Strategies for Success within a Student Affairs-Based Enrollment Management Enterprise

Custom Research Brief

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Research Methodology
II. Executive Summary
III. Enrollment Goals
IV. Divisional Enrollment Priorities
V. Collaborating across Institutional Divisions
VI. Evaluation of Student Affairs-Based Enrollment Management Structures
I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Project Challenge

A member university approached the Council with the following questions about student-affairs based enrollment management departments:

- **Admissions Consistency**: Given the conflicting priorities that affect admissions decisions, how do institutions guarantee that they consistently meet admissions goals? What short-, medium-, and long-term plans do institutions develop to ensure consistent year-to-year enrollment?
- **Inter-Departmental Cooperation**: What level of input does the office of student affairs receive from the office of academic affairs on admissions decisions? What formal structures, such as committees or working groups, allow for mediation between the two offices? What other informal channels allow for collaboration?
- **Decision-Making Factors**: What factors affect how the office of student affairs makes admissions decisions? What priorities shape the office of academic affairs’ input? What other measures do institutions use when making admissions decisions?
- **Evaluation**: How successfully do student affairs-based enrollment management structures meet the enrollment needs of other institutions?

Project Sources

- Advisory Board’s internal and online research libraries (www.educationadvisoryboard.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (http://nces.ed.gov/

Research Parameters

The Council interviewed enrollment management administrators at public universities with student affairs-based enrollment management departments.
### A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution/Organization</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Approximate Enrollment (Total/Undergraduate)</th>
<th>Carnegie Classification</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>Pacific West</td>
<td>14,500/11,200</td>
<td>Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>22,900/17,800</td>
<td>Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>19,100/16,500</td>
<td>Doctoral/Research Universities</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>31,100/21,900</td>
<td>Research Universities (very high research activity)</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University E</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>14,800/9,400</td>
<td>Research Universities (high research activity)</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** National Center for Education Statistics, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Observations:

- The enrollment goals of most contact institutions consist primarily of growing the number of enrolled students and raising the academic profile of the student body. Some institutions also focus on enrolling students from local communities, increasing the institution’s racial, ethnic, and national diversity, and decreasing the number of students requiring remission.

- Offices of student affairs and enrollment management at contact institutions contribute to enrollment goals by offering student support services, accommodating students who require on-campus housing, and providing financial assistance and guidance to students. These contributions increase retention rates and help attract academically proficient applicants, thereby fulfilling the two main enrollment goals of most institutions.

- Offices of academic affairs at contact institutions determine the ideal academic profile of recruited students. These determinations assist enrollment management administrators in deciding whom their recruitment efforts should target. At some institutions, individual academic departments or colleges may set their own enrollment standards. However, these standards must align with institutional goals and are often subject to review by the office of student affairs and enrollment management.

- Some contacts report that senior officials from across the institution contribute to the composition of a formalized strategic enrollment management plan; this plan guides long-term implementation and administration for the whole institution. The diverse makeup of the groups compiling these plans ensures the efficient coordination of enrollment efforts across divisions and the consideration of divisional circumstances that may affect the achievement of enrollment goals.

- Multi-tiered enrollment management committees oversee policy decisions and operations at some institutions. High-level committees generally determine policy and strategy and are composed of a small number of senior officials. Lower-level committees guide implementation and include numerous staff members who interact more directly with students.

- Some contact institutions find that meetings between enrollment management administrators and associate provosts or individual deans assist the coordination of enrollment efforts and the achievement of enrollment goals. One institution designates associate deans, staff members, and academic administrators to serve as liaisons to the Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management.

- Contacts at some institutions report that the office of academic affairs and the office of student affairs and enrollment management have partnered successfully on recruitment and graduation application initiatives. By leveraging the strengths of each division, contact institutions reduce inefficiencies in these areas and improve their effectiveness at meeting enrollment goals.

- Faculty members sometimes express dissatisfaction with student affairs-based enrollment management enterprises. Contact institutions mitigate faculty dissatisfaction by leveraging the support of the Provost, openly communicating the benefits of enrollment policy to faculty members, and coordinating efforts with academic affairs personnel to limit the growth of class sizes. Contacts report that cultivating an environment of receptiveness to faculty input also helps ameliorate dissatisfaction and supports the success of enrollment policies.
### Enrollment Goals across Contact Institutions

Across institutions, contacts report pursuing two main enrollment goals: increasing the number of tuition-paying students and improving the academic profile of the student body. In addition to these two goals, some contacts report that they also consider diversity, service to local students, and decreasing the number of students requiring remission in enrollment planning.

- **Growth**
  
  Nearly all contact institutions prioritize growth in their strategic enrollment management plans. Declining state budget allocations precipitated many of these growth initiatives. At University E, consistent reductions in state funding have led to an increased reliance on tuition. As a result, the institution intends to grow its enrollment from 15,200 to approximately 20,000 students by 2020. Similarly, University B hopes to preserve the current academic quality of its student body while rapidly growing the number of enrolled students.

- **Improved Academic Profile**
  
  University D recently reversed a decades-long deflationary enrollment trend. Currently, the University is operating at capacity with approximately 43,000 students on its three campuses. Instead of pursuing continued growth, the University plans to improve the academic profile of its student body and the selectivity of its admissions process. University C is also exploring means to increase the academic proficiency of its students; contacts there note that they are also seeking to grow enrollment.

- **Local Students, Financial Stability, and Diversity**
  
  Contact institutions also pursue other, secondary enrollment goals besides growth and academic improvement. University A is exploring ways to serve more students from surrounding communities and to enroll fewer students needing remission. The University D wants to cultivate a racially, ethnically, and nationally diverse student body as well as improve its academic profile. University B, too, hopes to preserve its current levels of diversity as it continues to enroll greater numbers of students.
IV. DIVISIONAL ENROLLMENT PRIORITIES

Improving Retention: Student Affairs’ Impact on Enrollment Management

Contacts report that locating enrollment management services within the division of student affairs facilitates the pursuit of enrollment goals: the student-support focus of the division of student affairs positively affects retention rates and grows enrollment in a cost-effective way. Additionally, campus-life marketing can improve an institution’s reputation among prospective students, thereby expanding the applicant pool and allowing student affairs administrators to recruit a more academically able student body.

Supporting Retention though Student Affairs Offices

The student affairs and enrollment management divisions at most contact institutions are composed of multiple departments and offices, all of which promote a supportive campus environment and contribute to student retention. These offices include:

- **University A**: The Center for Learning and Academic Support Services; the Early Assessment Program; the Office of Records, Registration, and Graduation; the Office of Student Health and Psychological Services; and the Office of University Housing Services.

- **University B**: The Office of Campus Life; the Office of Diversity and Community Involvement; the Office of Financial Aid; the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards; the Office of Housing; and the Office International Students.

- **University C**: The Academic Success Center; the Office of Alcohol and Other Drugs; the Counseling and Career Development Center; the Office of Educational Opportunity Programs; and the Office of Student Leadership and Civic Engagement.

- **University E**: The Center for Academic Development; the Counseling, Health, and Testing Center; the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships; the Office of Residential Life; and the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs.
IV. DIVISIONAL ENROLLMENT PRIORITIES

Articulating a Target Student Profile: Academic Affairs’ Impact on Enrollment Management

Contacts report that the academic affairs divisions at their institutions contribute primarily to improving the academic profile of the student body and to managing enrollment at the departmental level. Academic affairs personnel contribute to enrollment management processes by fulfilling the following responsibilities:

**Articulating a Student Profile**

Enrollment management administrators at University B attempt to recruit students whom professors will want to teach. To achieve this goal, personnel within the University’s academic departments closely advise them on the academic profiles of prospective students whom their recruitment efforts should target. Academic affairs personnel at University A likewise contribute heavily to determining the academic makeup of the student body and the academic offerings of which they may partake. Enrollment management administrators at the institution, on the other hand, focus on pragmatic concerns that determine how successfully they can recruit and enroll applicants.

Because University D’s enrollment goals consist primarily of elevating the institution’s academic profile, enrollment management has recently begun reporting to the academic affairs division. Contacts maintain that academic affairs personnel can tailor the academic profile of the incoming student body to institutional goals more easily than student affairs personnel can because of their familiarity with measuring students’ academic performance.

**Setting Enrollment Expectations within Individual Departments**

At some contact institutions, deans and other senior academic affairs personnel exert limited influence over the number of students that each college or academic department enrolls.

At University E, departmental teams comprised of the dean and his or her advisors provide enrollment management administrators with estimates of how many students they intend to enroll. Enrollment management administrators work to align these projections with institutional goals by coaching academic affairs personnel on retention skills. Similarly, individual colleges at University A may raise or lower their admissions standards to meet enrollment goals. All enrollment policies are subject to review by the University’s Strategic Enrollment Management Committee.
## V. COLLABORATING ACROSS DIVISIONS

### Establishing Enrollment Management Policies

Administrators of student affairs-based enrollment management enterprises solicit the input of academic affairs when determining the long-term strategic enrollment goals of their institutions.

| University B | University B currently lacks a formal enrollment management plan. However, the Associate Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management chairs a committee dedicated to establishing one. The committee is composed of the following personnel:  
- Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences  
- Dean of the College of Business  
- Faculty representation from various colleges, including the Honors College  
- Mid-level Administrators  
At meetings, these committee members discuss the elements that will comprise the University’s strategic enrollment management plan, the contribution each member will make to its formation, the marketing messages and scholarship offers that will assist in the plan’s achievement, and the impact of the institution’s changing demographics on enrollment. |
| --- | --- |
| University E | When University E needed to compensate for declining state appropriations by increasing enrollment, its President convened a 10-member University Budget Committee. Committee members include the following:  
- Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management  
- Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost  
- Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences  
- Chair of the Faculty Senate  
These senior officials formulated a strategic plan that focuses on raising enrollment at the University to 20,000 students by 2020. They prioritized improved retention rates to achieve this goal. |

### Informal Enrollment Meetings

Contacts at some institutions report informal collaboration between senior academic affairs personnel and student affairs and enrollment management administrators. These senior officials periodically meet one-on-one to coordinate enrollment efforts efficiently.

Due to transitions among academic affairs personnel, the Associate Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at University B has not yet conducted these informal meetings. However, he soon hopes to meet every other week with an associate provost in order to coordinate enrollment efforts.
V. COLLABORATING ACROSS DIVISIONS

Enrollment Management Councils

At University A and University D, a multi-tiered enrollment management council steers policy decisions as well as implementation. University officials comprise the top tiers of these councils; membership grows broader in the middle and lower tiers. Their broad representation, which includes multiple campus constituents, helps ease conflicts over enrollment policy and unify the institutions around clearly defined enrollment goals.

**University A**

- **President’s Cabinet**
  - Five-member body considers Governance Body’s policy recommendations
  - Includes the Provost, the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, and the Vice President for University Advancement

- **Enrollment Governance Body**
  - Submits enrollment recommendations to the President’s Cabinet
  - Small group of senior administrators, co-chaired by the Provost and the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs

- **Enrollment Operational Group**
  - Administers enrollment policy
  - Membership includes representatives from all student- and applicant-facing divisions, such as student financial services, admissions, outreach, and finance.

**University D**

- **Policy Council**
  - Functions as the governing body for strategic enrollment management.
  - Fifteen-member committee; includes vice presidents from critical divisions, such as academic affairs and student affairs, as well as two academic deans

- **Management Council**
  - Oversees working committees
  - Co-chaired by Senior Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and the Senior Academic Planner
  - Membership includes several associate deans and admissions officials.

- **Working Committees**
  - Four committees, each of which focuses on a particular enrollment issue
  - Committees include Access and Transition; New Student Enrollment Network; Policies and Procedures; and Student Retention.
V. COLLABORATING ACROSS DIVISIONS

Dean’s Meetings at University E

Every year, a group composed of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management, the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, and the Chair of the University Budget Committee meets with the dean of each academic department and a team of his or her advisors to discuss enrollment management. The exchange consists of the following:

**Enrollment Management Group Communicates…**

- The recruitment rate of each department
- How many application inquiries each department receives
- The retention rate of each department
- How each department’s retention rate compares to the overall University retention rate
- How many more students each department would have to retain to meet the University goal of 80 percent retention
- Strategies and techniques for increasing each department’s retention rate

**Dean’s Team Communicates…**

- Each department’s projected overall enrollment
- Each department’s projected retention rate
- Each department’s projected number of new professional students
- Each department’s projected number of new first-year students
- Each department’s projected number of new transfer students
- Each department’s projected number of new graduate students

Contacts report that this dialogue allows enrollment management administrators to calibrate their institution-wide projections to departmental realities. In addition, the retention coaching they provide to deans translates University retention goals into manageable benchmarks for individual departments. This strategy of reformulating the University’s enrollment management plan to convey the required contribution of each department reportedly facilitates the achievement of enrollment objectives.

**Enrollment Liaisons at the University E**

To assist with the achievement of enrollment goals, academic departments designate associate deans, staff members, or administrators to serve as liaisons to the Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. Enrollment management personnel approach these liaisons with recruiting and retention ideas to encourage collaborations.
Recruitment Partnerships

Contacts note that prospective students seek to learn about student experience both inside and outside of the classroom. In order to address both facets of campus life, contact institutions call upon academic and student affairs personnel to partner on recruitment efforts.

Streamlining Graduation Protocols at University A

Administrators at University A recently integrated academic departments more extensively into the graduation application process:

Old Protocol: Student Affairs and Enrollment Management Exercised Exclusive Oversight

Contacts report that prior to the administrative restructuring, students submitted their applications for graduation and all accompanying forms directly to the Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. Because the personnel processing their applications had to navigate various departmental requirements for graduation when judging an applicant’s eligibility, this protocol resulted in inefficiencies and fewer successfully processed applications.

New Protocol: Academic Departments Confirm Eligibility of Applicants Prior to Processing

Students who apply for graduation submit all necessary forms to advisors within their academic department. Advisors verify that students have met the department-mandated requirements for graduation. After academic departments confirm that prospective graduates have fulfilled all requirements, the Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management processes their application. This strategy has led to an increase in the institution’s graduation rate.

Academic Affairs: Classroom Experience

University B includes academic affairs personnel in recruitment efforts. Contacts report that academic affairs input consists primarily of discussions regarding the breadth of academic offerings available to enrolled students.

Student Affairs: Campus Experience

Student affairs personnel at University B describe the vibrancy of campus life to prospective students, thereby conveying a sense of the community present at the institution. Contacts at University C report that discussing campus life with prospective students results in a more selective applicant pool.
V. Collaborating Across Divisions

Mitigating Faculty Resistance

Because enrollment growth often increases class sizes, faculty members at some institutions have, on occasion, regarded enrollment management with antagonism. Contacts cite a range of strategies for lessening faculty resistance and recruiting faculty support for enrollment policies and procedures.

- **Leverage the Support of the Provost**
  
  Contacts at University E report that approximately 20 faculty members, including the chair of the faculty senate, have sought to strengthen the Provost’s office and weaken the Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. So far their efforts have had limited impact due to the Provost’s continued support of student affairs-based enrollment management.

- **Communicate the Benefits of Enrollment Policy to Faculty**
  
  Enrollment management administrators at University E deflate faculty opposition by inviting them to air their grievances at annual forums. At University C, administrators discuss the effects of enrollment policy at faculty senate meetings and at the President’s Workshop, which all deans and department chairs attend.

- **Manage Class Sizes by Facilitating New Hires**
  
  At University C, enrollment management administrators disclose the institution’s projected growth for the coming year to all academic departments. This information allows administrators within academic departments to adjust the number of faculty they employ to meet increases in the number of students and prevent the unmanageable growth of class sizes.
VI. EVALUATION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS-BASED ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

Reported Effectiveness of Enrollment Management Structure at Contact Institutions

In general, contacts report that pairing student affairs administration with enrollment management results in the consistent achievement of enrollment goals. Reported successes include:

- Continuous enrollment growth at University E
- At University C, an increase in enrollment from 14,000 to 20,000 students; a 130-point increase in the average SAT score of admitted students; a 15 percent increase in the retention rate; and an 8 to 9 percent increase in the graduation rate
- An increase in the number of applications and an improvement in the ability of administrative personnel to process applications at University A

However, administrators at University D recently decided that a student affairs-based enrollment management enterprise cannot effectively meet the institution’s goal of halting growth while improving the academic profile of admitted students. In July 2011, the University restructured enrollment management; the office now reports to the Provost.
The Advisory Board has worked to ensure the accuracy of the information it provides to its members. This project relies on data obtained from many sources, however, and The Advisory Board cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information or its analysis in all cases. Further, The Advisory Board is not engaged in rendering clinical, legal, accounting, or other professional services. Its projects should not be construed as professional advice on any particular set of facts or circumstances. Members are advised to consult with their staff and senior management, or other appropriate professionals, prior to implementing any changes based on this project. Neither The Advisory Board Company nor its programs are responsible for any claims or losses that may arise from any errors or omissions in their projects, whether caused by The Advisory Board Company or its sources.

© 2011 The Advisory Board Company, 2445 M Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20037. Any reproduction or retransmission, in whole or in part, is a violation of federal law and is strictly prohibited without the consent of the Advisory Board Company. This prohibition extends to sharing this publication with clients and/or affiliate companies. All rights reserved.