

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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THE SEVEN PILLARS: TAKING STOCK OF THE ENROLLMENT CYCLE

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With fall session enrollment largely settled and work on institutional reporting to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) nearing completion, college and university leaders have an important opportunity to evaluate the success—or shortcomings—of their enrollment strategies.

October marks the conclusion of the first quarter of the business cycle for most colleges and universities. The results provide some of the most reliable indicators of institutional financial performance for the academic year. For presidents, chief financial officers, and chief enrollment officers, this is the time to celebrate successes, identify weaknesses, and make necessary adjustments before enrollment shortfalls become budget problems.

For years, we have discussed the seven pillars of a successful enrollment program at a private college or university. Although institutional missions and markets differ, these pillars provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating enrollment productivity and identifying opportunities for growth.

The seven pillars are:

1. Traditional Undergraduate Enrollment
2. Traditional Transfer Enrollment
3. Early Enrollment
4. Nontraditional Undergraduate Enrollment
5. Traditional Graduate Enrollment
6. Online Enrollment
7. Continuing Education

Each represents a distinct enrollment opportunity and revenue stream. Together, they provide a more complete picture of institutional performance than the traditional emphasis on first-time, full-time undergraduate enrollment alone.

Working closely with institutional research, senior leadership should assess productivity across all seven pillars, comparing actual results with enrollment goals, historical trends, and budget assumptions. Equally important is identifying underperforming areas early enough to adjust expenditures and revise projections for the remaining three quarters.

While diversification is essential, traditional undergraduate enrollment remains the primary budget driver at many private institutions and deserves particularly close examination.

Consider the relationship between full-time and part-time enrollment. It can take four students enrolled in a single course to generate approximately the same tuition credit-hour volume as one full-time undergraduate taking 12 to 16 credit hours. Headcount alone,

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A recent survey indicated that 59% of colleges and universities reported declines in admission applications from international students this cycle.

therefore, can create a misleading impression of enrollment strength.

Critical subcategories also matter. Residential enrollment is an especially important example. At many private colleges, a residential student represents approximately \$14,000 annually in room and board revenue, in addition to tuition and fees. When students make last-minute decisions to change from residential to commuter status, the institution may retain the tuition revenue but lose the anticipated housing and dining revenue. An unoccupied bed cannot easily be replaced after the session begins.

A college might meet its overall enrollment goal while still experiencing a substantial revenue shortfall because its residential population fell below projections. Similarly, unexpected changes in student credit-hour loads, financial aid discounting, retention, or enrollment mix can affect the bottom line. These are the holes that presidents and financial officers must identify before they become larger problems.

One Source of Institutional Truth

We strongly recommend that the Office of Institutional Research serve as the authoritative source for all official enrollment data. Because this office coordinates state, federal, and accreditation reporting, its leadership is positioned to establish consistent definitions and reporting standards.

Well-intentioned staff members sometimes customize enrollment reports for their individual departments, inadvertently producing conflicting numbers. A common institutional standard eliminates confusion and ensures that everyone is working from the same information.

Over the years, many institutional research offices have moved beyond the traditional fall census approach toward a comprehensive, 12-month annual enrollment model. This broader perspective captures the full enrollment cycle, including spring and summer activity, graduate and online programs, continuing education, and other enrollment opportunities.

Such a model provides a more meaningful assessment of overall institutional productivity and a stronger foundation for forecasting performance throughout the remaining business year.

We also encourage institutional research directors to maintain key performance indicator dashboards for senior leadership. These should track enrollment against goals, net tuition revenue, residential occupancy, retention, credit-hour production, and other measures directly connected to institutional financial performance.

The Value of an Outside Perspective

Even institutions with experienced enrollment leadership benefit from periodic external assessment. An independent consultant can evaluate staffing, organizational structure, recruitment practices, admissions productivity, financial aid strategies, and predictive enrollment models.

For more than 30 years, Scott has utilized [The Dysart Group](#) for this purpose. John Dysart brings exceptional expertise in enrollment data analytics and predictive modeling, providing institutional leaders with valuable insight into both current performance and future opportunities.

Fall session is an ideal time for such an assessment. There is still sufficient time to implement recommendations, strengthen recruitment and retention efforts, and adjust operating budgets before the academic year progresses too far.

Enrollment management is not simply about recruiting the next incoming class. It is about understanding the productivity of every enrollment stream, connecting those results to institutional finances, and making informed decisions throughout the year.

The first quarter provides the evidence. Effective leadership requires acting on it.

When in doubt, ask an expert. The cost of an informed assessment is modest compared with the financial consequences of discovering an enrollment problem too late.

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CAREER SERVICES AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

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While we usually focus directly on strategies and tactics in the Admission and Financial Aid offices, in this hyper-competitive market, the quality of operations in offices outside of enrollment management can impact recruitment outcomes. The Office of Career Services is a prime example.

Both prospective students and parents report job placement and career success as major factors in the college selection process. You may wish to conduct a review of your career services operation to determine if the office is doing everything possible to enhance career outcomes and prepare students for a competitive job market. Discuss the following list with your colleagues in career services and determine readiness to address the following issues for students:

1. Resume/Cover Letter Assistance
2. Interview Skills
3. Zoom versus In-Person Interview Tactics
4. Job Fairs
5. Career Counseling
6. Employer Outreach and Posting
7. Alumni Outreach
8. Speakers/Headhunters
9. Skills and Interest Tests
10. Graduate School Guidance
11. Conducting Mock Interviews
12. Professional Clothing
13. Electronic Job Board
14. Internships
15. Job Scams
16. Specific Placement Rates
17. Graduate School Enrollment Statistics
18. Data on Starting Salaries
19. Interaction Timeline with Students (engagement by grade level)
20. Active Promotion of Services
21. Career Services Interaction as Part of the Curriculum
22. Understanding and Anticipating Emerging Employment Trends and Opportunities

23. Partner with Entities That offer Specific Employment Training for Work Opportunities (Financial Management Training)

It is critical once your team is comfortable with career offerings that this information is effectively incorporated into the admission plan.

- Ensure that your website emphasizes career service offerings and outcomes.
- Ensure your admission counselors have been trained to discuss the attributes and outcomes of your career services.
- Include the Career Services Office in your tours for prospective student campus visits.
- Include positive career outcomes in your systematic communication plan with prospective students and their parents.

While Career Services may be the most important office outside of enrollment management to review, other offices will impact recruitment outcomes as well. Consider evaluating other areas such as academic support services, academic advising, residential life, facilities management and student activities.



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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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