

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 2

APRIL 1, 2017

NEXT UP FOR ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT: COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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President
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Enrollment management models have been implemented, at least to some extent, at most colleges and universities. Data-driven identification of prospective students, tracking of inquiries and applications, monitoring of communication and yield rates, marketing, strategic utilization of financial aid and well-planned financing options, along with retention and graduation plans have been commonplace.

This has been true across most sectors of higher education. In many instances, however, enrollment management models have not been introduced or fully integrated at community colleges.

Market realities are now making enrollment management approaches essential, even at the community college sector. Changing demographics, reductions in state subsidies for higher education, an improving economy and greater price sensitivity along with greater focus on return on investment in higher education are all influencing the college selection process, even at community colleges.

■ PUBLIC COLLEGE TUITION SUBSIDIES

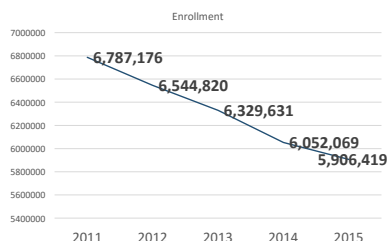
- Only **Five** States Increased Per Student Spending Over the Last Seven Years
- Nebraska Reduced Spending by \$121
- Louisiana Reduced Spending by \$3,906



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Enrollment at community colleges has historically been strong and peaked during the latest recession. Across the country, the number of students attending community colleges has declined significantly in recent years. Enrollment at community colleges has dropped by 13% since 2011.

■ COMMUNITY COLLEGE ENROLLMENT 2011-2015



A recent Inside Higher Education survey indicated that 88% of community colleges reported enrollment drops over the last two years.

These trends are important because community colleges still play a vital role in post-secondary education and in the economy. Adult learners comprise nearly 40% of total college enrollments and community colleges have served this population well.

ENROLLMENT MANAGER is a publication of **DWYER EDUCATION STRATEGIES, INC.** Inquiries and comments can be mailed to dwyereducation@aol.com. An electronic version of the newsletter is available at www.dwyereducationstrategies.com.

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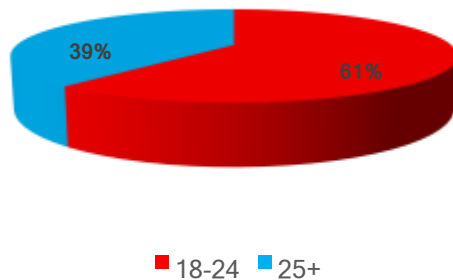
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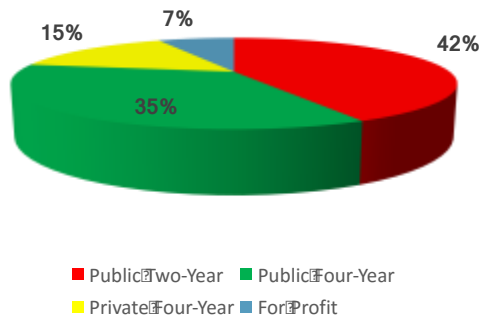
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■ UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT BY AGE



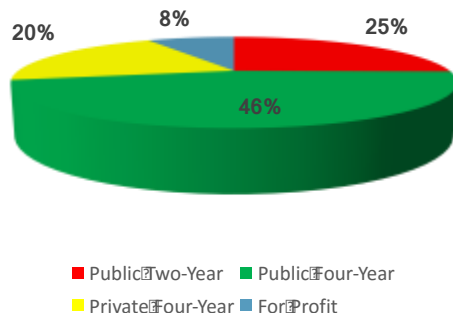
Community colleges enroll the largest percentage of part-time students in this country.

■ PT UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT BY SECTOR



Community colleges serve one-quarter of all full-time students enrolled in higher education.

■ FT UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT BY SECTOR



Enrollment declines at community colleges are placing many of them in a precarious situation. As the number of students drops, so does institutional net revenue and sometimes long-term viability.

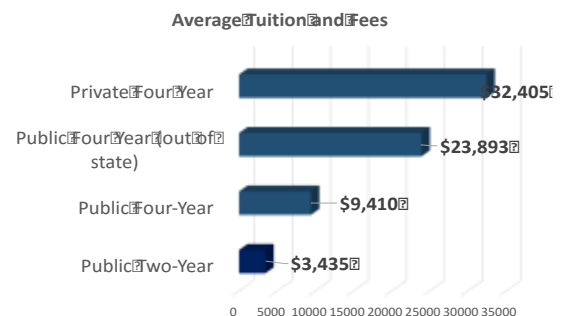
- Many states continue to retrench when it comes to subsidies which makes a difficult financial landscape even worse.
- Some community colleges are forced to cut institutional budgets and some have even been forced into staff, administrator and faculty layoffs.
- As a number of states face population decreases they are more often seeking economies of scale and considering closing or consolidating state-funded institutions.

It is imperative for leadership teams at community colleges to be aware of these challenging conditions and begin to re-think policies, procedures, strategies and tactics to mitigate their impact.

- **While community colleges have historically emphasized their comparatively low tuition and fee costs to secure enrollments, the new market realities demand much more.**

Tuition and fee rates at two-year public institutions vary significantly. Rates can fluctuate from a low of \$1,420 in California to a high of \$7,530 in Vermont. Regardless, the costs of attending community college are substantially lower than those in any other higher education sector.

■ AVERAGE TUITION RATES BY SECTOR 2015



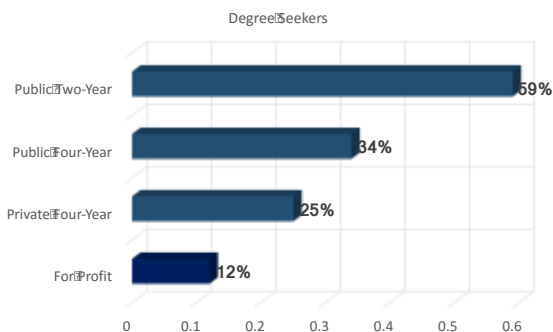
UP NEXT FOR ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT CONTINUED:

These lower costs, however, have not shielded the schools from weakened enrollment outcomes. While educating consumers on cost advantages remains important, it is critical to articulate a more specific value proposition. Two-year colleges must actively educate prospective students and families on how enrollment provides a meaningful return on investment, improved career prospects, higher salaries and enhanced preparation for an evolving employment scene.

- **Proactively emphasize the benefits of attending a low-cost institution to eliminate or greatly reduce aggregate student loan debt.**

Many families are concerned about student loan debt levels. Community colleges have a great advantage over other higher education sectors when it comes to the percentage of students with no student loan debt. While indebtedness most often reflects debt levels after only two grade levels, completing half of a four-year degree can still be advantageous in the marketplace even if students need to borrow for the final two years of their four-year degrees.

■ NO LOAN DEBT BY SECTOR



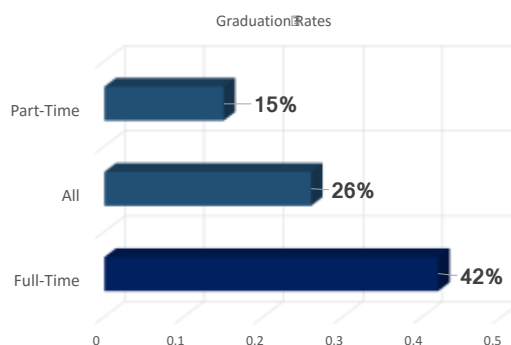
When addressing the topic of graduation rates at community colleges, focus on the graduation rates for full-time students since the outcomes are significantly better.

Community college graduation rates are often skewed by the inclusion of part-time students. Students enrolling part-time are significantly less likely to graduate.

Graduation rates are usually an important point of consideration for the families of traditional-aged students and four-year institutions enroll predominantly full-time students.

The following are the graduation rates as a function of enrollment status at community colleges:

■ GRADUATION RATES BY ENROLLMENT PATTERN



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UP NEXT FOR ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT CONTINUED:

- **Consider internal policies and procedures to make completion and graduation more efficient and cost effective.**

Take a close look at your internal rules regarding transfer credits and credits for lifetime experience. While keeping such rules academically sound, it helps to be as generous as possible to facilitate the path toward a degree or certificate. This can be an important selling point for prospective students.

- **Be deliberate in identifying prospective students. Place more emphasis on students directly out of high school.**

I have been surprised how many two-year schools do not take advantage of student search options with entities such as American College Testing (ACT), The College Board (SAT) or National Research Center for College and University Admissions (NRCCUA). Colleges and universities can purchase lists of prospective traditional-aged students who have either taken one of the standardized tests or completed a high school survey.

- **Establish a systematic communication plan for inquiries and applicants.**

Communicating with prospective students is vitally important. The communication, however, must be more than just view books, brochures, email campaigns and visit events.

- Be sure to include successful, employed graduates in your communication plan.
- Text messaging is more powerful than traditional email.
- Telephone outreach remains the most effective mechanism.

- **Introduce or increase the use of merit scholarships.**

Four-year colleges and universities have been using various forms of merit scholarships to attract student interest for decades. This is a tool often under-utilized by community colleges. I refer to “merit” scholarships loosely as scholarships can be offered to recognize myriad student attributes.

- **Reconsider utilization of institutional and/or endowed financial aid funds for merit/talent and to meet financial need.**

If funding is not available for merit recognition, repurpose endowed funds for this initiative. Keep in mind, however, that even at community colleges, it may be necessary to set aside some funds for students to meet financial need.

- **Review the college web site for emphasis on recruitment.**

Your web site can be an influential recruitment destination. Make sure that for the home page, and every section throughout the site, that the emphasis is on providing information to prospective students.

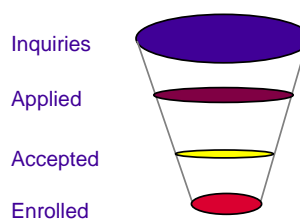
This is the appropriate venue to help make your value proposition that extends beyond low tuition costs and includes new career tracks, preparation for advancement and increased earning potential.

Use your site to discuss the benefits of lower student loan debt. The differences in monthly payments between two years of borrowing and four+ years of borrowing are substantial.

Demonstrate industry and employment trends in your area that coincide with your program offerings.

- **Check that your recruitment leadership team is using data-informed funnel analysis when making strategic and tactical plans.**

■ THE ADMISSION FUNNEL



UP NEXT FOR ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT CONTINUED:

Tracking and monitoring prospective student progression through the enrollment funnel is critical to inform the basics of the overall recruitment plan as well as day-to-day and week-to-week and month-to-month priorities.

- **Establish concrete recruitment goals as a function of counselor/recruitor.**

You must do more than agree upon an aggregate recruitment/enrollment goal. The objectives, whether tracked as headcount or credits, should be broken down and distributed as a function of individual recruiter/enrollment professional/admission counselor to bring individual accountability into the process.

- **Invest in professional development.**

Make sure to set aside funds to facilitate participation in professional development for your admission personnel. Think about attendance at recruitment learning events sponsored by organizations and associations beyond those strictly designed for community colleges.

- **Be more aggressive encouraging students to apply for financial aid.**

Your financial aid operation must assume primary responsibility for encouraging new and returning students to apply for financial aid. Simply packaging students who apply for financial aid is not enough in a competitive market when affordability is so important. Evaluate your institution's comprehensive plan to ensure that all students apply for financial aid early and complete the process well before the beginning of the next term.

- **Simplify the financial aid process.**

Review the current institutional process for applying for financial aid. Are there forms and steps that could be eliminated? Is your office making use of available technology to ease the application process? Designate a staff member outside of the financial aid office to apply and complete the process to evaluate customer friendliness.

- **Consider introducing or expanding athletic opportunities.**

Starting or expanding athletic offerings can be a great way to increase enrollment. While there are costs associated with athletics, proper introduction or expansion is generally worth the investment.

Now is the right time to start asking the specific questions about your enrollment management operation. These are challenging times for community colleges and the marketplace is likely to get even more competitive in the coming years. It is not too late to begin taking aggressive measures to implement proven enrollment management strategies and tactics to address demographic, resource and political obstacles. Such steps are important for your survival and for the students you serve.

ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP STARTS AT THE TOP: SETTING THE TONE FOR SUCCESS

Dr. Marylouise Fennell
Principal
Hyatt-Fennell

Dr. Scott D. Miller
President
Virginia Wesleyan College

Enrollment management remains the single most vital area of any college or university with a tuition-driven budget. As institutions revise their marketing strategies, develop retention programs, and upgrade campus facilities, parents and students remain in the consumer driver's seat. What's the value for their tuition dollar? What are the "extras" that a campus can offer? Which institutions offer the best financial-aid packages? Will graduates have a job waiting for them after four years of college?

To respond to these concerns and continue to build enrollment, the conventional wisdom is that admissions offices will have to work overtime to attract more students. But beyond enrollment strategies and a plethora of student-friendly communications are comprehensive planning considerations that must be led by the president and his or her team.

Following are some key recommendations:

SETTING THE TONE FOR SUCCESS CONTINUED:

The president must be the driving force in making recruitment and retention a priority on campus.

In these times, it's too easy for enrollment issues to be placed on the back burner as fundraising consumes presidential time and energy. It is essential, however, that the president remain equally hands-on in both areas. We know of campus CEO's who have awakened too late to "red flags" which would have indicated negative enrollment trends.

No other area is more vital to an institution's ongoing health and viability than recruitment and retention. It is critical, therefore, that enrollment report directly to the president with an open line of communication and access. In this critical area, presidents simply cannot afford to take their eye off the ball for even a short period.

The president must create a corporate culture that supports the enrollment operation.

This includes a president who is highly visible at recruitment events, while taking the lead in the institutional philosophy portrayed in conventional enrollment publications and online. This initiative also includes leveraging facilities to create value. "Tired" classrooms, grounds and facilities create a drag on the entire enrollment management process: enhanced residences, recreation-fitness facilities and dining services serve as an integral part of the student experience, and play a vital role in attracting and retaining students.

As our 2010 book "President to President: Views on Technology in Higher Education" (Council of Independent Colleges/SunGard publications), co-edited with our friend and colleague Jacqueline Powers Dowd emphasizes, institutions must also leverage technology to create a competitive advantage. While expensive, technology offering convenience also levels the playing field for small and mid-sized institutions.

The president must maintain a balance in enrolling student-athletes.

Most liberal arts colleges are members of the NCAA Division III, which emphasizes student-athletes who will

succeed academically with their colleges. It is important that the president underscore the importance of athletics while at the same time holding the enrollment office to a standard of recruiting student-athletes who mirror the campus population. Student athletes need to be just that. Recruiting those who do not reflect the institutional profile will inevitably lead to retention problems later, serving neither the athlete nor the institution.

The president must take the lead in setting financial-aid priorities.

We hear many stories of presidents getting into trouble over runaway financial-aid budgets. "Buying" students with steep discounts is a recipe for long-term financial ruin. Contrary to popular opinion, it is possible to attract and retain students, while also improving selectivity, access and affordability. It's all in the planning.

Sound strategic planning, along with a realistic, forward-looking enrollment plan, can be an effective extension of the president's vision for his or her institution.

Understanding one's market, the expectations of prospective students, opportunities through synergistic partnerships, and the capacity of facilities in attracting and retaining students, all are essential ingredients for enrollment success. And all must have leadership and follow-through from the top—the president.

###

Dr. Scott D. Miller is President of Virginia Wesleyan College, Virginia Beach, VA. Previously, he was President of Bethany College, Wesley College, and Lincoln Memorial University. He is Chair of the Board of Directors of Academic Search, Inc.

Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, a former president of Carlow University, is senior counsel for the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and principal of Hyatt Fennell, a higher education search firm.

They have collaborated on 13 books, including "President to President: Views on Technology in Higher Education" (Volumes I to III) and "Presidential Perspectives" (Volumes I to X). They edit the popular higher education thought series "President to President" (Sodexo).

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