

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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PROPOSALS TO CHANGE FEDERAL TAX REGULATIONS HAVE MANY IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITY CONCERNED

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President
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At the time of this writing, Congress is in the process of making significant changes to federal tax laws and several could negatively impact students and/or higher education institutions. Final provisions are not available, but the following are under consideration:

- The new law could eliminate the ability of students to deduct the interest from their student loans.
- The House has proposed taxing tuition breaks for graduate students.
- Many colleges and universities provide full or partial tuition benefits to spouses and children of employees. It is possible that such benefits could now be taxed.
- Tuition benefits for employees may also be subject to federal tax.

- Other college tax benefits could be eliminated or reduced including The Lifetime Learning Credit, The Hope Scholarship Credit and The American Opportunity Tax Credit.
- While it would only apply to the richest colleges and universities, there is a proposal to tax endowment income.

Final implications will not be known until the bill makes it through the reconciliation process and actually passes, but several of the current proposals have higher education advocates concerned.

PRESIDENTIAL PLAYBOOK: THE CONTEMPORARY TRANSFORMATIONAL MODEL FOR LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

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In our last *Enrollment Manager* column, we outlined the key ingredients for enrollment success at private liberal arts colleges. Our premise, based on over 30 years of leadership experience at Council of Independent Colleges institutions, suggests that private colleges with an endowment of

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under \$100 million should have a full-time enrollment of at least 1,100. This number provides “critical mass” for campus climate, student life, and budgetary operations without compromising the small college atmosphere.

Highly successful models also focus attention on graduate, special session (mini-term), early enrollment (pre-collegiate), and online (non-traditional), reflecting service to diverse student markets.

The model we suggest was featured by Dwyer Education Strategies (<http://www.dwyereducationstrategies.com/the-commonwealth-is-witnessing-a-transformation-at-virginia-wesleyan-university-in-virginia-beach/>) and titled “The Commonwealth is Witnessing a Transformation at Virginia Wesleyan University in Virginia Beach.” Consultants noted the positive results of academic expansion, investment in infrastructure, and a “systematic and comprehensive communication plan” for student recruitment.

The model is based on 30 years of experience leading liberal arts colleges and research we conducted with over 100 college and university presidents—information we have shared during the past 13 years through two popular thought series for higher-education presidents nationwide. “*Presidential Perspectives*” (www.presidentialperspectives.org) and “*President to President*” (www.president2president.com) are higher education leadership series written by college presidents for college presidents. The “*President to President*” series is sponsored by Sodexo, which exerts no editorial control over content.

Chapters are authored by notable presidents whose institutions are in the forefront of innovative practices in these areas. One chapter will be released each month, distributed electronically, and posted on this website. At the end of the series, the foreword and chapters will be bound into a keepsake book. We encourage you to explore the archive of this “think tank” and subscribe free of charge. This year’s series, “**How Disruptive Innovation is Shaping the Next-Gen Campus and Enabling Student Success,**” will focus on how institutions are innovating in order to secure the future and ensure positive

business outcomes, all while enhancing the student experience on campus.

In this issue of *Enrollment Manager*, we focus on the role of the president in the enrollment equation, and how sustainable, quality growth continues on many campuses resulting from sound enrollment practices led by a fully engaged president.

A winning enrollment strategy starts at the top with a president fully committed to a comprehensive enrollment plan based on an overarching vision for the institution. The Board must understand and visibly support the setting of large but realistic goals and sustainable viability to be achieved by the president—the primary spokesperson and advocate of the strategy—and his or her team.

In successful strategic planning, objectives should be realistic enough to inspire consensus and commitment to results. To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- Commission an independent Institutional Review to evaluate current conditions and assess opportunities. This will provide the basis for a four-part comprehensive planning model including space-utilization study, condition assessment, 10-year master plan, and strategic plan.
- Utilize experienced counsel to develop an enrollment matrix that will control the discount rate, produce a significant return on investment, and evaluate staff effectiveness. Staff evaluations should be based on specific objectives and outcomes.
- Dedicate gift dollars and, if necessary, some leveraged borrowing to build or renovate high-impact facilities. “Tired” classrooms, grounds, and facilities—not to mention inadequate technology—create a drag on the entire enrollment process. Transformational presidents recognize the importance of attractive facilities and look for creative ways to fund improvements. Athletic facilities—artificial turf, lights, all-weather tracks, and improved locker, training, and weight facilities—are a useful starting point. (The revitalized facilities can enable the college to

TRANSFORMATIONAL MODEL FOR LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES CONTINUED:

attract a new brand of coach, responsible for recruiting scholar-athletes who will be successful on and off the field or court.)

- Add extra-curricular and co-curricular activities that will utilize these facilities and boost enrollment. A marching band will also support the music program, for example.

We also suggest:

- Reconsider the use of part-time faculty and staff in key positions. Part-time employees generally do not produce positive results in recruitment or retention.
- Create cost-effective, synergistic partnerships to support the library, learning resources, and technology—all important to ensuring student success.
- Supplement traditional program growth with a modest but student-centered, non-traditional adult program. Online offerings can succeed here.
- Utilize branding and marketing dollars wisely. Although most successful brands are not created overnight, judicious use of resources can result in a highly effective, long-term strategy.
- Develop a comprehensive internal communications plan that will help to drive the external one. Briefing faculty, staff, students, and volunteers on goals and successes—and keeping them on message—will pay dividends in public opinion and fundraising, and, even more important, in enrollment and retention.
- Periodically utilize external counsel to evaluate results objectively and recommend areas for improvement from an informed, outside perspective.

- Ensure that the president is visible at all admissions open houses as well as parents and family weekends. Remember that he or she is not only the chief spokesperson for the institution but also its best sales executive.

In the highly competitive, supercharged enrollment landscape of today, no institution can afford to be complacent or to rely on strategies of the past. That means that progress and sustainability in enrollment depend on a forward-looking, innovative, and integrated recruitment strategy. It begins with the president, is sustained by bold but realistic thinking and planning, benefits from investment in infrastructure, and relies on motivated, regularly evaluated staff.

Have no doubt: enrollment will remain challenging, but only by meeting those challenges can enrollment succeed.

#

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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.

MAKE SURE YOUR FINANCIAL AID OFFICE IS DOING THESE TEN THINGS

John W. Dysart
President
The Dysart Group

We are beginning the fourth month of the new financial aid cycle and it is a good time to pause and evaluate financial aid operations. The higher education market is competitive and price can be an obstacle for most families. Enrollment leaders and Presidents should take the time to touch base with their financial aid professionals to evaluate preparation for the recruitment cycle.

1. **Ensure that packages for new and returning students have been going out since October 1, 2017.**

We are now into the second year of the new financial aid calendar. Congress specifically changed the timetable for financial aid so that packages could be sent much earlier to provide families with additional time for informed decision-making and financial planning.

Find out how many applicants for admission have been packaged for Fall 2018. How many of your currently enrolled students have award letters to show them how they can afford to re-enroll next year?

By this time, depending on the size of your institution, you should have packaged hundreds to several thousand students for Fall 2018.

2. **Check to verify that the Financial Aid**

Office has a plan in place to use paper and technology to encourage students to apply for financial aid.

Your college or university should have in place an aggressive approach to encourage new and returning students to apply for financial aid.

- Use your website to notify all students that financial aid season is underway.
- Take advantage of your internal email communication system to encourage currently enrolled students to re-apply for financial aid.
- Text messaging is an immediate and effective way to encourage students and families to apply for financial aid.
- Mailing periodic postcards or letters to students can also be effective.
- Coordinate reminder activities with your Student Services Personnel and Resident Advising staff.
- Be sure that financial aid reminders have been incorporated into your systematic communication plan for your admission applicants.

Early application means early packaging and this is the best scenario for both institutions and the students they serve.

3. **Review mechanisms in place to track success in securing financial aid applications and sending financial aid packages.**

Having a Financial Aid Office prepared to award students as soon as they apply for financial aid is great. A multi-tiered reminder system for both new and returning students is even better. It is important, however, to also have in place some kind of tracking system to monitor the rates at which new and returning students apply for aid and are packaged.

A weekly report shared with the leadership can help administrators evaluate the process throughout the cycle. If the report reveals any short-comings, tactical changes can be made. For example, if the current approach is not encouraging enough returning students to apply for

MAKE SURE YOUR FINANCIAL AID OFFICE IS DOING THESE TEN THINGS CONTINUED:

financial aid, perhaps you should consider a telephone reminder campaign. If students are applying early but there is a backlog in packaging, the Financial Aid Office may require additional resources such as technology enhancements or extra, temporary staff.

4. Package returning students without waiting for grades for the Spring semester.

I am surprised that so many colleges and universities still delay packaging for returning students until Spring grades are recorded. This is done to make sure that students are not packaged only to find out that they run into satisfactory academic progress issues after the fact.

Waiting to package returning students is never a good idea. It is possible that you may package some students who run into academic difficulties by the end of the Spring term. If this occurs, simply withdraw the initial package. Making all of the other students wait until the end of the Spring term to find out how they can afford to re-enroll just does not make sense.

5. Examine your financial aid award policy every year for appropriateness for the market you serve.

It is always a good idea to evaluate your financial aid packaging policy every year. Markets and situations can change so you must be prepared to alter your packaging policy if needed.

- Has the ability to pay for your students changed?
- Has the percentage of students eligible for Federal Pell Grants increased or decreased?
- Has the average or mean EFC increased or decreased?
- Are there material changes in the percentage of students enrolled from outside the state?

- Have any significant changes been made to your federal allocations or to your state grant program?

If your market conditions have changed, be prepared to adjust your packaging policy.

6. Do everything possible to simplify the process of applying for financial aid.

Conduct a detailed audit of the financial aid process and all documents required in the process. Eliminate from the process any documents or steps not specifically required by federal or state regulation.

7. Discuss the institutional plan to guarantee that neither new or returning students miss state deadlines for financial aid.

It is distressing that so many eligible students miss out on state grants because they fail to meet the published deadlines. Colleges and universities should be doing much more to make sure new and returning students apply for financial aid in time to meet the deadline.

In-state students can be tracked as a separate entity. The communication plan for these students should be more aggressive.

Missing deadlines for state aid can increase institutional discount rates or negatively influence recruitment outcomes and retention. While it is obviously the ultimate responsibility of students and parents, Financial Aid Offices can play a vital role ensuring that all eligible students meet deadlines for state grants.

8. Discontinue institutional deadlines for applying for financial aid.

While encouraging students to apply for financial aid early in the cycle is important, deadlines are not the most effective tools.

- Deadlines often affect first-generation students the most because they are unfamiliar with the application process.
- Denying institutional aid to prospective students

with high financial aid need will adversely impact recruitment.

- Removing institutional aid from currently enrolled students is likely to have a negative impact on retention.

Tracking, intervention, systematic reminders, communication and pro-active outreach are much better mechanisms to encourage students to apply for financial aid.

9. Coordinate financial aid packaging with your Business Office.

Stay in communication with your Business Office throughout the Spring term to identify any students with significant outstanding balances and students who are not keeping up with their payment plans. There is still time to address such issues before they become barriers to re-enrollment.

10. Actively consider financial aid appeals.

There are often signs that new and returning students are not happy with their financial aid packages. Look at the signs and actively initiate appeals rather than waiting for the students to come to you.

- New students who have been packaged but have not deposited may have affordability issues.
- Packaged returning students who have not registered for the Fall 2018 term may not be able to afford to re-enroll.
- Admission counselor may be aware of prospective students who have expressed concerns.
- Faculty and staff may be aware of students who have said they do not know how they can afford to re-enroll.

It is not necessary or even desirable to enhance financial aid packages for these students. It does, however, make sense to be aware and at least consider additional action.

Schedule a time to meet with
John Dysart, President of
THE DYSART GROUP
to discuss your enrollment and
revenue needs at these upcoming
conferences:

**Academic Impressions
Tuition Discounting Conference**

February 7-8, 2018

Location Denver

**Association of Business
Administrators of Christian
Colleges**

Annual Conference

February 13-17, 2018

Wyndham Orlando Resort
Orlando, FL

ABHE

Annual Meeting

February 21-23, 2018

Rosen Plaza Hotel
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your enrollment and maximize net tuition revenue
at the upcoming Academic Impressions
Conference: *Aligning Your Enrollment and
Tuition Discounting Strategies.*

When? February 8-9, 2018

Where? Denver, CO

Who should attend? Any finance or enrollment
professional balancing competing priorities of
maintaining (or attempting to lower) the discount
rate while also trying to meet aggressive
enrollment goals that are in line with your
institutional mission.

Go to [http://academicimpressions.com/conference/
aligning-your-enrollment-and-tuition-discounting-
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Enrollment Management

We have worked collaboratively with colleges and universities to significantly grow enrollment, enhance academic quality, reduce attrition and increase net revenue.

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