeal. Campaigns should occur at various stages of the student lifecycle (e.g., orientation, student success

workshops, first-year seminars, advising appointments). Most students who file an appeal are approved and continue their enrollment, but too few pursue an appeal.

❖ Require students on probation to participate in an eight-week program designed to diagnose risk factors. The institution customizes a recovery success plan and mentors students in the early stages of plan implementation—holding them accountable for assigned tasks and the achievement of related milestones.

In terms of the future of holistic retention approaches, expect to see expanding use of Big Data, intelligence (AI), and The Internet of Things (devices communicating with each other) to track students, identify risks, and perform interventions. Big Data are already being used across multiple institutions to identify risk factors and automatically push recommended solutions to students as well as to their faculty, advisors, and retention support specialists. In some cases, Big Data are integrated with retention management systems for improved coordination of efforts and CRM systems to send relevant communications to students.

Broad scale applications of AI are less prevalent but are predicted to emerge rapidly. For example, a few institutions are using AI tools like the Cognii Virtual Learning Assistant and IBM's Watson described in *Chapter Two*. Other schools are leveraging AI-powered systems like Amazon's Alexa. Georgia Tech, Northeastern University, and Arizona State University conducted a pilot of the Echo Dot (Amazon's virtual assistant, Alexa) by providing the device to select students during the 2017–18 academic year. This fall, Saint Louis University has placed the same device in some 2,300 residence hall rooms with pre-installed skills to answer more than 100 questions about the University (Williams, R., 2018, August).

We live in exponential times. Consider, for example, Google's recent release of the "Medical Brain." Google has developed an algorithm that uses hundreds of thousands of data points to predict how long a person's hospital stay will be, the probability of returning to the hospital in the near-term, and when the person will die (Bergen, M., 2018, June). Imagine the predictive power of algorithms that can apply thousands of institutional and individual data points to determine the probability of college and course success. That would revolutionize retention efforts and the admissions process—ultimately, supplanting the current reliance on standardized test scores and creating a more precise holistic admission review on which to base admit decisions.

To predict how institutions might use The Internet of Things, consider a solution already developed by a vendor. This technology connects the IP address of students using campus

Wi-Fi with the router in a specific location and these data are transmitted to a retention management system. The technology can determine if a student attended class, visited the library or the tutoring center, and how much time was spent in the residence hall. From that information, interventions and automated communications are initiated.

Protracted Retention Support

It is unrealistic to think that student behaviors and issues that may have been years or even a lifetime in the making can be remedied in a single trip to the tutoring center or a meeting with an advisor or counselor. For that matter, some longer-term supports such as summer bridge programs typically are inadequate to yield sustainable change in an individual. Summer bridge programs are primarily designed to close the college readiness gap exhibited by a growing number of students entering college directly from high school. While researchers have identified positive correlations between participants in these programs and first-year course completions, particularly in math and writing, there is little evidence that suggests the benefits extend to the number of credit hours completed, retention, or completion (Barnett, E. A., Bork, R. H., Mayer, A. K., Pretlow, J., Wathington, A. D., & Weiss, M. J., 2012, June).

With **first-year seminars**, the research is more promising. The research does show improved retention and completion rates at many institutions that offer first-year seminars as well as longer-term effects such as usage of campus supports, higher grades than non-participants, increased engagement in co-curricular activities, and meaningful interactions with faculty (Jaijiaram, P., 2016, February; Goodman, K. & Pascarella, E. T., 2006, Summer). Across the higher education landscape, there are seemingly infinite variations of first-year seminars; however, they share the common goals of improving academic performance, social and academic integration, and ultimately, retention and completion. Because some of these courses are voluntary and some are not for credit, outcome measurements could be affected by variables such as self-selection. Nonetheless, first-year seminars represent one of the protracted retention supports that actually produce lasting results.

In addition to first-year seminars, other supports that provide prolonged engagement with students also yield long-term learner outcomes. These often include **academic advising**, **mentoring**, and various forms of **coaching**. Certainly, faculty/student interaction, inside and outside the classroom, has positive benefits that frequently extend beyond the length of a course, as described in *Chapter Five*.

Regarding **academic advising**, there are many models practiced in the academy—some advising is delivered by faculty, some by professional advising staff, and some through a hybrid model that includes faculty and professional staff. At many institutions advising is voluntary and at others it is required for some (e.g., first-time students, at-risk students, those changing majors), if not all students. Advising methodologies also vary widely across institutions. Illustrative examples include developmental, prescriptive, intrusive, holistic, and appreciative advising. Regardless of the adopted model and methodology, academic advising has the highest long-term impact on students when the following attributes and practices are in place:

❖ Assigned advisors are easily accessible.

❖ Advisors have extensive institutional, program, and curriculum knowledge.

❖ Advisors and advisees are familiar with and use enabling technologies, such as student information systems and degree audits, to inform their interactions and planning.

❖ Advisor training is comprehensive and ongoing.

❖ Students are engaged in establishing academic, career, and life goals.

❖ An academic plan is provided to students that aligns with their goals.

❖ Scheduling is decoupled from the mentoring aspects of advising.

❖ While class scheduling occurs a couple of times per year, mentoring is an ongoing process that focuses on student goal attainment, emerging issues and opportunities, and guidance related to success behaviors, just to name a few.

❖ Advisors proactively reach out to students, including when an intervention is needed.

❖ Touch points with students occur multiple times during each term.

❖ Advisor/advisee relationships are built on mutual trust and respect.

❖ The advisor and advisee view student success as a shared responsibility.

❖ The impact of advising on student learning and success are evaluated and the findings are utilized for continuous improvement.

Like academic advising, **mentoring** assumes many different forms. The formal role of faculty mentoring referenced above is most often accompanied with informal faculty mentoring encounters with students. Administrators and staff also engage in structured and everyday student mentoring. In my consulting practice, I have observed everything from a formal program where every administrator, staff, and faculty member adopted a small cohort of new students to mentor to campuses where mentoring was considered a form of teaching

and thus, it became part of the job expectation. One institution I recently visited has 224 faculty mentors, each with a caseload of mentees that they work with throughout the four-year experience.

Peer mentoring is also relatively common. When implemented with the right mentors, training, and oversight, peer mentoring can have lasting benefits for the mentees, and it is an extremely cost-effective strategy. Often, peer mentoring is a standalone program, but some institutions have paired peer mentoring with orientation and others have done so with a first-year seminar. Some academic programs also embed peer mentoring with their majors.

Though not particularly common, there are examples of mentoring leveraging alumni and industry experts. To illustrate, one of SEM Works' clients matched incoming students with alumni who worked in an industry that aligned with students' career interests.

Irrespective of the form of peer mentoring, the mentoring relationship leads to improved academic and social integration, and in some cases, career networking. One study revealed that academic performance (grades and course completions) was higher for mentees as compared to non-mentees (Leidenfrost, B., Strassnig, B., Shultz, M., Carbon, C., & Schabmann, A., 2014). Moreover, numerous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of mentoring on student retention and completion (Collier, P. J., 2016, January).

Student success coaches are becoming more prominent in higher education. Their roles are similar to mentors but often more systematic and intrusive. Unlike mentors, these individuals' sole responsibility is coaching. Typically, they are highly trained professionals with backgrounds in counseling, student development, or retention theory. There are even vendors that provide coaching as a fee for service. Whether implemented in-house or outsourced, coaching usually involves routine (often bi-weekly) contacts with students via a variety of mediums (e.g., in-person, phone, email, web chat, video conferencing). Much like advising and mentoring the focus of these contacts is to developmentally address learner goals and milestones, facilitate problem solving, direct students to campus supports, and teach them success behaviors.

In the future, institutional investments in student retention will increase—partly as a response to enrollment, government, and public pressures to improve retention and completion rates. These investments also are likely to increase because the research suggests that focused human interaction over an extended period of time yields results. The

problem with retention strategies like first-year seminars, advising, mentoring, and coaching is that they are resource-intensive. However, institutional leaders who compare the costs of such initiatives with the return on investment (ROI) will quickly determine that these type investments are worthwhile and inevitably generate additional revenue.

Customized Retention Support

In general, there are three categories of retention initiatives: generic (the same for all students), segmented (designed to target the common needs and risk factors of a subpopulation of students), and customized (unique to an individual's diagnosed needs and risk factors). Not surprisingly, the impact of retention efforts varies by the type of initiative, with generic methods having the least impact and customized approaches resulting in the best outcomes.

During my tenure as associate provost at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), we discovered that students placed on academic probation rarely returned to the University. Consequently, we implemented a recovery program intended to ensure probationary students returned to complete their degree and were provided with the support required to succeed. In its infancy, the program applied the same solution to students with low grades—various academic supports. Following this methodology nearly half the program participants, returned to "good academic standing" within the first semester they reenrolled. Most were able to sustain that level of academic performance over time. However, we were not satisfied with these results. This caused us to rethink the strategy—replacing a generic approach with one that was customized. In the new model, returning probationary students completed a multifaceted diagnostic followed by a tailored recovery plan designed to address risk factors. While poor grades were the common symptom, we uncovered a host of underlying causation factors. Once the program launched the results were astonishing. On average, seventy-five percent of participants earned "good academic standing."

As posited earlier in this chapter, customized student success plans as well as efforts like the one at UNCG lead to significantly improved retention and completion. Customization of this kind is particularly relevant to Gen Z students, who have only lived in a world where most things are tailored to their unique preferences and needs. Customized solutions also speak directly to their individualistic nature.

Tools for one-to-one marketing, customer service, learning, and loyalty building are ubiquitous in the private sector and to a somewhat lesser degree, in higher education. This trend will continue with more sophisticated solutions on the horizon. With that said, technological solutions will never replace the need for humans as part of the customization mix. Both Millennials and Gen Zers value human connections and support. Even with the most advanced machine learning, human beings have innate abilities like intuition and caring that cannot be emulated by other means.

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CHAPTER NINE

Maximizing Progression Throughout the Student Lifecycle

Often enrollment management is described as a "cradle to endowment" model, which implies that a lifecycle exists between a student and an institution. This lifecycle is first recognized by a college or university when a student initially expresses interest in the school; however, it may actually begin much earlier with perceptions, experiences, and affinities associated with an institution. Once the connection with a school is initiated, the **future student stage** of the lifecycle begins followed by the **current student stage** and then the **former student stage**. *Figure 1* illustrates these stages along with progressive sub-stages in a hierarchical fashion. Many of the psychological attributes and behaviors associated with progression through the lifecycle also are depicted in *Figure 1*.

***Figure 1: Student Lifecycle Construct***
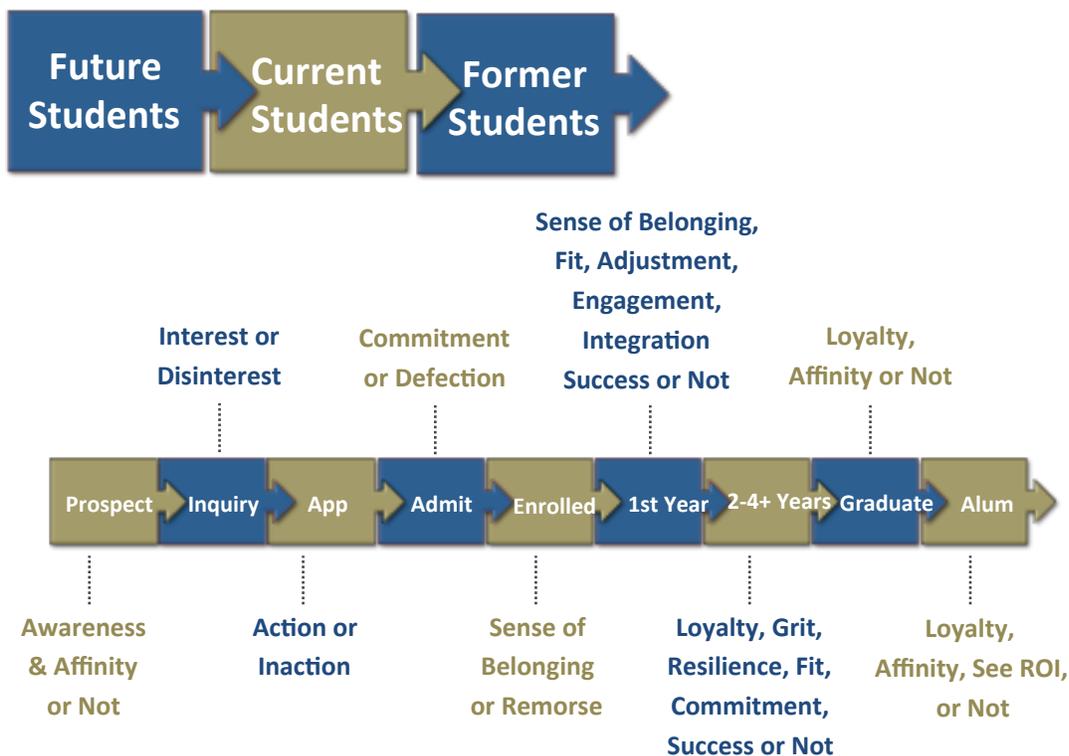
Figure 1 assumes students actually progress from one enrollment stage to the next. In point of fact, many do not progress and those who transition forward certainly do not all progress at the desired time. Failure to progress results in the end of the student lifecycle with a

particular institution; although, a number of students will initiate a new lifecycle with another educational provider. Since the objective of recruitment and retention efforts is to facilitate progression into, through, and beyond the institution, on-time student transition between lifecycle stages represents success.

For some future students, this psychological and behavioral progression will occur without any contact by a college. For others, however, barriers to enrollment, usually life circumstances and overtures by competitors, will hinder forward movement. Regrettably, it is not the norm for current students to remain continuously enrolled through to completion. Dropping out, stopping out, or transferring are more common. This phenomenon is often caused by a lack of motivation or commitment, personal and institutional barriers to continued enrollment, an absence of loyalty to the institution, academic failure, various non-cognitive factors, and competing priorities. With alumni, they tend to be loyal to their alma mater if they feel the experience provided life-changing value and/or they have a strong connection to the school or more often, one or more individuals who made a difference in their life. Alumni loyalty is important to the enrollment enterprise because these individuals personify an institution's value proposition (outcomes of the educational experience). They also can return as students, refer potential students, and spread positive word-of-mouth about the college or university—theoretically, every institution's most powerful recruitment tool.

Future Student Progression

Interactions and communications with prospective students have the highest probability of influencing pre-enrollment progression when the **frequency and nature of contacts** are strategic. This means that contacts are planned synergistically with each contact building on the previous one; they are timed to coincide with the various stages of student decision-making; each one includes a compelling call to action; and the right mix of messaging is in place.

The **right frequency** depends on the length of the prospective student lifecycle. As a general "rule of thumb" the number of communications and interactions with potential students should be sufficient enough to compel a student to take desired action (e.g., visit the campus, apply for admission, apply for financial aid, take placement tests, attend orientation, meet with an advisor, register for classes, and pay for college). Contacts also must be relevant to the student given his or her interests, stage in the lifecycle, and the window of time available

before matriculation. Applying these basic ground rules, the frequency of interactions depicted in *Figure 2* provides a useful guide.

Figure 2: Frequency of Interactions

	Time to Matriculation						
	1< week	1 month	3 months	6 months	9 months	12+ months	
Reg	1	2	2	2	2	2	Frequency of Interactions
Admit	1	1	2	4	6	8	
App	0	1	3	5	5	5	
Inquiry	0	1	2	4	6	8	
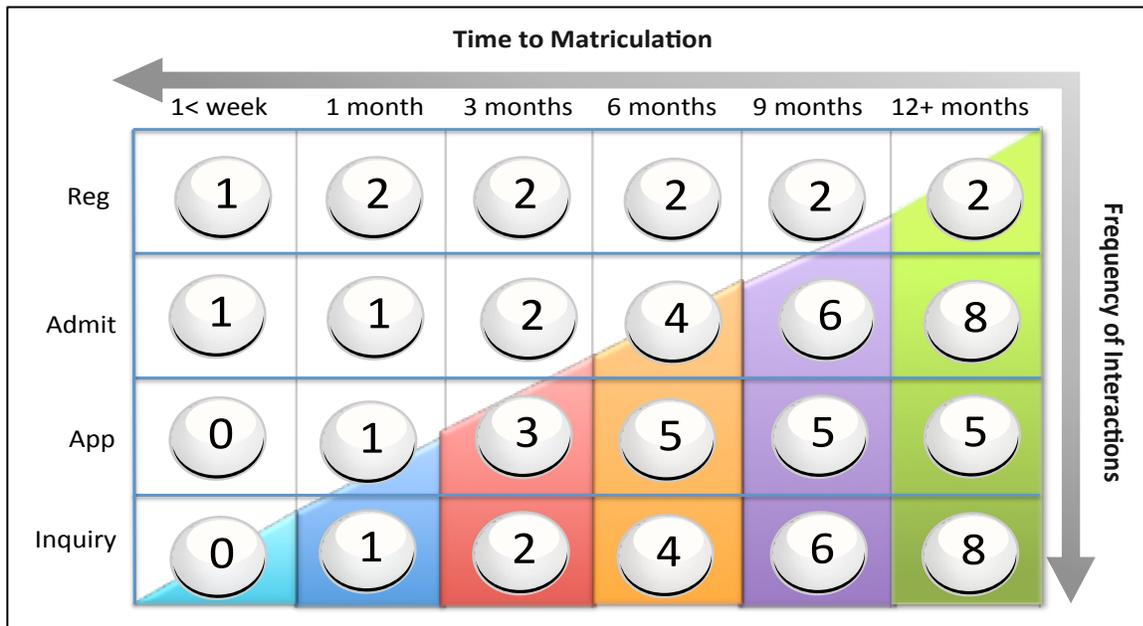
The **right nature** of communications and interactions has multiple dimensions. First, the use of multiple channels of contacts is imperative—particularly when the channels are aligned with student preferences (e.g. in-person, phone, mail, email, web portal, social media). Presuming that channel preferences are associated with gender, age, race or ethnicity is a faulty mental map. Such preferences are much more individualized than affiliated with a demographic group. Some colleges and universities address preferences by allowing students to self-initiate the interaction in a manner that is most preferred by them and best serves their needs. While this approach does ensure congruence between interactions and student preferences, it is far too passive. To proactively engage students through their preferred channels, institutions either inquire about preferences and then align interactions accordingly or offer a variety of channels per interaction and allow students to select the channel that best meets their needs.

Second, prospective student communications and interactions are most effective when originating from multiple sources (e.g., recruiters, faculty, staff, current students, alumni). However, a decentralized method of recruitment and communications is fraught with

problems—uncoordinated communications, overlapping and duplicative communications, and mixed messages resulting in student confusion and frustration. Avoiding this common pitfall is possible by having a single prospective student communication and engagement plan that is centrally managed. Typically, a centralized plan is coordinated by admissions or marketing departments with a range of stakeholders involved in the planning process. In this model, all communications are staged within a CRM system that records what communications a student has received and when they were sent. Stakeholders are provided with access to the system as well as the actual communications via an electronic repository. Similarly, a coordinated schedule of engagements (e.g., high school visits, outreach activities with businesses and community organizations, information sessions, open houses) is shared with stakeholders usually through a calendaring system. This systematic orchestration of future student communications and engagements ensures that all stakeholders can respond to prospective student inquiries accurately and collectively facilitate their progression through the enrollment stages efficiently and effectively.

Third, the vast majority of communications from colleges to prospective students are process-oriented in nature. Because many learners are first generation college students, a heavy emphasis on completing foreign processes is warranted. But, it is doubtful that any student has ever selected an institution because he or she likes a school's process. For this reason, process-oriented communications must be balanced with marketing and relational communications. Marketing communications should focus on selling the institution at the inquiry level and shift to promoting academic programs as the student progresses through the pre-enrollment stages. Beyond commodity attributes of an institution (e.g., affordable tuition, convenient proximity to home or work, flexible learning options), the quality of programs and expertise of faculty along with the success of graduates are key decision factors. These attributes need to be promoted vigorously.

In this same vein, students often choose an institution because of a personal connection they have made with a college or university employee or another person affiliated with the school. Relationships of this nature often occur through serendipitous encounters. Nevertheless, to leverage relationships effectively, a more intentional approach is required. For example, some institutions have adopted an advocates model of recruiting where a recruitment manager works with a carefully selected group of advocates to orchestrate interactions with potential students through multiple channels (e.g., faculty phone-a-thons, academic division or department hosted events, student ambassador social media conversations, face-to-face encounters).

Process, marketing, and relational communications culminate in a powerful force influencing student enrollment decisions. Still another type of communication worthy of consideration is success-oriented messaging. Delaying the promotion of proven success behaviors and strategies until orientation or the start of term reduces the opportunity to alter deeply rooted intellectual, social, and emotional patterns in time to salvage the academic performance of many students. *Figure 3* demonstrates how process, marketing, relational, and success communications can be integrated throughout the student lifecycle. It also infuses loyalty-building communications into later stages of the lifecycle.

Figure 3: Student Lifecycle Communications
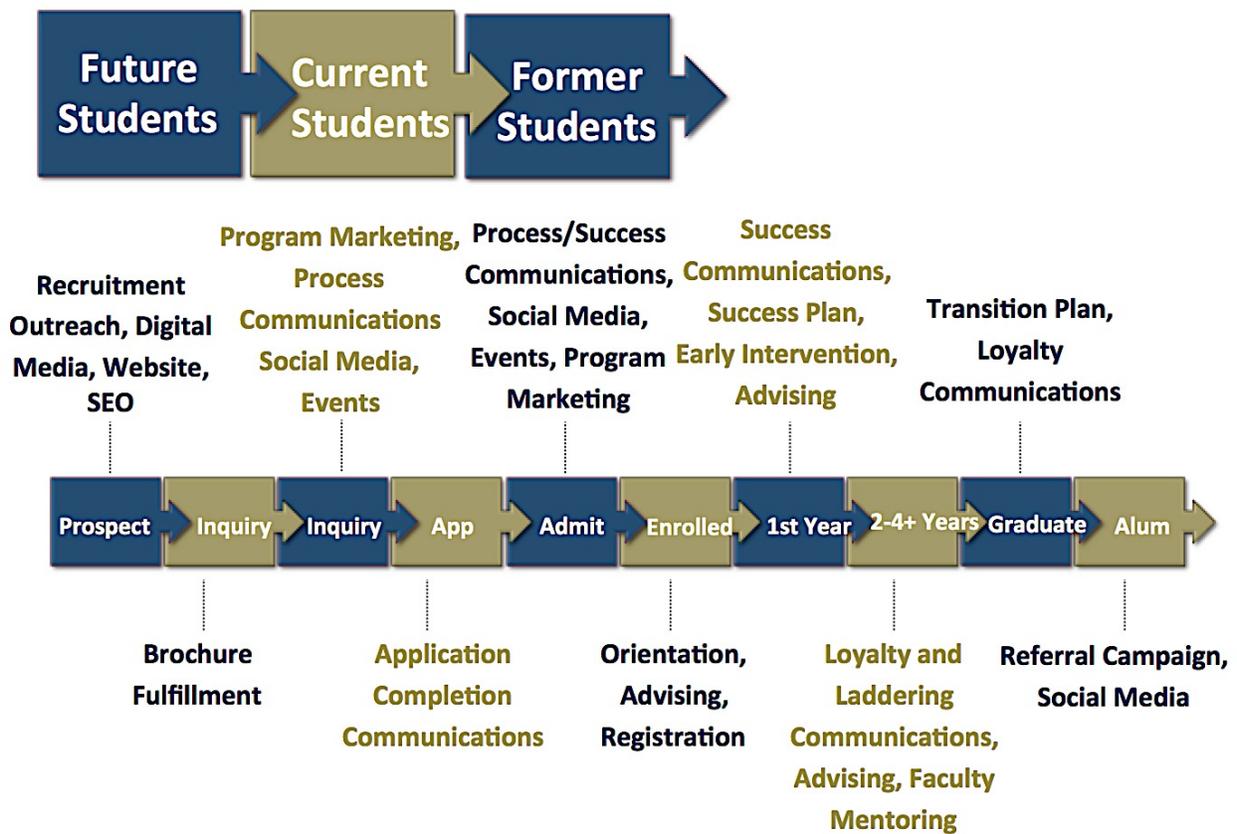
Current Student Progression

Given that prevention, intervention, and recovery strategies are highlighted in *Chapter Eight*, the focus here is on communications with current students. *Figure 4* illustrates the nature of these communications. In combination, the following current student lifecycle communications promote learner success and progression.

Figure 4: Current Student Communications Model

Deadlines, support services, service tutorials, degree completion

Missed deadlines, early interventions, policy implications

Proactive Transactional

Reactive Transactional

Current Student Communications

Delivering on the institution's promise

Loyalty Building

Desired Learner Behaviors

Time management, study habits, note-taking skills, test-taking strategies

Relationship Management

Connections with faculty, staff, industry, and peers

- ❖ **Proactive transactional communications** are preventive in nature. By conveying impending deadlines through compelling visuals and multimedia (not volumes of text), an institution will reduce the likelihood that students are adversely impacted by such deadlines.

- ❖ **Reactive transactional communications** become necessary when students do not respond to proactive transactional communications or are otherwise adversely impacted by missing deadlines, being affected by institutional policies or requiring early intervention. Most students do not understand higher education bureaucracy or structures, procedures, and policies. They need assistance navigating student- and institutionally-inflicted problems that arise. Reactive transactional communications are intended to provide students with options, pathways for problem resolution, and directions to school personnel who can assist them.

- ❖ **Desired learner behavior communications** are designed to reinforce learning strategies and habits instilled in them from instructors, classes, academic support services, etc. Messaging should be delivered concisely at critical junctures during the student's educational journey.

- ❖ **Relationship management communications** tend to be less time sensitive than the three types of communications previously described. Ideally, relationship-oriented

communications occur frequently and throughout the lifecycle of a current student. Of particular importance are relationship connections around a shared affinity (e.g., a program of study, extracurricular interests, life circumstances, common goals). By targeting such associations using customized communications, an institution can engage students in a vibrant educational experience.

❖ **Loyalty building communications** perpetuate the courtship that was initiated with prospective students into their lives as current students. The best opportunity to develop institutional loyalty centers around the "promise" an institution overtly or covertly makes to the students it serves. While each institution may have made unique promises to its students, in general, colleges and universities are in the business of transforming lives. Consequently, loyalty-based communications should convey how an institution is transforming students through learning, preparation for a career or further university study, contributions to society, improving the quality of their lives while enrolled and into the future.

Most institutions orchestrate communications at the prospective student and former student (alumni) stages of the lifecycle. However, the same level of planning, execution, resources, and infrastructure do not exist for current student communications. Communications to enrolled students are usually ad hoc without any cross-organizational coordination. Too often, such communications occur without the knowledge of related offices and personnel resulting in poor service and student runaround. In point of fact, there usually is no champion or single owner of current student communications—making it virtually impossible to coordinate communications campus-wide. Until this issue is addressed, it will be difficult to implement a comprehensive communications plan for existing students.

Hopefully, colleges and universities will engage in communications planning and implementation as a means of facilitating progression and thus, retention and completion. For this to happen, institutional leaders must make this a priority, and provide the requisite antecedents for success (e.g., a designated owner, staff capacity for implementation, technology optimization, funding).

Former Student Progression

Former student progression refers to student transitions out of the institution—into a career or advanced education. In view of the emphasis on such educational outcomes by

government, the public, and prospective students, colleges and universities may need to focus more intentionally on delivering related services. To determine if heightened attention is needed, consider your institution's performance on measures such as graduate employment within six months, employment rates within students' field of study, employment in professions that require the degree earned by your students, acceptance rates into graduate and professional schools, acceptance rates into a university when transferring from a two-year college, and performance of your graduates at the next level in their educational journey. If measures like these show that your graduates are not as successful as the institution would expect or desire, then existing services and practices should be evaluated to identify opportunities for improvement and existing gaps.

Virtually every campus offers some level of **career services** from centralized departments to decentralized or satellite locations embedded within an academic division as well as hybrids of the two. The array of services provided through these models is broad and ranges from career exploration to internship and co-op placements and job search support. Some schools also have career coaches that work with students over time to align student interests and strengths with opportunities in the job market. Software solutions exist to offer career coaching online. The leading provider of this service, EMSI, leverages labor market data and a matching process to assist students in finding the best-fit career path.

Although career services are prevalent on college campuses, a recent report by Gallup and the Strada Education Network revealed that fewer than 20% of undergraduates reach out to their school's career center for advice on finding jobs and applying to graduate schools. The same study showed that 50% of respondents "often" or "very often" discuss their future careers with **faculty and staff** (Fadulu, L., 2018, January). These findings suggest that more needs to be done to promote career centers, but it also implies that faculty and staff play an important role in advising students on career-related matters. Faculty are often knowledgeable about the industries associated with their discipline along with related career trends. However, they tend to be less aware of online tools and resources that are available to support students in their career pursuits. Faculty and staff can better guide students by expanding their scope of expertise through self-learning and more structured learning provided by career centers, teaching and learning centers, among others.

As cited in *Chapter* Four, preparing students for careers has become increasingly complex due to the rapidly transforming work environment—largely driven by technological advances and societal changes. Findings from a World Economic Forum survey of the top

executives in the world's leading companies, showed that they agreed the most important skill set for jobs in 2020 will be complex problem solving, along with critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and emotional intelligence, which align well with liberal arts and general education learner outcomes at many colleges and universities (Kielburger, C. & Kielburger, M., 2017, May). While postsecondary institutions have not neglected cultivating problem solving and critical thinking skills, they have perhaps fallen short with respect to discussing these skills in relation to changing career fields.

Educators also would greatly serve their students by more comprehensively and systematically introducing them to a network of leading experts and industry leaders. These opportunities often happen organically or in the form of internships, service learning opportunities, field experiences, etc., as is already the practice at most institutions. As described in *Chapter Five*, experiential learning has emerged as a growing emphasis on many campuses and is consistent with the direction recommended by industry experts. Experiential learning allows academic departments and faculty to provide relevant challenges, create opportunities for real-world application of knowledge gained in the classroom, and design learning opportunities across disciplines (Fuchs, M., 2018, May).

With respect to **students pursuing advanced educational opportunities**, particularly at graduate and professional schools, their undergraduate experience likely prepares them for the academic rigor at the next level but falls short in terms of teaching them how to navigate the admissions process, explore graduate assistantships and other funding options, understand different teaching methodologies and coursework expectations, degree requirements, and relationships with graduate supervisors. At most community colleges, transfer counselors offer this type of guidance as students prepare to transition to a four-year school, but there often is no one designated at universities to support an undergraduate's transition to graduate education. Academic advisors at universities may offer this service and certainly, some faculty do so informally; however, a systematic approach to help students navigate the complex world of graduate education is a clear gap.

Higher education is largely about preparing students for their future. With this in mind, the academy should do everything possible to ensure students "cross the finish line." Their educational journey does not end at graduation. It is what happens next that matters most.

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PART FOUR

Enrollment Planning and Implementation

Creating a Strategic Enrollment Plan

The Keys to a Successful, Sustainable Implementation

INTRODUCTION

Enrollment Planning and Implementation

To this point in the book, the enrollment context, academic program innovation, and enrollment strategies have been described. An enrollment plan represents the synthesis of those environmental factors and strategies into a road map for implementation.

In 2004, I edited and coauthored a book, *Essentials of Enrollment Management: Cases in the Field*, which featured case studies from ten institutions of varying sizes and types. From this experience, I learned that no two colleges or universities plan or implement enrollment management the same way. There is no single best methodology or formula to follow. How one approaches enrollment planning and implementation depends on a multitude of factors (e.g., enrollment goals, environmental context, institutional leadership, organizational capacity, available resources, enrollment management expertise). Therefore, the chapters in *Part Four* are illustrative and the methodologies and concepts presented therein must be adapted to fit an individual institution's situational context.

For this reason, you are cautioned not to wholesale adopt one of the many enrollment plans that can be found online. They may offer ideas for how to proceed and what to include, but these plans should not be used as a template to follow. On a related note, never publish your enrollment plan on a public-facing website. By doing so, you give away any competitive advantage obtained through the process.

Many enrollment plans are purely tactical in nature. Despite the fact that tactics are necessary in any such plan, it is strongly recommended that your enrollment plan be strategically focused. Being strategic means that the plan is **data-driven**, including institutional data, environmental trend data, and best practice research. A strategic enrollment plan also is **forward thinking**—ideally three to five years out. It should not be a remedy to address an immediate crisis the institution is facing but rather a journey that will position the college for the future. It requires **systems thinking** in terms of how various enrollment functions need to be synched as well as how the plan interfaces with and supports an institution's strategic plan, academic priorities, and financial requirements. In the same vein, it should tightly **integrated** and thus, include all enrollment contributors (e.g., undergraduate, graduate, continuing education, online, and dual enrollment). Integration

also refers to extending across the entire student lifecycle: pre-enrollment, enrollment, and post-enrollment stages.

Obviously, enrollment plans that sit on a shelf are useless and even counterproductive. Like any plan, an enrollment plan is valuable only if it is used as a road map for daily operations. It must be a dynamic, organic document that informs decisions, guides priorities, challenges assumptions, and validates action. The plan should serve as a lever to influence campus culture in adopting a strategic approach to marketing, recruitment, retention, service delivery, and academic program relevance.

Strategies, per se, do not create a sustainable competitive advantage or enrollment results. Even with the best enrollment strategies and leadership intentions, a school's enrollment success is directly correlated to its ability to execute the strategies presented in the plan. People are an institution's capacity to produce results. Your success in producing optimal enrollment results will be determined by your capacity to motivate employees and develop employee competencies to the highest levels possible. How well an institution supports its people determines, in large measure, how well the organization performs. Therefore, investing in people to ensure the quality of implementation is fundamental to achieving enrollment objectives as an institution.

In addition, available enrollment intelligence that informed the development of goal-driven strategies in the planning stage should be used as the basis for monitoring progress toward implementation. An effective implementation process requires leadership, a focus on students, data-driven decisions, campus-wide involvement, and a willingness to let go of the old ways of doing things. Put simply, adopting a strategic enrollment management (SEM) philosophy involves a commitment to organizational change in culture, systems, and practices. The process of organizational change requires persistence and sustained attention over time.

CHAPTER TEN

Creating a Strategic Enrollment Plan

Peter Senge's bestselling book, *The Fifth Discipline*, speaks broadly to organizational change. He theorizes that positive change within an organization begins with a critical look at its current reality (Senge, P. M., 1990). Comparing that reality to an organization's vision of what it aspires to become reveals the gaps that exist between the current reality and the vision. In a similar fashion, postsecondary institutions engaging in enrollment planning should assess their current state relative to their enrollment ambitions. The gap between the two is where strategies are needed to achieve desired enrollments.

Enrollment Planning Framework

Figure 1 depicts the planning process used by SEM Works with our clients. This **enrollment planning framework** can be adapted to fit any institutional context. Much like Senge suggests, the process begins with situational analysis of a school's internal and external enrollment context with dual purposes: **(1) defining the current reality and (2) identifying related gaps**. This task can be accomplished in-house or by contracting with an enrollment management consulting firm like SEM Works.

Figure 1: Enrollment Planning Framework
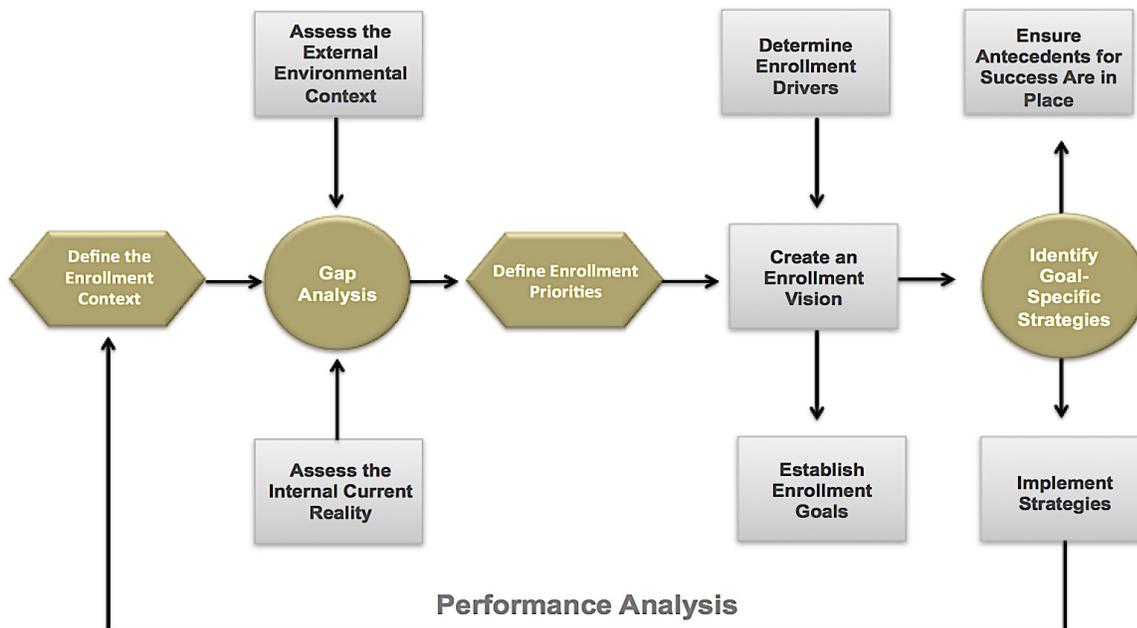
Informed by the findings from the situational analysis, **enrollment priorities** are defined. At its core, planning involves choosing between alternatives and determining which future state is preferred (Bean, J. P., 1990). Too often, this is where "the wheels fall off." Everything cannot be a priority (e.g., enrollment growth, higher academic student profiles, increased student diversity, improved retention, increased net revenue). Though some of these priorities are complementary and as such, need to be linked together, others are competing. As an institution transitions from planning to implementation, it is imperative that enrollment priorities be clearly defined and ideally, rank ordered. Effective strategy development and deployment of scarce resources depend on this prioritization.

Once the priorities are established, an **enrollment vision** for the institution can be created. The vision should be concise yet of sufficient depth to describe the desired future state with respect to enrollment. Some of the best enrollment visions I have encountered provide a visual road map to the future state. Regardless of the format, the vision should stem from a situational analysis and broad stakeholder input. The final version should be shared campus-wide alongside a description of the process followed to arrive at the vision and a rationale for adopting the vision.

Following the visioning process, **enrollment goals** should be defined that support the attainment of the future state together with the **enrollment drivers** deemed necessary to achieve the goals. Enrollment drivers may include increasing market share, expanding to new markets, retaining students at a higher rate, building new facilities, and launching new academic programs, among others. When considering enrollment goals, there are two basic approaches: (1) high-level directional goals that are usually sufficient for planning purposes or (2) granular enrollment goals designed to drive strategy, foster shared accountability across the institution for the attainment of enrollment goals, and track discreet areas of performance.

In terms of establishing goals, it is important to note that identifying enrollment goals is an imprecise science, and goal setting is markedly different from projecting enrollment outcomes. In point of fact, projections are formulaic in nature and often do not account for the efforts of the institution. Conversely, enrollment goals more broadly consider data and other factors to reflect the contextual reality (past, present, and future) as well as institutional aspirations, constraints, and planned strategies.

The goal setting methodology applied by SEM Works involves a comprehensive, data-driven approach that incorporates a systems perspective using four lenses in determining proposed enrollment targets: (1) a clear articulation of institutional aspirations, (2) available business intelligence, (3) an analysis of institutional capacity, and (4) an understanding of external forces. *Figure 2* depicts some of the variables used in goal setting for each of the major elements of the analysis.

Figure 2: Enrollment Goals Model
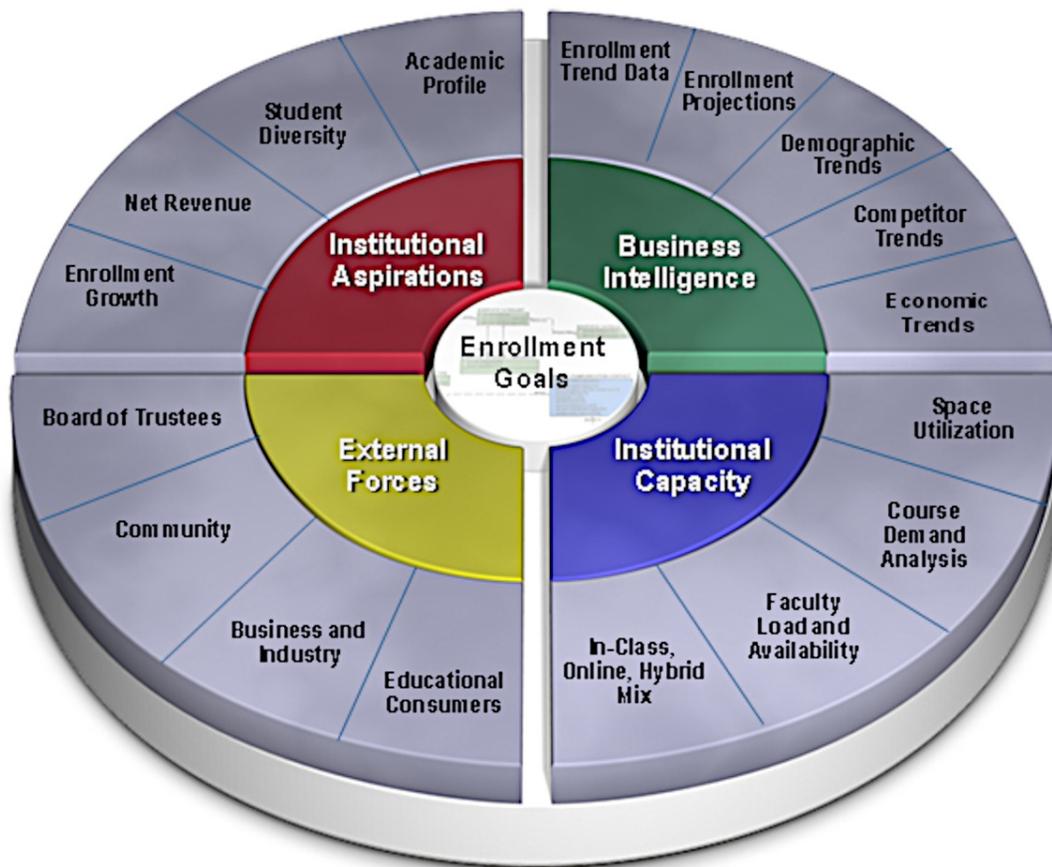
Enrollment planning becomes strategic when it is an integral component of institution-wide planning and resource management processes, fused with the academic enterprise, and when it advances transformative change. For this reason, the application of the enrollment goal setting methodology presented above is highly consultative and collaborative process. More precisely, a **three-phase iterative goal setting process** is employed:

❖ **Phase One** encompasses a **linear regression method of modeling** to identify a starting place for enrollment goal setting. This modeling method analyzes a dependent variable (e.g., the most recent enrollment number or retention rate) against one or more independent variables (such as yield rates, retention trends, and growth or decline rate trends).

❖ **Phase Two** involves an **environmental systems analysis** of internal and external trends and factors impacting enrollment. There are five components to this analysis: (1) a high-level external environmental scan; (2) enrollment trend data and research; (3) a review of SEM strategies, practices, structures, and capacity; (4) institutional leaders provide feedback related to opportunities and barriers associated with achieving enrollment targets; and (5) interviews with the academic leaders from each academic division, reporting and analysis experts, as well as leaders within the enrollment areas to establish an understanding of aspirational enrollment goals and perspectives on the environmental factors likely to impact enrollment into the future.

❖ **Phase Three** focuses on conducting a **critical analysis** of the aforementioned information and data. In this phase, the following are considered: (1) stakeholder perspectives on aspirational enrollment goals; (2) trend data such as demographics, labor, economic, higher education participation rates, transfer rates, etc.; (3) capacity dimensions such as space utilization, instructional delivery method, scalability potential, and support capacity; (4) external forces exerted by governing and accrediting bodies, business and industry, educational consumers, and other educational providers; along with (5) opportunities for enrollment growth, retention improvements, revenue optimization, aspirations related to student diversity, and opportunities to impact desired academic outcomes on the strength of an estimate of the impact of new programs and strategies. To the degree possible, all of the aforementioned information points are used in determining enrollment goals.

As stated previously in this chapter, enrollment goals should be granular enough to inform daily operations, strategic decision-making, and stakeholder accountability. An enrollment goals typology is presented in *Figure 3* that shows illustrative goal categories.

Figure 3: Enrollment Goal Typology

Goal Type	Institutional	School/College	Student Segment
New Students	✓	✓	✓
Continuing Students	✓	✓	✓
Returning Students	✓	✓	✓
Gross Revenue	✓	✓	✗
Net Revenue	✓	✓	✗

Leveraging established goals, the task of **planning strategies** can commence. It is critical that strategies within the SEM plan support the attainment of these goals. Early in my career as a consultant, a client sent me 143 potential strategies they had brainstormed and asked which ones I would advise them to implement. I identified only three that I could recommend. Many were awful strategies, but the primary reason for eliminating most of the strategies was that they did not align with previously established enrollment goals. Strategic enrollment management is not about doing more. It is about focusing on the right things in the right ways. For instance, if a goal is to increase first-to-second year retention by two percent each of the next five years, there should be specific strategies within the plan to accomplish this goal.

As strategies are developed, the **antecedents for a successful implementation** must be identified. Related antecedents might include leadership support, faculty buy-in, funding, new positions, staff training, time, technology optimization, and a host of others. Unless identified antecedents are in place or there is commitment from campus leaders to support the creation of the antecedents, the strategies should not be included in the plan. To reiterate an early point, attempting to implement strategies "off the side of the desk" is almost never effective. Execution is everything.

Upon approval of the final SEM plan, **implementation** can begin. The details associated with a productive implementation are described in *Chapter Eleven*. For now, it is sufficient to reaffirm that no plan outperforms the quality of implementation. SEM implementation must

be accompanied with **an analysis of strategy performance** (a topic also covered in *Chapter Eleven*). The performance analysis provides the insights necessary to continuously improve the plan over time. SEM planning is not a one and done effort. It should be cyclical in nature with reviews and, potentially, revisions occurring at least annually. In general, it is prudent to stay the course set in the enrollment plan; however, the institution must practice strategic dexterity—adapting to changing conditions, mitigating emerging threats, and seizing new opportunities.

The Enrollment Planning Cycle

A decade or so ago, we had a client who insisted that we develop an enrollment plan in one day. She and I sat in a room for four hours and hammered out an enrollment plan. The plan on paper was sound but it lacked one very important ingredient—stakeholder input. As you might expect, when the plan rolled out, there was nominal buy-in and therefore, implementation suffered. Conversely, we have had clients who drug out the planning process for a year or longer against our advice. The problem with this scenario is momentum. It is virtually impossible to maintain momentum over such a protracted time frame.

So, my recommendation is that your SEM planning process takes just long enough to collect and analyze essential data and research as well as involve key stakeholders sufficiently to assume ownership of the plan. Typically, this requires six-to-nine months in the planning cycle. *Figure 4* delineates the various phases within the planning and implementation cycle and describes planning activities, related milestones, and a standard time frame for each phase. It also provides a summary of many of the planning elements outlined earlier in this chapter.

Figure 4: Integrated SEM Planning Cycle

|	**Phase 1** Current Reality	**Phase 2** Strategic Issues	**Phase 3** Plan Development	**Phase 4** Implementation	**Phase 5** Evaluation
PROCESS STEPS	Current Reality	Strategic Issues	Plan Development	Implementation	Evaluation
PLANNING PROCESS ACTIVITIES	Conduct a self-assessment/external audit of existing practices and strategic issues Report on findings and related recommendations Decide which recommendations require action and become an institutional priority	Identify and answer key research questions Use data as actionable intelligence Target significant strategic issues	Identify goals and objectives related to each strategic issue Design strategies to achieve stated goals and objectives Define the action steps required to complete each strategy Build a business case for additional resources (if required)	Grab the "low hanging fruit" and look for quick "wins" Ensure needed antecedents of success are in place (e.g., training, technology, space, funding, incentives) Execute at the highest level of quality possible Engage in "proof of concept" pilots for large-scale initiatives	Measure the effectiveness of each major initiative Continuously improve implementation efforts based on effectiveness measure findings Assess the degree to which goals and objectives were met
PLANNING MILESTONES	Audit complete and priorities established	Strategic issues identified on the basis of data	Plan written along with action steps	Implementation following an agreed upon timeline	Evaluation and continuous improvement
STANDARD TIMEFRAME	3 months	3 months	3 months	3-5 Years	Ongoing

Lessons Learned

Having developed hundreds of enrollment plans, I have learned a few lessons along the way that may accelerate your learning curve and help you to avoid common pitfalls. First, consider the advice the ancient military consultant, Sun Tzu, offered to warring principalities around 400 B.C. (Griffith, S. B., 1963). His guidance focused on four foundational principles: know yourself, know your enemy, know the ground, and know the weather. On the surface, it may be difficult to discern the relationship of these principles to enrollment planning. So, I am providing a translation here. In a higher education context, know yourself can be translated to knowing your institution—its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Knowing your enemy is interpreted as knowing your competitors—their competitive advantages and disadvantages relative to your institution. Knowing the ground refers to internal culture, politics, and how to get things done on your campus. Finally, knowing the weather implies that the environmental conditions surrounding your school have an impact on enrollment outcomes.

Shifting from the theoretical to the practical, *Figure 5* shows enrollment planning lessons learned from colleges and universities across North America and beyond. Each is described in more detail herein.

Figure 5: Enrollment Planning Consideration
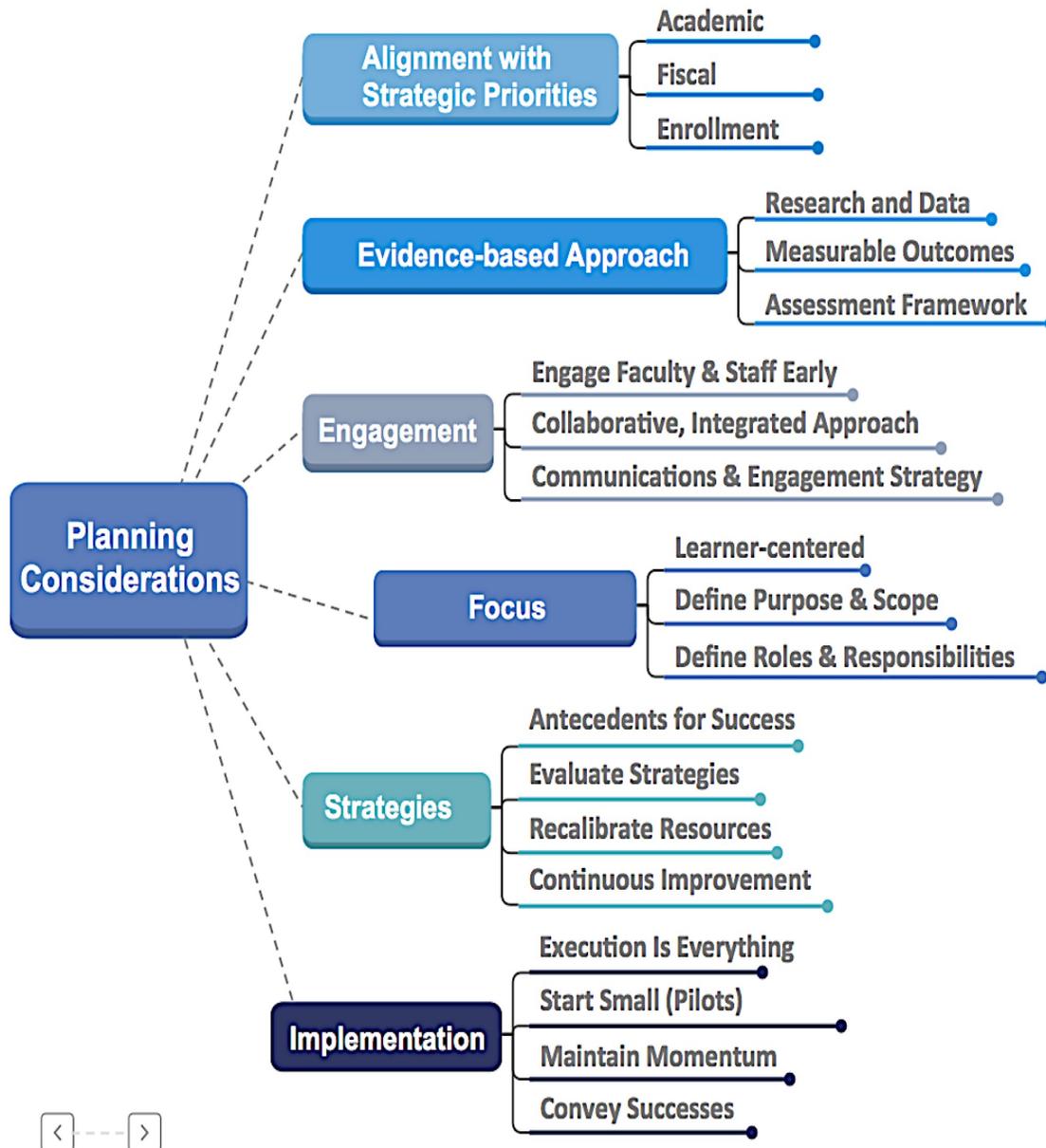
To garner institutional leadership support, enrollment plans must be **aligned with other strategic priorities** (e.g., fiscal, academic) and to the degree possible, be integrated into the college's strategic plan. The enrollment plan should not drive these institutional priorities but instead, serve them. Keep in mind that enrollment management, itself, is not the core business of the institution. Enrollment revenue simply provides the means to support the academic mission of a school.

We already have established that enrollment plans must be **evidence-based**, informed by research and data and with measurable outcomes. To that end, it is important to have an assessment framework designed before implementation begins, preferably with pre-implementation and post-implementation assessment to determine the difference made through the execution of strategies in the plan. Each strategy should have associated performance metrics and an assessment framework to collect and analyze the resultant data.

The importance of **stakeholder engagement** in the planning process has been identified earlier in this chapter. A collaborative and integrated approach to planning ensures key stakeholders have a voice in developing the plan and therefore, will be more likely to engage in the implementation phase. Besides having a seat at the table when planning occurs, many of our clients have benefited from having an internal communication and engagement strategy in place when the plan rolls out. Such a strategy consists of internal messaging that includes (1) a **definition of SEM** as it relates to the student lifecycle, (2) a compelling rationale for SEM that conveys **a sense of urgency** (e.g., enrollment trends as compared to institutional goals and aspirations, demographic shifts, the competitive landscape, enrollment challenges facing the institution) combined with (3) **a sense of hope** (e.g., improved student quality, enhanced student success, increased student diversity, enrollment revenue generation in tight budget times, heightened institutional reputation), along with (4) concrete opportunities for **engagement**. The process of conveying these messages begins with the senior leadership followed by every academic and administrative unit. Messages also may be tailored for each stakeholder group (e.g., full-time versus part-time faculty and staff).

Although enrollment planning is intended to advance the institution, the primary **focus** of a SEM plan should be on the students. Their successful progression into, through, and beyond the college is the fundamental underpinning of enrollment management, and it is what makes the SEM enterprise more than just another business model. If the learner is central to SEM strategies, the scope and purpose of the enrollment plan become clearer and

stakeholders are more likely to support the effort. This raises an interesting point. Strategic enrollment management is not a concept or term that most institutional stakeholders will embrace. Nomenclature matters when buy-in is needed, so consider casting the enrollment plan as the promise your institution makes to students and others you serve, as suggested in *Chapter Seven*. If not a promise, identify something else that people who work at the institution already are passionate about and reflects their purpose for investing their lives in a career in education. They will more naturally want to join a cause aligned with their own values and beliefs. This is particularly the case when related roles and responsibilities are defined.

In terms of **enrollment strategies**, the lessons learned reinforce the earlier statements regarding the need for antecedents of success, the evaluation of strategy performance, and the notion of using performance measures to recalibrate human and financial resources in order to continuously improve enrollment initiatives. Perfecting strategies over time requires the right enrollment intelligence, a laser focus on the right strategic issues, and the institutional will to act. Doing so affords an institution the ability to nimbly adapt to changing environmental conditions, evolving student expectations, as well as emerging competitive threats.

As previously postulated, the results emanating from an enrollment plan are intrinsically tied to the quality of **implementation**. For more protracted, complex, and sometimes costly strategies a proof of concept pilot may be the best way to proceed. Such strategies also are commonly staged over multiple years. It is normal for the focus on and commitment to implementation to wane over time. To overcome this phenomenon, enrollment and institutional leaders must sustain momentum by holding implementers accountable for quality deliverables in the SEM plan and conveying success stories to the campus community. Moreover, take time to celebrate successes and milestones.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Keys to a Successful, Sustainable Implementation

The enrollment plan sets the SEM agenda for an institution—addressing the "who," "what," "when," "where," and "how" of the SEM initiative (Whiteside, R., 2001). With this road map in hand, implementation can commence. But, this critical stage must be undertaken with **best practices** in mind, the skillful management of the **change process**, and methods in place to **measure performance** and the organizational dexterity to **adapt based on how strategies are performing**.

Implementation Best Practices

SEM implementations are most effective at colleges and universities when the culture already is focused on performance. These organizations exhibit a participatory management style where faculty and staff feel empowered and are fully engaged. Teamwork and collaboration are valued in the context of open, transparent communication and where collegial relationships built on trust permeate the culture. The environment fosters a high tolerance for risk-taking as long as it is evidence-based. As such, innovation is encouraged and rewarded and innovative ideas are embraced. People within the organization are student-centered and are continuously seeking to learn themselves. They have a "can do" attitude and accept personal responsibility for performance with a view to continuous improvement individually and as an institution.

Sound idealistic? Admittedly, there are few schools that possess all of these attributes. Nonetheless, you should aspire to achieve this ideal. SEM provides one means of doing so. Mobilizing a campus community around a **common purpose** is the secret to producing dramatic, sustainable enrollment results. Through the SEM planning and implementation process, key constituents across the campus community should be engaged in identifying, defining, and organizing around a common purpose—what are referred to as **strategic opportunities** in the SEM context.

The literature provides an abundance of examples of concrete, practical **implementation best practices** (Pinnacle Management Systems, 2013, March; McKinney, M., 2016, December; Teamweek, 2017; & Richards, L., 2018). Select exemplars are presented here.

- ❖ Begin with the end in mind
- ❖ Define a clear project scope
- ❖ Map project tasks and deliverables on a timeline
- ❖ Do not be overly aggressive with the timeline for implementation
- ❖ Reduce work in progress to create the organizational bandwidth necessary for a new implementation
- ❖ Select the right people for implementation
- ❖ Assign a project manager to keep implementers focused on required tasks
- ❖ Prepare to keep planning
- ❖ Implement while monitoring progress and metrics
- ❖ Maintain quality throughout the implementation
- ❖ Hold implementers accountable
- ❖ Communicate regularly and effectively with implementers
- ❖ Keep leaders informed

In addition to these general best practices, some **common risks** associated with SEM implementations that we encounter with our higher education clients are listed below with recommended remedies—some of which have been presented earlier in the book.

- ❖ **Implementation risks.** Any enrollment plan has minimal impact if it is not executed well. Collaborate with the project sponsors to define reporting and accountability mechanisms intended to monitor the quality, timeliness, and effectiveness of implementation. Furthermore, during the planning process, identify antecedents for successful implementation. It is strongly recommended that no enrollment initiative be presented in the plan without the necessary antecedents in place or a leadership commitment to create said antecedents prior to implementation. For this reason, you are encouraged to have senior leaders vet the core elements of the planning document before the full plan is written.
- ❖ **Reluctance to let go of the old ways of doing things.** As part of the planning process, ask planning teams to inventory existing enrollment strategies and protocols related to their assigned strategic opportunity. They should categorize each as high performing, moderately performing, low performing but has potential, and low performing. This exercise is designed to identify opportunities to recalibrate existing resources (time, money, and space) in order to implement new strategies in the enrollment plan.
- ❖ **Leadership support and investment.** While you should always search for opportunities to recalibrate existing resources before considering new investments, enrollment

management is a resource-intensive enterprise, and new investments will inevitably be required. As appropriate, counsel senior leaders on the strategic investment of new resources. The advice should include the potential ROI related to investments as well as the probable consequences of choosing not to invest.

Leading Change

Successful SEM initiatives have **multiple enrollment champions** across organizational boundaries and at varying position levels within the institution's hierarchy. These advocates often lead by example. Some are more vocal and visible. Irrespective of their stature within the institution, they represent a critical element in adopting a SEM culture, and overcoming resistance to change. As *Figure 1* illustrates, SEM objectives are often contrary to the underpinnings of an academic culture. This creates natural tensions that must be addressed through effective change management practices. Enrollment champions can be instrumental in working through these tension points.

Figure 1: Natural Tensions

Academic Culture		SEM Objectives
Autonomous	⟷	Common good
Discipline-focused	⟷	Systems-focused
Unit-oriented	⟷	Integration
Cognitive dissonance	⟷	Buy-in
Academic freedom	⟷	One voice
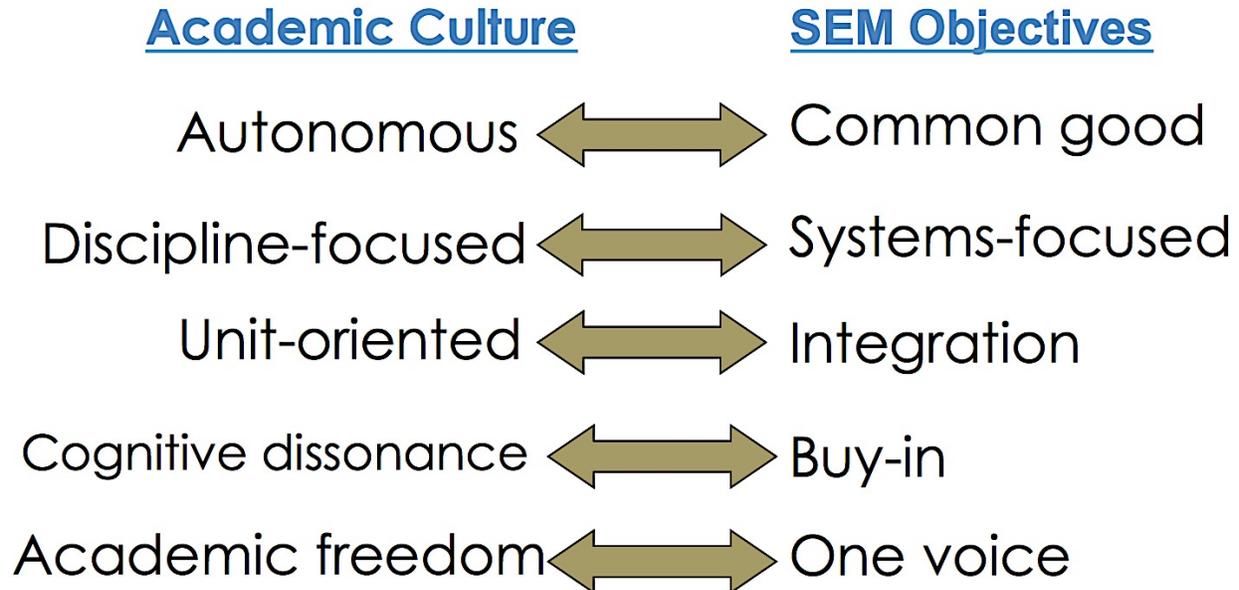
Earlier in this chapter the importance of developing **a sense of urgency** was mentioned. Acclaimed author, James Belasco, uses a metaphor of a baby circus elephant to explain the nature of organizational change in his book, *Teaching the Elephant to Dance* (Belasco, J. A., 1990). The metaphor starts with the elephant staked and shackled in the same spot, where

is learns to walk in circles. As it grows stronger and capable of pulling the stake from the ground, it remains in the same position. Dr. Belasco describes this act as being comfortable with the status quo, much like people in organizations. It is not until the circus tent is on fire that the elephant breaks free from its restraints and moves. He posits that organizations and people are much the same. They need a compelling sense of urgency to embrace change. Certainly, there are ample trends in higher education today to convey a sense of urgency.

Being overly heavy handed with the approach or message will be counterproductive. Instead, tell a well-orchestrated story consistently over time. Provide sound bites of data and research to support your claims. Share anecdotes and the voice of students to further substantiate your position. Sometimes, peer comparisons also will get the attention of your colleagues. As your storyline unfolds, identify advocates for your cause, power brokers who need to be influenced, and anticipated resisters. Find the points of leverage that will resonate best with each of these groups. Ultimately, the path to overcoming resistance and securing buy-in is through education and transparent communication. Where possible, find ways for these stakeholders to participate in the change process. This is how they will eventually become invested in the change ahead.

The **reasons change efforts fail** are numerous. However, the most common include: misunderstanding resistance because in a higher education setting resistance to any meaningful change should be expected, faulty mental maps that exist within the academy, assuming obvious or simple solutions will remedy complex problems, underestimating the power of symbolic leadership actions and behaviors, being impatient for large scale change to occur, experiencing an attrition of successes, and giving up prematurely. Be mindful of these potential hazards as you manage the change process.

Lastly, inspire a campus-wide focus on improving the student experience. The benefits of said focus for students and the institution are readily apparent but the personal benefits for each employee may be cloaked in SEM jargon and the respective requirements placed on them relative to supporting this new initiative. Many of them already feel stretched thin, and this is just one more thing to add to a demanding workload. So, you must find ways to convey the value of the effort for them at an individual level (e.g., better students, improved work conditions, job stability, the possibility of salary increases). People, in general, are motivated by changes that will positively impact their lives.

Performance Management

Management guru, Peter Drucker, is often recognized for saying that "you can't manage what you can't measure." Indeed, performance management is a painstaking but essential task. Almost every time I visit a campus, I observe a plethora of enrollment activities. However, when I ask implementation owners, "How do you know what is working and what is not," I often get a "deer in the headlights" look. No enrollment effort is strategic without these insights.

Measuring performance implies that the SEM plan is organic and dynamic in nature, as it should be. As part of the SEM plan, there are typically high-level KPIs and effectiveness measures—what I refer to as **lag indicators** of success. These frequently include funnel reports with the number of inquiries, applicants, admits, depositors, and new enrollees for prospective students as well as yield rates between each of these stages. For current students, lag indicators include year-to-year and term-to-term retention rates and graduation rates. Such lag indicators are useful in determining the overall effectiveness of the SEM plan; however, they do not reflect how individual strategies within the plan are performing.

For that reason, you should identify and measure **lead indicators** associated with each strategy. By systematically measuring lead indicators, the institution will be positioned to continuously improve the SEM plan over time. Examples of lead indicators for prospective students are as follows:

❖ **Student search:** Number of inquiries produced, responses to specific calls to action, and yield at each stage of the enrollment funnel
❖ **Recruitment Outreach:** Number of inquiries generated, inquiry yield, and an admissions counselor ROI assessment
❖ **Campus visits:** The number of campus visitors, visitor satisfaction, and the impact of the visit on decisions to enroll
❖ **Communications:** Open rates, click-through rates, and responses to specific calls to action
❖ **Advertising:** Readership or number of viewers; responses to specific calls to action; cost per inquiry, applicant, and enrolled student; and an image study

With respect to current students, some available lead indicators are listed here. Many of these indicators are tracked and analyzed through retention management systems for the purpose of early intervention.

- ❖ Attendance at orientation
- ❖ Participation in advising sessions
- ❖ Class attendance
- ❖ Course drops
- ❖ Transcript requests
- ❖ Student engagement in and outside of class
- ❖ Amount of loans and unmet financial need
- ❖ Utilization of student supports

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, lead indicators can be leveraged to determine which strategies are high performing, moderately performing, low performing but have potential, and low performing. This information can be used to refine the plan and the strategies within it. Simple. Right?

The problem that most institutions experience is that performance measurement is left to the implementers, who do not have the requisite time and, possibly, expertise to accomplish the task. A sound investment for any institution is creating (if one does not already exist) an **enrollment analyst position** to focus solely on performance measurement. This investment pays huge dividends—allowing the enrollment enterprise to be strategic and continuously improve performance.

Naturally, there may be many reasons a strategy is not producing the expected results. It could be the wrong strategy, or it may simply be implemented in the wrong way. Other questions to explore include: are the right people involved in strategy implementation; do they have competing priorities for their time; do they have the necessary skill sets and training; are they leveraging related technologies in the right ways; has adequate direction been provided to implementers; and are work conditions conducive to optimal for performance. Identifying a poor performing strategy is just the first step. You also must understand the **causation of poor performance** in order to effectively address it.

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CONCLUSION

It is not wrong to be obsessed with student enrollment. In fact, you must be obsessed to produce optimal enrollment results for your institution. The real question is how you manage that obsession. Will you be focused or distracted by every enrollment opportunity and challenge that surfaces? Having a strategic enrollment plan, as described in *Chapter Ten*, with broad-based stakeholder input is perhaps the best way to mitigate the threat of distraction.

But, do not underestimate the need for the socialization of SEM concepts and practices. This paradigm is not known by or natural for many of your colleagues. They must come to understand what you are doing and why. They must see the value of the effort as well as know how they can contribute in meaningful ways.

When I was an associate provost at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, I arrived to find three consecutive years of enrollment declines and an enrollment operation that was underfunded and not understood by the campus community. So I began a nine-month journey to raise awareness, create a sense of urgency, and socialize SEM concepts. I met with at least twenty-five different groups of stakeholders—really anybody who was willing to listen. At the end of the journey, I had to convince seven academic deans to give me the funds required to implement the SEM plan we had been developing. The cost was a million dollars. Every dean voted to support the plan because they came to understand that their academic division's success was fundamentally dependent upon our collective enrollment success.

That was not the end of the story. Being a good steward of their resources, a year later I was able to demonstrate how their investment yielded nine million dollars, which, among other things, paid for forty-two faculty positions. Guess what? They wanted to give me more money. Over the years we grew the enrollment and revenue substantially—ultimately, moving the institution in a very positive direction. That is the power of SEM and the power of people united around a common purpose.

SEM merely provides a means to an end—overcoming an enrollment challenge and/or realizing a bold vision for the future. It is a tool that leverages the strengths of an institution and offers a methodology to expose and address internal weaknesses. SEM provides lenses through which to analyze external threats and opportunities. Moreover, it is a systematic

method of thinking about the dynamics of an institution's enrollment—past, present, and future.

Navigating the enrollment context described in *Chapter One* and the disruption of higher education, as presented in *Chapter Two*, requires such a methodology. Understanding these factors and their potential implications for enrollment is paramount in today's rapidly changing environment.

Likewise, you must transcend the narrow view of your own college experience and adapt to the contemporary world of Millennial and Generation Z students. The attributes, expectations, and learner needs of these generations must inform how colleges and universities conduct business, deliver services, teach students, and implement enrollment and retention strategies if your institution is to thrive long-term. Calcified practices, outdated archetypes and mental models, as well as the proverbial "death grip" on "the way things have always been done" will result in an institution's downward spiral toward closure, merger, or at least, the dilution of institutional relevance in the emerging landscape of higher education.

As suggested in *Part Two* of this book, academic relevance is the foundational cornerstone of an institution's position in the new world order. How you choose to respond to the changing educational ecosystem will, in large measure, determine the image of your school, how it is valued by the outside world, and ultimately, what difference it will make in the lives of students and in society. So, academic offerings must be innovative and aligned with the needs of students and industry. This includes the curriculum, teaching methodologies, modalities of instructional delivery, and how student learning occurs.

Reengineering strategies for marketing, student recruitment, retention, and progression designed for Millennials and Gen Zers is almost as important. Even the best strategies must be modified to deliver optimal results. For this reason, enrollment managers must be innovative, take calculated risks, focus on the students you serve and will serve in the future, leverage existing and emerging technologies to support enrollment efforts, and use data and research to guide strategies.

Finally, effective enrollment planning and implementation are essential to success. With so many competing priorities, it is challenging to commit to the due diligence required. However, as Benjamin Franklin famously said, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail."

Strategic enrollment planning followed by sound implementation practices will yield results far greater than the ad hoc execution of a multitude of disjointed, half-baked strategies.

Whether you are just beginning a SEM journey or reimagining an existing SEM effort, the insights offered throughout this book will help you manage the student enrollment obsession toward positive ends. Be strategic and retain your focus and resolve. Your institution's vitality and relevance depend on it.