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ADMISSIONS AND FINANCIAL AID WARNING SIGNS FOR NEW PRESIDENTS

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If you have recently been appointed as President at a college or university, you already know the importance of enrollment and net revenue for institutional survival and success. The following is a quick checklist of warning signs as you consider your current enrollment and financial status.

- Review recruitment outcomes over the last five years for signs of declines in applications, acceptances and new student enrollments. Yes, the current market is challenging, but declines are often a sign of strategic and/or tactical shortcomings. It might be time to evaluate the entire admission operation. Accepting disappointing outcomes due to external influences is a mistake.

- Review recent trends regarding average institutional aid expenditures for signs of growing discounts. Headcount stabilization and even growth are often mitigated by unnecessary institutional scholarship and grant expenditures. You will need an approach to financial aid expenditures that specifically supports your admission and retention plans.

- Review recent overall trends for declines in net revenue generated from tuition, fees, room and board. While discount rates and headcounts are important, net revenue is king. You may want to reconsider your pricing strategy in addition to your financial aid award policy.

- Determine initial financial aid packaging dates for both new and returning students. There is never a good reason to delay the start of financial aid packaging for either population. Financial aid packaging for all students should commence the first week of October.

- Check with your chief financial officer for recent trends regarding student refunds. Your award policy may be creating cash refunds for students unintentionally. High amounts in outstanding receivables are also

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UNCERTAINTY WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Trump Administration and Congress are currently considering changes that could cause significant upheaval. Start planning now!

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problematic. Both are likely signs of a misguided financial aid packaging policy and/or poor collection practices.

- Whatever challenges you may be able to identify, check with your department heads on new plans, strategies and tactics to be implemented for Fall 2026 to secure improved outcomes. Doubling down on recent practices is generally a bad idea if the desired outcomes are not being achieved.

If you are unsure how to proceed, contact successful colleagues. Many are likely to have faced similar challenges in their careers.

Do not hesitate to seek outside counsel from professional consultants to review the current operation, with the goal of offering proven initiatives to increase enrollment and net revenue during these difficult times for colleges and universities.

How to Use the New Carnegie Classification to Explain Your School's Benefits to Prospective Students

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When it comes to deciding which college to attend — and whether obtaining that education is worth the cost of incurring student loan debt — prospective students and their families are always looking for more information, clarity, and reassurance. One tool that can help them with all three is the Carnegie Classification, which groups institutions according to the type and priority of the degrees they offer. Enrollment and admissions professionals can also make use of the Carnegie Classification, but to do so, you'll need to understand what it measures, what it reveals, and how to explain its results in layman's terms that your prospects will understand and appreciate.

What Are the Carnegie Classifications?

First created in 1970, the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (more often referred to as simply the Carnegie Classification) is a methodology for identifying colleges and universities in the U.S. according to their offerings.

The program's original goal was to help students make enrollment decisions easier by ensuring they were comparing schools that are roughly similar in offerings.

For example, it's typically easier to calculate the difference in value of an "apples to apples" comparison between two schools who both primarily offer a Bachelor's Degree, rather than an "apples to oranges" comparison between a school that primarily offers Associate's Degrees with one that primarily offers Bachelor's Degrees.

However, this year the Carnegie Classification has undergone its first major revision in 50 years.

The 2025 Carnegie Classification generally evaluates institutions across three data points:

- an institution's size
- its award level focus, which considers the types of degrees an institution awards
- its academic program mix, which considers the fields of study in which an institution awards degrees

These new 2025 Carnegie Classifications also include new information to help measure the economic impact of a school's education on its students. As a result, the updated classifications now make it easier to compare schools that offer different degree types, or which serve vastly different demographics by using new comparison points to determine their relative long-term value.

Since many cost-conscious and outcome-focused students will undoubtedly be interested in these new numbers, being able to understand and explain them is key.

Four Ways to Measure Who an Education Helps, and How

In essence, the 2025 Carnegie Classification groups institutions of all sizes and degree focuses into four categories:

- Those offering a **greater-than-average access** to education and delivering **greater-than-average earnings** for their graduates
- Those offering a **lower-than-average access to education** but delivering **greater-than-average earnings** for their graduates
- Those offering a **greater-than-average access** to education but delivering **lower-than-average earnings** for their graduates
- Those offering a **lower-than-average access** to education and delivering **lower-than-average earnings** for their graduates

You can see a graph charting how all institutions are currently classified by the Carnegie Classification here.

What does each classification mean, and how can you help explain your school's classification to prospective students to optimize their interest? Let's take a closer look.

Higher Earnings, Higher Access

Schools in this quadrant score high in both areas—they offer broad access and strong career outcomes. For prospective students and enrollment managers alike, that's a win. These institutions support a diverse student population, often with robust financial aid, and produce graduates with above-average earnings. Their campuses tend to reflect varied backgrounds, enriching the college experience through diverse perspectives.

Higher Earnings, Lower Access

These schools deliver strong earning potential but are selective, often requiring top academic performance. Think Ivy League or elite STEM schools. Getting accepted is a major accomplishment, but students may face more academic pressure and encounter less diversity. As a result, these institutions may need to highlight student support and inclusivity to balance perceptions of exclusivity.

Lower Earnings, Higher Access

Though not focused on high-paying career outcomes, these schools play a vital role in making higher education widely accessible. Many serve first-generation students and offer degrees in socially essential or personally meaningful fields. Prospective students value support services, inclusion, and opportunities to connect with a diverse, authentic community.

Lower Earnings, Lower Access

This quadrant often includes niche institutions, such as faith-based colleges with specialized missions. While they may not lead to high earnings or broad access, their value lies in alignment with students' spiritual beliefs and personal identities. Diversity may be limited by design, and the emphasis is often on meaningful, values-driven education rather than financial return.

3 Ways Your School Can Use Its Carnegie Classification to Connect with Prospects

Now that you understand how the Carnegie Classifications work and which general quadrant your institution falls within, you can also use those numbers to level up your enrollment process.

For example, if you're communicating with prospects who are interested in a specific major but who want to stay close to home, use the Carnegie Classification to see how your school is classified compared to nearby schools who offer similar degrees.

If your prospect is considering schools from multiple states because they're focused on finding the best return on their educational investment, see where your school falls in terms of Carnegie Classification earnings measurement compared to your prospect's other possible schools. If your institution's classification differs from your competitors in terms of earnings, determine what else your institution offers those other institutions don't.

And if your prospect is passionate about opportunity, diversity, and having a culturally robust college experience, see how your institution is classified in terms of education access compared to other schools your prospect is considering. Your Carnegie Classification in educational access may mean that it's more likely that your prospect is going to find a way to fit in, stand out, and be themselves.

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The Dysart Group is a higher education consulting firm specializing in enrollment management. We have provided consultation services to more than 250 colleges and universities throughout the United States with extraordinary results.

We have worked collaboratively with colleges and universities to significantly grow enrollment. Our institution-specific recommendations have helped increase the number of admission applications as much as three-fold. Improved communication strategies and new tracking metrics have resulted in higher folder completion rates and increased the number of students accepted for admission. New student enrollments have grown by as much as 70% in a single cycle while discount rates have been controlled. Proven strategies have increased retention rates by as much as 7% in one year.

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