

# ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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## WHAT VICE PRESIDENTS FOR ENROLLMENT NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FINANCIAL AID

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In the enrollment management model of organization where admissions and financial aid both report to the same senior enrollment officer, it is not unusual in many small, private, liberal arts colleges for that officer to have more of a background in admissions than financial aid. Indeed, in many instances, the enrollment management model may actually have originated with (or least that may be the perception) “putting financial aid under admissions.”

In such cases, it is not unusual to find the VP EM may have been a director of admissions and once in the new role continuing to be more engaged in admissions rather than financial aid. The VP EM will likely be less knowledgeable about financial aid, have less of an interest, or just be intimidated by the esoteric world of financial aid with its own obscure language, complicated processes, and confusing regulations.

The VP EM, therefore, relies on the financial aid director, but often feels that the

financial aid office is not supportive of the recruitment strategy. While the VP EM is focused on numbers, the financial aid officer has multiple masters to please besides the VP EM including government officials, auditors and staff in the business office. The VP EM may feel at the mercy of the financial aid officer because of a lack of knowledge preventing the right questions from being asked. The FAO may actually have policies and procedures that negatively impact enrollment and the VP EM must know enough to recognize when this is happening.

For the VP EM who feels financial aid challenged, there are a number of steps to take to prepare for effective oversight of the financial aid office. The first thing to realize is that in the world of financial aid it is not necessarily what you don't know that will get you – it is what you don't know you don't know. So, any VP EM needs to get to the point of knowing what they don't know!

First, get involved in the financial aid professional associations which are among the (see *What Vice Presidents Need to Know* p. 3)

## ANATOMY OF A SIGNIFICANT TUITION INCREASE

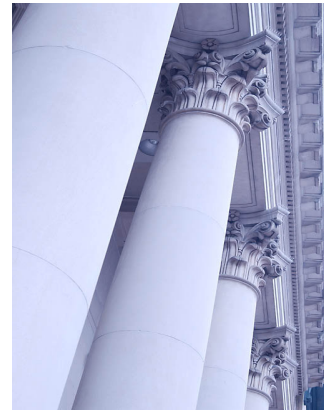
John W. Dysart  
President  
The Dysart Group, Inc.

Colleges and universities generally raise the price of tuition every year. While there are the rare exceptions, most institutions raise prices to deal with planned improvements,

annual increases levied on their own budgets by various vendors and the need to address salary adjustments and increases in benefit costs.

Sometimes, leaders need to consider approaches to pricing that are more (see *Anatomy* p. 2)

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## ANATOMY CONTINUED:

aggressive than typical. I worked with one Southern college that made the difficult decision to implement a significant increase in tuition in 2005.

The college leadership had held tuition increases to modest levels for a number of years. It was hoped that a tuition price consistently lower than most private colleges in the region might positively influence new student enrollments and retention. The commitment to hold tuition increases to a minimum did not result in increased new student enrollments or improved retention. It did create pressure on the budget over the years, particularly as the college still found it necessary to discount tuition by continually higher percentages, despite the modest tuition levels. The minimal tuition increases also changed the market position of the college in relation to other private institutions in the geographic region based upon price. The college found itself to be one of the low tier colleges both in “sticker price” and average net tuition.

Acknowledging that good decision-making with regard to pricing begins in the budget process, institutional representatives reviewed recent budgets. They established desired improvements for the college in accordance with the institutional strategic plan. Rather than establishing price level first and conforming the budget to the proposed price, they intentionally calculated the costs of initiatives designed to improve the educational product and proposed a price level that made long-term and short-term improvements achievable. The calculation reflected that, to make meaningful progress toward strategic goals, the college would need to increase tuition by 19% in one year.

Communication with institutional constituency groups was of paramount importance. Meetings with a variety of campus administrators, students, faculty representatives and Board of Trustee members were designed to explain the increase. Anticipating questions prior to the meetings and having conducted the appropriate research in advance made these encounters productive.

While communication was important, campus administrators were careful not to over-state the impact of the tuition increase. Campus constituents were informed of the change along with reference to the improvements the increase would fund—focusing on strategic plan goals. Campus leaders did not discuss percentage increases and did not tout the historical nature of the increase. This approach enabled campus administrators to avoid over-reaction on the part of constituent groups.

The tuition increase had significant implications for financial aid. This was recognized and the institutional financial aid award policy was adjusted to ensure that the increase would not negatively impact access or retention. This did not mean that the college increased financial aid for returning students to offset the tuition increase. Rather, all professional staff members in the Financial Aid Office were available throughout the cycle to meet individually with returning students if necessary and make case-by-case financial aid adjustments where warranted. The Financial Aid Office tracked returning student appeals, *recording fewer than one dozen*. Regarding new students, the college fine-tuned its strategy of meeting most need, by enforcing consistent guidelines which included a hierarchy of merit aid, external grants and loans.

Careful planning and communication contributed to the fact that the highest tuition increase in the history of this small, private, liberal arts college coincided with the largest number of new students in its history, the largest number of residential students in history, improved academic quality and the largest overall enrollment in the history of the college.

## WORKING WITH TELESERVICES VENDORS

Tom Wogan  
President  
Edge Teleservices

Not too long ago, the use of a teleservices vendor from outside the institution would have been unthinkable. Yet today, more and more of those responsible for increasing enrollment have realized that outsourcing offers a number of advantages. These include:

- being able to contact large numbers of prospective and currently enrolled students within a short time frame
- freeing up internal staff and student workers to focus on more critical tasks
- being able to turn calling “on and off” as needed, without dealing with personnel issues
- being able to make more calls per hour with dialing technology

(see *Working p. 3*)

## WORKING CONTINUED:

If you are considering using an outside calling firm, here are a few tips to make your first campaign a success:

- Make sure you have a “game plan” that addresses:
  - your budget
  - how to get data from your files to the vendor
  - your timelines
  - your confirmation process
  - your follow-up strategy
- Insist on digital recordings of all awards. Recordings can be very helpful for quality control.
- Monitor progress and quality regularly. Most vendors have the technology to allow you to listen in on calls. You can listen from any phone, anywhere.
- Make sure confirmation is meshed with your calling. The standard should be that a letter is mailed no more than 48 hours after each call. Can your teleservices vendor produce the letter? Even better!
- Don't miss opportunities down the road...consider callbacks.
- Insist on good training of vendor's agents. Make them your ambassadors. Also, test your vendor's agents on basic information about your school.

## WHAT VICE PRESIDENTS NEED TO KNOW CONTINUED:

best in higher education. There are state, regional and national groups. At least go to the state meetings and begin developing a network of financial aid folks that you can call on for advice. Also, attend one of the many workshops these groups offer. For instance, the Southern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SASFAA) offers a great summer workshop for new aid administrators.

Second, do the work! Let your admissions counselors handle folder reviews while you learn how to package. Start with freshman packaging (since financial aid makes a difference in college choice). By mastering packaging, you will find the pieces of the financial aid puzzle start to

Communicating with prospective students by telephone can be a powerful way to support the achievement of recruitment objectives. Telephone conversations can be held on a variety of topics including visits, financial aid, academic programs and invitations to group events.

Telephone calls can also be placed to returning students to assist in retention. There are always good reasons to communicate with new and returning students, but institutions do not always have the resources to conduct telephone campaigns on campus.

Following these tips will enable administrators to make good decisions when selecting a company to provide telephone outreach services.

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come together. It is the best and quickest way to learn how the different aid programs work and, more importantly, how they work together in a package. This will enable you to be more effective in dealing with prospective students and their families. It will give you a great tool in closing with a prospective student and securing that all important deposit.

Once you have more knowledge about the financial aid process you will be better prepared to make management decisions about financial aid that can impact your enrollment strategy. For instance:

The packaging policy: How financial aid is awarded and in what order can impact yield and expenditure levels.

(see *What Vice Presidents Need to Know p. 4*)

## WHAT VICE PRESIDENTS NEED TO KNOW CONTINUED:

**Forms:** Are all those forms really necessary? Your financial aid office may be requiring unnecessary paperwork that just makes the enrollment process more difficult.

**Verification:** Watch out for this one. Some aid offices require 100% verification or require students to complete the verification process prior to packaging. Neither policy is required by federal regulation and each delays the enrollment process.

**Setting work priorities:** Keep an eye on paper flow! Packaging students and encouraging them to complete their folders are the top priorities. You need to monitor this to make sure financial aid efforts are not getting diverted to other concerns. Completing files by the opening of school will enhance cash flow since financial aid can only be drawn down when all paperwork is complete. If you have a 90% plus file completion at the opening of school your business officer will love you! An important ally to be sure.

The key thing to remember is that financial aid offices are not trying to slow things down, but their training instills in them the inclination to be thorough and document. That is important but many financial aid offices do more than necessary and you need to know enough to keep things moving so that you can successfully enroll your class.

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## LEAVE NO MONEY BEHIND

Louis Dupart  
Associate  
Fleishman and Walsh, LLP

Colleges and universities are continually looking for new sources of funds. Naturally, people turn to Washington, D.C. and the federal appropriations process -- especially the Fund for Post Secondary Education (FPSE). But, like a field that has been plowed over and over, this source of funds is generating a lower yield because there are too many requests and not enough money. The answer is to target little used federal accounts that can be promising sources for funding. For example, federal money is available for highway and related infrastructure such as garages, sidewalks, overpasses, trails and bikeways, environmental clean up, capital building programs, historic preservation, technology upgrades, and outreach to local communities to name just a few.

The key to success is a well-orchestrated campaign. This begins with identifying the institution's specific needs including both capital and programmatic needs and then prioritizing the requests. Once this is done a careful triage has to be undertaken to ensure that the requests that are pursued are reasonable given the constraints on federal resources. Fortunately, since money is fungible, it can be moved around. This offers an institution the opportunity to fund a project for which the school has already allocated funds if that project either stands a higher chance of being successful or the normal funding amount is more significant than those on the priority list. Any money obtained for this project allows current funding to be freed up for another project.

Success is not guaranteed. The requesting institution needs some luck, but more importantly a Member of Congress or Senator who has the "juice" to get the request funded. This is not a question of being a Republican or a Democrat, but rather, is the Member someone who has the seniority, respect, committee assignment, or the "need" to generate the attention from the appropriations Committee Staff to fund the project. Need, in this context, is defined as the belief that funding the project will help the Member's popularity back home. Republican and Democratic leadership frequently fund projects in vulnerable or junior Members' districts to arm them with a quiver of projects to demonstrate that they are effective in helping their constituents.

Beyond finding a Congressional champion, the project must (see *Leave No Money Behind* p. 5)

## LEAVE NO MONEY BEHIND CONTINUED:

be well thought out and be presented in a user-friendly manner. Too often, schools send in a list of requests to their Members of Congress that are not well defined. This problem can be easily avoided by undertaking a dialogue with the Member of Congress and his staff. By developing a priority list early, usually in the fall, it is possible to meet with Staff and Member to obtain their thoughts on each project.

New entrants into the process need to introduce themselves by visiting Washington and meeting with the Member and Staff. Face to face meetings with top school representatives signal to the Member that the project is indeed a priority. It is an opportunity to clearly lay out why a particular project will help their constituents and ask for the Members support. Members do not like to say no. If the project helps an institution in the district and has the backing of the community, it makes it easier to say yes.

It is critical that the projects be shepherded through the process. This is both a procedural and substantive process. Procedurally, it is critical to meet the deadlines established by each office and the relevant Committees. Requests are often adjusted on short notice or even switched from one account to another at the last minute to increase the chance of success. One must be able to react quickly.

The foregoing is a basic plan, but, like building a home, it is a daunting process for those who want to do it themselves. Many institutions attempt it themselves and achieve limited success. It is relatively easy to get a grant of \$100,000 to \$250,000. The real money is obtaining total grants year-after-year of \$1 million or more.

A lobbyist who knows the process and has worked with colleges and universities is invaluable. They know the Members and their staff and can help refine the requests. They can help to "game" the requests to make it much harder for a Member to say no by placing them in categories that have both the highest chance of being funded as well as obtaining the largest amount possible. Their goal is to leave no money behind. They know the hidden paths to success and how to put the project back on track if it has gotten lost in the sea of requests each office gets each year. Indeed, each member of Congress receives hundreds of requests each year and is only able to fund a small number of them. The lobbyist is particularly helpful with smaller

institutions that are just starting to build relationships in Washington. Their experience and knowledge of the staffs and direct relationships with Members facilitates and expedites the relationship building process.

A good lobbyist will have a track record of success. Since their clients are a matter of public record, you can see for whom they have worked and you should ask for their track record. The best way to do this is to carefully examine their references and ask how they have fared over a series of years. Are they keeping clients for a number of years or simply flipping them from one year to the next, not providing quality service to any of them?

Washington is an important source of funding. It should not be overlooked; but it needs to be addressed by a systematic and well-organized campaign designed to yield maximum revenue over multiple years ensuring that no money is left behind.

## UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO LEAD ENROLLMENT MAN- AGEMENT OPERATIONS

Mike O'Grady  
Senior Vice President  
College Loan Corporation

The higher education industry has changed dramatically over the last thirty years. Separate offices devoted to financial aid, recruitment and retention have often been collapsed into enrollment management divisions.

The trend has been at some cost to financial aid professionals. In many cases, representatives in the Financial Aid Office no longer control the parameters of institutional scholarship and grant programs, even those based upon financial need. They are lucky to have a seat at the table as these programs are constructed but are still held accountable for their impact on expenditure levels regardless of their effectiveness. Award policies are often devised collaboratively within the enrollment management division and even financial aid processes and procedures are no longer under the sole auspices of financial aid professionals.

In reality, the problem is not the trend toward enrollment management. Collaborative approaches with regard to recruitment, retention and financial aid make sense. The real industry challenge is that so few financial aid professionals are promoted to leadership ranks in enrollment (see *Uniquely Qualified to Lead* p.6)

## UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO LEAD CONTINUED:

management. Vice Presidents for Enrollment positions are dominated by people with admission and recruitment experience. This is unfortunate for colleges and universities because many financial aid professionals are uniquely qualified to effectively lead enrollment management operations.

People do not like to openly talk about it, but there is a significant difference in the art of recruitment and the art of financial aid. Both can be taught and learned. The nuances of financial aid, however, are simply more complicated and more difficult to learn. While both professions involve knowledge and creativity, only financial aid professionals are subject to so much accountability from outside forces like state and federal regulators. Further, the rules are subject to change as soon as you learn them! The point is that a professional with detailed knowledge of financial aid is going to have an easier learning curve on recruitment and retention than a recruitment professional seeking to understand financial aid.

Enrollment management is data-driven. It requires an understanding of numbers, trends, yields and fund management. Financial aid people deal with these things everyday. They are comfortable with numbers—they have to be. They are detail-oriented and experienced in generating reports and monitoring expenditures. They are used to being accountable for the bottom line while balancing the needs for recruitment and retention.

Financial aid professionals generally have greater experience working with broad constituency groups. This is extremely important for enrollment managers. Certainly admission staff members work with prospective students and parents. Financial aid administrators work with prospective students and parents as well, along with currently enrolled students and parents, graduates, lenders, federal and state governments, faculty, business officers and more.

Detailed understanding of financial aid from all sources is so important in enrollment management. Control of institutional expenditures at private colleges and universities will often have more impact on the institutional budget than recruitment or retention. One must understand pricing options and the impact of pricing decisions on revenue and enrollment. It is clear that financial aid professionals are inherently more qualified to manage aid resources and meet institutional objectives regarding net revenue. Administrators in financial aid manage pricing decisions every year.

The point is not to criticize enrollment managers with recruitment experience. We must recognize, however, that we have a huge cadre of uniquely qualified individuals who do not seem to be given level opportunities to advance to leadership positions in enrollment management. College and university administrators should be doing more to identify enrollment managers from within the financial aid ranks. Perhaps more importantly, financial aid professionals should be much more proactive in seeking these leadership positions. Improved enrollment management clearly benefits the institution, but it ultimately serves students well.

## DEFINING ROLES IN ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

Dr. Earl Brooks  
President  
Tri-State University

The first step in successful implementation of an enrollment management plan is to clearly delineate responsibilities. Each division must understand its role in enrollment management.

The defining of roles and responsibilities begins in the Office of the President. The President is charged with setting the vision for what institutional leaders wish to accomplish. In addition to vision, the President must monitor overall implementation activities and ensure accountability in the process.

The Admission Office is very important. Representatives in the recruitment effort must achieve new student enrollment objectives in line with the strategic plan. New student enrollment goals are more than just headcount. They must also encompass minimum levels of academic quality as defined by SAT scores, ACT scores, high school grade point averages or other important indicators. Other new student characteristics can be equally important such as geographic source, ethnic diversity and ability to pay.

Presidents must make sure that appropriate reporting mechanisms exist to track recruitment progress throughout the cycle. Meaningful data analysis is important on an ongoing basis and annually.

Presidents must work with recruitment professionals to determine the appropriate goals, but Presidents must also ask these professionals to outline the (*see Defining p. 7*)

## DEFINING CONTINUED:

strategies and tactics that will be used to achieve the objectives. So often, recruitment efforts fail yet the same strategies and tactics are implemented again!

The Financial Aid Office contributes to the overall effectiveness of an enrollment management plan. Financial aid officers are charged with supporting both recruitment and retention through award policies, application procedures, the timeliness of awards and service to students and parents.

Financial aid officers must also be mindful of their duties regarding completion of folders in support of cash flow objectives. Processes and procedures should ensure timely disbursement for students and for the institution.

An effective financial aid process also involves working with students and families on financial planning. As the costs of higher education rise, financial planning becomes more important.

Presidents might also wish to examine the institutional award policy with the leadership in the Financial Aid Office to ensure that the policy is not structured in a fashion that complicates collection efforts or makes unreasonable payment plans.

Student Services must also be involved in the enrollment management plan. The professionals in the division should focus on co-curricular offerings that are responsive to student interests. There should be mechanisms available to determine appropriate activities. Activities can be a powerful influence for retention.

For residential campuses, the quality of housing and the experience of living on campus are critical. Student services staff members should have specific plans to continuously improve the residential experience for students. Offering an atmosphere suitable for fun, study and relationships can be a difficult balance.

Athletics plays a significant role at many colleges and universities. Establishing programs that are competitive and focused on graduating student athletes can be challenging. Presidents may wish to inquire annually about the specific plans on the table for achieving these difficult objectives. Athletic headcounts are also important for planning and budget. Ensure that the leaders in the athletic division have clear goals for recruitment as a function of sport and accurate measures for retaining student athletes.

It might be useful to make co-curricular transcripts part of the student services plan. Such transcripts are useful for students as they build their non-academic resumes while in school but can also be valuable for administrators as they quantify participation rates.

Individuals in the Business Office play a powerful role in enrollment management. Decisions regarding issues as obvious as pricing will influence other campus decisions on a myriad of topics related to product.

Business officers must be able to communicate with students and parents. Something as simple as timely and accurate billing can make a difference in recruitment and retention. Collaboration with other offices, including Admission and Financial Aid are required. Careful plans must be made with regard to collections. How are collections tracked? How often is success reviewed? What additional steps can be taken each year to improve collections?

The role of the faculty is arguably the most important. Few things are more important than a quality teacher. Teaching, however, must be tailored to the type of students recruited as part of the strategic plan.

The role of faculty in academic advising is extremely important. High quality advising can positively influence retention outcomes. Effective advising is a data-driven enterprise and must include tracking. Annual plans for outreach and continuous analysis can make a real difference.

Somewhat easy steps such as monitoring the pre-registration status of currently enrolled students and taking action to encourage students to complete the process will help.

Enrollment management is a broad and complicated concept. Colleges and universities can be overwhelmed into inaction. Presidents can positively influence the process by taking the first step and defining roles for the campus divisions.

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