THE HISTORY OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

PART ONE

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INTRODUCTION

The Changing Landscape of Higher Education

There's little doubt that the landscape of American higher education has changed. Long gone is the heyday of college-for-everyone, where due to a number of federal programs, as well as affordability and accessibility, students flocked to colleges. Admittedly, the high point lasted for decades; in the years following World War II, programs like the GI Bill—not to mention a thriving economy unparalleled in U.S. history—allowed a far broader segment of the population to attend college. Over ten million veterans alone took advantage of the subsidized tuition, books, and living expenses that led to a massive increase of value in not only the university system of the country, but in the resulting boom in the nation's economy as well. After all, an educated populace meant a thriving one. Developments in American science, manufacturing, and literature, to name a few, soared. Our moon landing would likely not have been possible without this dramatic infusion of degree-bearing professionals.

Not only did students attend college en masse, they could likewise afford to. The same held true for the baby-boom generation, who could now boast college enrollment as one of the newly ostentatious displays of the middle class. This "massification" of American higher education extended well into the mid-1970s. Many other historical factors, from Civil Rights to the Women's Rights movement, with its attendant Title IX legislation, allowed college access to students across racial and gender lines. This period also saw a burgeoning increase in part-time and nontraditional students.

Naturally, the number of educational institutions increased in order to keep pace with the swelling bank of students seeking, among other things, a chance at a better life and—increasingly—a better job. Between 1960 and 1970, 521 new institutions were founded, and by the mid-1970s the total number of colleges and universities had grown by more than 50 percent; with more colleges comes more faculty, naturally, and in the fifteen years between 1960 and 1975, full- and part-time faculty nearly *tripled* in size from 236,000 to 628,000 (Gumport et al 10-12). In light of rapidly increasing enrollments, and the attendant need for administration, states like California went on to found

state systems of education that incorporated the newly-created two-year community colleges, state colleges, and research universities under one massive umbrella—and all while keeping the cost to the student low.

In short, more people were searching for more opportunity, and higher education in America came to be seen—and continues to be seen by many—as the golden key to that opportunity. With the increase in a diverse student body, universities summarily diversified as well, offering varied majors and degrees. Federal funding helped lay the foundation for research institutions, and the number of Ph.D.'s multiplied in accordance with the newfound emphasis on science, math, and engineering that came in the wake of the Space Race and the Cold War. By the mid-1970s, enrollment in colleges had increased five times in size since 1951 (Gumport et al 2). Though they didn't have the same terminology then as now, this growth would soon prove to be a "bubble" of epic proportions.

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Tuition, of course, has always been a key factor in the decision to go to college. The GI Bill was a blessing for returning veterans, but for the following generation things were different. One of the milestones of the issue of college tuition was the introduction of the federal student financial aid programs throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. Whether it came in the form of grants, low-interest loans, or work-study programs, federal aid was a deciding factor in opening doors for low income and minority students who had heretofore not had access to academia. African-Americans, in particular, took advantage of the new opportunities; between 1964 and 1972, the population of African-Americans between the ages of 18-24 attending college more than doubled to 20%, and by 1975 almost 20% of the 18- to 24-year-old Hispanic Americans were enrolled in higher education (Gumport et al 6).

Because of the growth, especially, of state school systems, higher education more and more was defined as a democratic right that deserved widespread public support. With enrollment increasing, the American people continued to see college as a "public good" through the late-1980s. But change was coming, and the changes that came are still being reckoned with today. The 1997 study, *The United States Country Report: Trends in Higher Education from Massification to Post-Massification*, points out two things that began a shift in how we both think about and pay for the college experience.

The first change came in increasing numbers of matriculating students, who tended to think of themselves as workers and homemakers before students, and they tended to see college in terms of economic benefits. College, in short, became a consumer affair, where the student "consumer" was purchasing products in the form of classes and degrees.

Secondly, tuition at both private and public institutions began to rise sharply, increasing ten-fold between 1965 and 1994 (Gumport et al 27-28). This problem coupled with the fact that both students and parents had increasingly begun to doubt the economic return on an expensive education, especially when the American job prospect was beginning to erode. With state funding and per-student spending falling precipitously, there is concern not only for the future of student enrollment in higher education, but also for the future of higher education itself.

Add this to the new market pressures being exerted on education—increased competition for student dollars, particularly with new, for-profit colleges—coupled with the public's resistance to tuition increases and eroding faith in the institution, and the situation for many American colleges, both public and private, becomes dire. Students, when they do go to school, are increasingly market-driven themselves; according to data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, between 1970 and 1993 three distinct degrees increased substantially: business administration, health and related sciences, and communications. Unsurprisingly, each is intimately linked to a rising need in the marketplace. Which is to say, students are thinking of college in terms of *jobs*.

The bottom line is this: the post-war educational boom has created a large number of colleges and universities, each of which are now competing in an open marketplace for an increasingly scant resource: students—and student dollars. It's easy to liken this boom to the housing boom of the early 2000s, where houses were built faster than occupants could fill them. As it is with the neighborhoods of empty houses scattered across the country in the wake of the burst housing bubble, so it is with empty seats in college classrooms. These students, it's important to note, are not at all like their parents, or even their grandparents, both of whom likely enjoyed the gift of a reasonably-priced education that provided huge dividends. These students, beginning with Millennials, now have a degree of power that a lot of campuses don't—or won't—appreciate: the power of choice. Like the matriculating students of decades prior, these new students are more likely to think of themselves as customers buying a product, and they look at the variety of campuses as if they were products on a shelf. They are also increasingly, as we shall see, incredibly tech savvy.

We are just now emerging—if we are indeed emerging at all—from the Great Recession. Recall that the GI Bill and the huge growth of the educational system followed on the heels of the Great Depression. Times were different then: the economy, coming off war production, was strong; housing was relatively affordable; and in many ways, what colleges had to contend with in enrollment was far less sophisticated. But today's economy has left bubble after bubble deflated, particularly in housing. Jobs, especially in the manufacturing sector, have largely vanished. The prospective student of today knows this, and they have a profound lack of idealism.

The Lumina Foundation's "Goal 2025," in this light, seems noble. Taking a goal set by President Obama, the Foundation set their goal at no less than 60% of Americans holding high-quality two- or four-year degrees, which will mean producing 16 million more graduates than at current rates. The first hurdle will be to get those students enrolled—but where?

As Frank Newman and Lara K. Couturier point out in their article "Rhetoric, Reality and Risks," higher education is clearly shifting away from the public sector to a competitive market, forcing colleges to rely on external revenue, competition for funding and, most importantly, competition for students; they contend that colleges should "recognize that change (in the form of the market as in other dimensions) is coming—in fact, to some degree it is already here. Whether we like it or not, whether we are prepared or not, it has entered the academic scene" (61-62).

The problem many colleges face is not, as one might imagine, strictly an academic or even administrative problem. It is, in light of current economic trends, a marketing problem. Not only is America's "Generation Z" increasingly pessimistic of the role of college in their lives, but their parents are as well. After all, the cost of college falls largely on the parents. It is perhaps a dream of most, if not all, American parents of a potential college student—many of whom will be first-generation college students—that their child will attend a respectable college without graduating under a burden of debt. Indeed, the noble idea of the federally-subsidized college loan has become part of the problem: an ever-escalating number of college graduates today are beginning their professional lives—that is, if they get a job at all—with staggering debt, a debt that has surpassed the accumulated debts of credit cards in this country.

According to a recent study by The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS), the average debt of 2012 college graduates had swelled to $29,400, a 25% increase since the study was last done in 2008. And tuition, as nearly everyone knows, is continuing to increase, without any sign of stopping. The task of colleges, in terms of marketing, is first to think of themselves as marketers—to

think of themselves, essentially, as sales people. Although this can be seen as a shift in tactics or responsibilities for many admissions departments, the fact remains that in today's market economy, students have the ultimate choice. Schools may as well be lined up along a shelf, though the real marketplace has rendered the metaphor of "shelf" obsolete, for the one marketplace students are intimately familiar with abides on the Internet.

The Internet has, without a doubt, changed the face of the American economy. With giants like Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Target, or just about any major retail Goliath using the Internet for browsing, shopping, ordering, and delivery, the idea of the college search has likewise changed forever. But it's also the sense of ease and speed that the Internet allows us, students-as-potential-customers included, which has changed the face of how we choose among schools. Although the days of the recruiter showing up at the high school cafeteria are not completely gone or obsolete, the importance of a strong and clear Internet presence is surging. Colleges have, for better or worse, come to realize this.

Today's high school senior is far more likely to go to Google rather than an admissions representative at a college fair. Thus, it is the college's website that carries most of the weight of the pitch. A user-friendly website is imperative, but not every college has had the personnel or finances to effect a change in their web presence. Social media, too, is crucial; Facebook has surpassed MySpace in users and clicks, and the front running campuses have made a note of this and, ultimately, set up an account. Add in Twitter, YouTube (where many college students have posted their own, homemade videos about their college), Instagram and others, and the fact that smart phone use is skyrocketing, and college admissions officers should see that what is needed today is a complete and total paradigm shift in how we reach out to potential college applicants and their parents (parents, after all, are frequent users of social media and search engines, too).

But another paradigm shift is required in order for a college to get clear on what, exactly, it is selling. A quick look over numerous college websites shows very similar forms of "branding": student-to-faculty ratios, financial aid packages, opportunities for student clubs, and so on. The problem is, every college has those things, and though Harvard and Yale may never have problems with establishing their brands, the great majority of today's universities and colleges (many of whom, you'll remember, sprang up in the wake of the Second World War) need to contend with their own, unique image.

THIS IS WHERE ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT COMES IN.

PART ONE

One Grand Design

In institutional legend, it is Jack Maguire of Boston College who is generally credited with establishing the term "enrollment management"—and this back in the mid-1970s. At the time, Boston College, which had long been seen as a commuter college for locals, was struggling. The number of graduating high school seniors was falling (25% nationally, and 45% in New England alone), and the college was mostly drawing what students it did have from Massachusetts, New England, and the Mid-Atlantic region. Boston College was trying to increase its prestige, but despite an increase in merit scholarships and with an 80% acceptance rate, the college was faltering.

In 1973, under the leadership of Executive Vice President Frank Campanella, things began to turn around when the college began intensive fiscal planning, largely under his leadership and that of former assistant physics professor and Dean of Admissions, Records and Freshman Financial Aid, Jack Maguire, who together laid out what would become the single most important concept in college recruitment. In a Fall 1976 article published in Boston College's alumni publication, Bridge Magazine, Maguire described *enrollment management* as "a process that brings together often disparate functions having to do with recruiting, funding, tracking, retaining, and replacing students" (16). Several of the core components of the accompanying student information systems, with their technologies, were marketing admissions, research & information flow, market prediction, and financial aid strategies (Epstein 2-4).

Maguire was right in his seeing the way the wind was blowing in what was becoming an increasingly competitive environment—really, a complex market. Then, as later, the academic community disliked the idea of marketing, a term that seems unnatural in the context of higher education, or education in general. Maguire foresaw the flagging application and enrollment rates and huge deficits that loomed in the future for what he called the "less fortunate colleges and universities" (16). He could look at, say, the plunging birth rate that was naturally—as time has proved—leading to a decrease in students eligible for college. He also foresaw what has clearly come to pass: a generation of young people who see only escalating costs for college without the guarantee of a

career payoff. But in light of the various "disparate fields" that made up the preliminary enrollment management idea, Boston College, he noted, was "on the leading edge of the growing movement to reduce fragmentation by systematizing and integrating these fields into one grand design" (16).

Colleges have become, as he figured they would, more comfortable with the idea of marketing because, for one, their livelihood was threatened, but also because they have come to understand the concept of marketing in a more sophisticated manner. The school was not, he suggested, becoming a mere salesman or, worse, a "huckster," but was instead using enrollment management as a way to merge the strength of the institution with the needs of the consumer—whom he defined, parenthetically, as a "student." A long range plan, he continued, could help bring an institution's goals and objectives into sharp focus, then all the institution had to do was to align the best students, the ones who best fit those goals and objectives, with the institution. "The task of a good admissions operation," he wrote, "is to communicate these strengths to the student marketplace in a forthright and persuasive fashion" (16).

He also put forth nascent ideas of what we now call data. One thing Boston College did, for example, was to send out annual marketing questionnaires to all accepted applicants, asking pertinent questions such as: who or what got them interested in Boston College? What factors influenced their decisions to attend or else go elsewhere? The surveys were analyzed, trends identified, and the admissions strategy adjusted to accommodate the newfound data (17).

One particularly important piece of data they found—and one that is ever more relevant today, in fact, in light of what has come to be known as the "experience economy"—was the knowledge that the two strongest reasons students ultimately decided on Boston College was location—the city of Boston itself—and the attractiveness of its campus. So what did the college do about this? They displayed images of the city of Boston prominently in its literature, alongside colorful campus photos (17).

The result? An increase in campus tours and on-campus interviews. What this "intensive data research" led to was, frankly, success. "By adopting a marketing orientation," Maguire concluded, "Boston College now has a much more sharply honed understanding of students' perceptions of our position among our competitors. We can now pinpoint, and better influence, the sequence of decisions that determine the final investment (of four years) and $20,000 in a college education" (17).

Surprisingly, Maguire made one discovery that is likewise as important today as ever: the importance of databases. "To understand and control this complex flow," he argued, "reliable computerized information systems are essential…most important of all, the coordination of data retrieval, with analysis and timely decision-making based on that data, must be maintained…" (18). He also recognized that students were becoming increasingly interested in an education geared toward a career, an issue that was fast leaving traditionally liberal arts colleges floundering. The college existed to serve these students, and knowing how to serve them would lead, naturally, to a radical reorganization of the organization's mission and structure—but not necessarily by abandoning its principles.

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As for financial aid, Maguire saw the need to implement strategies in funding that would attract—and retain—a broad sample of students. At the time, approximately 40% of Boston College's student body was not finding its financial needs met. Many of the financial aid practices prevalent then, he wagered, "will be called into serious question" (19). This is even more important today in the post-Recession aftermath.

Interestingly, one of the main problems with enrollment management at the time, concerned students who had ended up in Boston College for the wrong reasons or should never have been there at all, "either because they were never properly motivated or there was a basic mismatch between them and the University community" (20). This idea leads to a much different idea of the admissions funnel—how can an institution attract not just students, but the *right* students? Again, his answer was data and metrics. In the end, Boston College began doubling its application rates while at the same time decreasing its acceptance rate—thus effectively flaunting its prestige. And Jack Maguire has gone on to found his own successful consulting business.

In the intervening time, Enrollment Management has evolved to meet the new demands of the university and student marketplace of the 21st century. Thomas Huddleston Jr., in his article on enrollment management, charts the evolution of the term, beginning with the first book about enrollment management, published in 1982, *Strategies for Effective Enrollment Management*, which defined the program as "an assertive approach to ensuring the steady supply of qualified students required to maintain institutional vitality" (65). Michael Dolence's 1993 *Strategic Enrollment Management: A Primer for Campus Administrators* broadened the definition to define enrollment management as "[a] comprehensive process designed to help an institution achieve and maintain

the optimum recruitment, retention and graduation rates of students . . . [a]n institution-wide process that embraces virtually every aspect of an institution's function and culture" (qtd. In Huddleston 65). Huddleston goes on to define enrollment management thus:

> *Optimally, an institution's enrollment is comprehensively developed and is based on a strategic, integrative plan that includes the identification, attraction, selection, encouragement, registration, retention, and graduation of targeted student segments. The quality of the students' collegiate experience is based largely on the academic environment, operational excellence of the institution's transition programs, student services, and personal development opportunities. Within this broad context, an enrollment manager's efforts are intended to shape and influence particular units that have significant impact on a student's decision to enroll, persist, and graduate. The strategic management of these units is important to an institution's growth, fiscal health, and student satisfaction (65).*

Enrollment management, as we know it, began in private colleges (typically liberal arts colleges suffering from the same problem as Boston College) but soon spread to public and two-year colleges as well. In 1997, Huddleston co-authored a national study which identified seven areas of enrollment management units, several of which concern us here (as they did Boston College): institutional research and planning, marketing, admissions and, to some extent, financial aid.

Focused planning and research begins the process. "An integrated research and planning effort," says Huddleston,

> *can enable colleges and universities to remain sensitive to the marketplace and carefully assess external social trends and internal strengths and weaknesses, relative to the attraction of new students... An institutional research effort manages and provides relevant data including...historical trends, registration statistics, student characteristics, and enrollment patterns and projections... For example, discovering what prospective and current students perceive to be important as well as the corresponding level of satisfaction is essential (66-67).*

Admissions offices have applied marketing principles and strategies to formulate plans that, among other things, "create institutional awareness, identify student demographics, project student demand, and develop enrollment and retention plans (67)." This process is, of course, data driven.

The admissions office today, Huddleston continues, deals with "an environment of rising tuition costs, the special interests and needs of the institution, and the competitive marketplace for students" (67). They must generate interest in the institution, identify and contact the potential

pool of applicants, maintain contact with the applicants to ensure they remain interested in the institution—via coordinated programs and activities—and encourage enrollment through quality customer service.

Colleges are well aware of the fact that cost has an enormous influence on a potential applicant's perspective of college choice. Colleges can enhance the value of their "product" and educational experience through tuition pricing and financial aid packages.

A quick Google search of "enrollment management" will pull up not only articles and the requisite Wikipedia entry but reams of college offices dedicated to it. As Jim Black points out in his article "Defining Enrollment Management: The Structural Frame," the enrollment management organization has been structured into the university system thoroughly and has, as he has it, "matured"; according to Black, the very language embedded in the institutions—integrating within the institution, imbedded in institutional planning, fusing with academic enterprise and so on—demonstrates the new organizational enterprise of the 21st century university and college (4-5). "All of this suggests," he claims, "that the enrollment management organization of the future will be more agile and market responsive" and will "permeate every aspect of the campus and serve as catalyst for institutional change" (5).

Today's college administrators are finding that adequately marketing their campuses, programs, Greek life, and Study Abroad programs to be a huge drain on their resources. Many colleges—especially smaller, regional, four-year institutions—are beginning to outsource these marketing decisions. The field of marketing is expanding quickly, and many of the concepts of 21st century marketing are entirely applicable to today's college marketing ventures. It's up to either colleges—or the companies that recruit on their behalf—to keep abreast of these trends.

One important idea, as Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore lay it out, is the notion of the "experience economy." In the same way that Starbucks strives to create a home-away-from-home in their corner shops, colleges need to consider what "experience" it is that they are selling. As Robert A. Sevier points out in an article for University Business, what colleges need to attend to in their admissions campaigns is the fact that "What colleges sell, most often, is the sum of all the experiences that students…have while attending and the opportunities they have when they leave. In other words, we sell experiences." Now those Study Abroad programs, as well as "green" residence halls, and proximity to major urban areas the college touts seem much more focused.

Of course, this is exactly what Boston College figured out: the actual place, Boston, as well as the campus, was what most impressed students; therefore, it became a main selling point. Just as Disney engineers every customer experience, postsecondary institutions engineer and reengineer processes like campus visits, orientation, and registration to ensure not only student success but, essentially, customer satisfaction (Black 6).

After all, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, citing a report by Moody's Investors Service, shows that the majority of higher-education institutions are in grim straits, too dependent on tuition, for one, as well as auxiliary income (much of which comes traditionally from alumni and endowments), and state support which has, as the news has amply demonstrated, plummeted. Whether this majority can weather the economic downturn and, in addition, save face with an increasingly dissatisfied public, remains to be seen, but much of this survival is based, simply, on how well higher education can reach out to the public.

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And this is especially crucial in a time where parental concerns over tuition, especially, are increasing. A survey conducted by *Inside Higher Ed* in conjunction with Gallup researchers found that the concerns are directly affecting many four-year liberal colleges, the bulk of the higher-ed institutions seeing their bottom lines sag. "Parents are also likelier to see vocational certificates than liberal arts degrees as leading to good jobs for their children," Scott Jaschik reports, "and they view job preparation as the top role for higher education." Any discerning mind will quickly see a "value proposition" here: the importance of outcome in a family's decision to enroll a student in college. This value proposition, in addition to several others, is a point that good enrollment managers not only research but also actively uses in their student enrollment campaigns.

The purpose of this book, then, is to show that as enrollment professionals continue to think differently about enrollment management, they must also look at their enrollment management partner differently. Capture Higher Ed was founded on the premise that in the 21st century, enrollment management can be not only multifaceted in its approach, but can be thought of as a blend of strategic use of data and the art of the recruitment process.

Today, "enrollment management" has become Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM). The 1980s and 1990s brought new challenges to admissions offices: budget crises, the changing student demographics and the changing perception, as noted before, of the public towards the institution of higher education. "The increasing complexity of the higher education environment," chimes Michael G. Dolence, "requires the incorporation of the admissions office into a more comprehensive conceptualization of enrollment issues called Strategic Enrollment Management," a concept that continues to evolve. "Simply defined," he says, "strategic enrollment management is a comprehensive process designed to achieve and maintain the optimum recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of students, where optimum is defined within the academic context of the institution" (71-72).

SEM is, in brief, a flexible structure that can be refined to fit an institution's mission. Dolence offers seven key words that further define SEM: it must be *comprehensive*, involving all levels of an institution from academic affairs to landscaping, anything that affects a student's perception of the school; it must be *designed*, with well-articulated purpose, scope, and expectations designed to meet goals and objectives; it must *achieve* and *maintain* its benchmarks into the future because SEM is a sustained effort; it deals with *optimum* enrollment, balancing the appropriate capacity of students without sacrificing quality; finally, it concerns itself with *recruitment* to influence a student favorably in his or her decision to attend, and then works toward *retention* of the student, i.e. guiding them through to eventual success (72-73).

ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT CAN BE NOT ONLY MULTIFACETED IN ITS APPROACH, BUT CAN BE THOUGHT OF AS A BLEND OF DATA AND THE ART OF THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS.

Dolence goes on to articulate SEM's primary goals. The most important, perhaps, at least at the outset, is to stabilize enrollments—at the very least, stopping the decline of enrollments, but also to stabilize enrollments within certain majors, say, and to smooth the fluctuations the institution may find itself in from year to year. Linking academic programs with SEM, as another goal, removes the element of chance from enrollment in certain programs, serving instead to stabilize departments in their student numbers that, consequently, can stabilize their budgets and curriculum development, among other things. Finances, of course, will be stabilized via long-term planning, increasingly necessary in an environment of what amounts to consumer pessimism over the "product" of higher education—most notably in the ever-escalating tuition costs.

Beyond budget, he continues, SEM optimizes resources, stabilizing the numbers of employees while focusing their efforts. SEM improves service, which is particularly resonant to applying students, as SEM promises to reduce paperwork, shorten waiting time and so on. This, obviously, improves quality of process. With the needed technological systems in order to operate the databases, SEM improves access to information. In addition to that data comes a reduction of vulnerability to environmental forces, meaning staff can monitor and evaluate what's going on in the world as it relates to the pool of prospects. Finally, SEM allows institutions to evaluate their strategies and tactics that lead, necessarily, to improved performance.

To sum up, SEM "focuses on what is best for students and how to ensure their success while addressing all aspects of the institution's mission" (Wilkinson et al 6). It all begins with the institution's mission, and from there the sky's the limit. With a data-driven SEM program in place, institutions can streamline not only their recruitment process, making their institution far more appealing to potential students, but retain them all the way through the process to graduation and produce alumni who are proud to support their institution financially and otherwise.

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