

## Profile of an Effective Enrollment Manager

by Kathy Kurz

The concept of enrollment management has been around since the mid 1970s. Enrollment management involves planning strategically to achieve a sustained competitive advantage and bringing together functions related to recruiting, funding, and retaining students in order to implement the plan. Enrollment management organizations are as varied as higher education institutions themselves. There really is no one “right” model. The best model for an institution depends on institutional history, the enrollment challenges being faced, and the strengths of the people involved. Regardless of the title and official portfolio of the campus leader who heads the effort, however, there are five key attributes common to all successful enrollment managers.

### **Attribute #1: Fact-based Management**

The successful enrollment manager must be data-driven—must be willing to use data to plan, monitor, and strategically deploy resources, which are often limited, to meet enrollment goals. While enrollment managers themselves need not have extensive quantitative training, they must respect the effectiveness of a quantitative approach to decision-making, and be willing to work with and learn from experts well versed in statistical analysis and measurement techniques. For example, as institutions seek to expand their geographic draw, using data on likely markets is critical to effective targeting of outreach efforts. Without data, it is easy to try to do too much in too many places, resulting in a diluted effort that produces little by way of significant results. Tools like College Board’s Enrollment Planning Service (EPS) are available to help enrollment managers better understand, with data, which markets they have saturated, and which still have opportunity for growth. In addition, using data available in the student systems on campus, staff can identify primary, secondary, and tertiary markets for travel planning and con-

sequently develop appropriate levels of relationship building with each market.

### **Attribute #2: Collaboration**

Because managing enrollments ideally involves everyone on campus from staff to faculty to senior administrators to alumni, the enrollment manager must be able to build support for enrollment efforts, engaging everyone—even those not reporting in the enrollment division—to play their appropriate role in the effort with enthusiasm. This requires excellent skills of persuasion and motivation on the part of the enrollment manager, as well as the ability to listen and seek insight from others. Developing and sustaining an institutional commitment to achieving stated enrollment goals is a race without a finish line. Typically, in addition to the enrollment management division itself, there will need to be a committee structure comprised of a cross-section of faculty and staff from inside and outside the enrollment division to ensure that the necessary communication and consensus building takes place. However, plans with no follow-through won’t be productive. Here is how Barbara Fritze, Vice President for Enrollment and Educational Services at Gettysburg College has ensured successful collaboration:

*The key to success is solid data, collaboration, communication, and a willingness to bring everyone around the table (Chief Financial Officer, Admissions, Financial Aid, Institutional Research, College Life, and Academics) to inform and to focus on the important issues. On my campus, we established an Enrollment Management Committee to deal with everything from financial aid strategy, to researching tuition levels for board consideration, to retention research. The committee is knowledgeable about enrollment issues and is poised to address and*

*respond to questions in other conversations on campus. We listen, listen, and listen. We effectively use data and research to inform decision-making. Then the enrollment management team persuades, informs, and motivates people to take action. Finally, we celebrate our success!!*

### **Attribute #3: Knowledge and Experience in Higher Education Marketing (earned or acquired)**

Often the word “marketing” is narrowly interpreted to mean advertising or publications/public relations. However, the successful enrollment manager must take a broader approach to marketing that encompasses all aspects of building and enhancing an institutional image—not just promotion, but also price, product, and place. The enrollment manager must understand both the marketplace and the institution’s mission in order to develop an appropriate and effective long-range marketing plan. He must understand retention and the characteristics of successful students. She must know the competition—both who the institution wins against as well as who it loses to—in order to effectively position the institution against that competition. The enrollment manager must be well versed in up-to-date recruitment techniques—particularly those involving the Web—and must understand the price sensitivity of the applicant pool. Most important, the enrollment manager must know that they can’t do it all. She must hire/develop expertise within the enrollment management organization to supplement her own knowledge. For example, Jane Brown, Vice President of Enrollment and College Relations at Mount Holyoke College, called on one of the College’s economics professors, Mike Robinson, to provide assistance in modeling the outcomes of alternative admissions decisions and financial aid awarding strategies. As Ms. Brown explains,

*“Professor Robinson’s expertise in predictive and econometric modeling are powerful tools in our enrollment planning process and, as a respected member of the faculty, he has partnered with us to communicate the strategic value of our enrollment management model to the broader campus community. Importantly, Mike’s input has helped the institution understand the “trade-offs” necessary to reach our multiple enrollment goals.”*

### **Attribute #4: Entrepreneurial Approach**

The successful enrollment manager must be willing to take risks and experiment, albeit within a sound, data-driven framework. We aren’t talking here about action for action’s sake, or quick fixes, but rather about being able to move forward creatively in the face of uncertainty to make decisions, test new approaches, adjust strategies, and plan for the future. In order to stand out in a crowded market, tried and true approaches need to be employed creatively and uniquely. For example, to create a rapport with prospective students, University of Bridgeport e-mailed math puzzles to those

prospects who had expressed an interest in science and technology. As with quantitative skills, the enrollment manager need not be the source of creative energy, but must, at minimum, respect new ideas and build a team with complementary skills. Moreover, the team must be willing to test and pilot new initiatives, understanding that the rewards for success are greater than the penalties for failure.

### **Attribute #5: Managerial Skills**

Successful leadership of today’s complex enrollment management operation requires skill at organizing, delegating, prioritizing, supervising, and planning in order to get the most out of constrained resources. The enrollment manager must be able to build and motivate a staff with diverse strengths, ensure that responsibility and authority are clearly assigned, and that evaluations reflect both individual and team contributions. The team must be supported by automated and well-documented systems and processes. Effective and efficient student service must be a measurable goal of every office.

Key elements of effective management, according to Dolan Evanovich, Associate Provost for Enrollment Management at the University of Connecticut, include

*“creating an environment where people are encouraged to take chances, and enlist the support they need to achieve the desired outcomes. Moreover, staff need to be given the tools to be successful, and supported in expanding their knowledge base, both within their own areas as well as across departmental lines. Involving staff in the planning process is also critical. When staff help build the strategies, they will be invested in the long-term success of the organization. Finally, a good manager shares both the vision and the credit for all accomplishments. This approach helps create a sense of team within the organization and facilitates effective partnerships with critical areas outside of the division. The enrollment management division at UConn has relied on its strong relationship with the University Communications division in shaping a new image for the University with tangible gains in enrollments, diversity, quality, and revenues. This is a remarkable accomplishment for which multiple offices and individuals can claim responsibility.”*

### **Final Note**

Finding an enrollment manager with the requisite attributes can be challenging. In fact because of this, or in some cases because of budget or political constraints, some institutions have chosen to use a “matrix management” approach rather than hire an enrollment manager to oversee enrollment-related operations. Under a matrix management approach, representation from academics, admissions, financial aid, etc., meet as a team on a regular basis to plan together and coordinate their efforts. While this approach can work, the group still needs a leader. This leader needs to be responsible for ensuring that a comprehensive enrollment plan is developed

and implemented by the team. In addition, each member of the group must be clearly held responsible for achieving institutional enrollment goals as a critical part of their annual evaluation. Finally, the success of the model relies on each member of the team being a strong leader/manager within his or her own area of expertise. If members are struggling to bring their own operations and staff into order, they will not be able to adequately fulfill their necessary role as a member of the team.

Regardless of the organizational model in place, because tuition revenues are such a critical part of every institution's operating budget, the "voice" of enrollment management

must have a place at the senior cabinet level. This will ensure that the impact that various institutional decisions might have on enrollments is taken into consideration. This is not to say that every decision should be market driven, but only that the institution needs to constantly be aware of market forces as it charts its course for the future.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Kathy Kurz** is Vice President of Scannell & Kurz, Inc., a consulting firm that develops customized financial aid and enrollment management strategies for higher education clients. Prior to starting the company in 1996, Ms. Kurz was Associate Vice President for Enrollments at the University of Rochester.

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