Winter 2025

100 ISSUE #1

AACRAO 1910

College and University

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

Feeling Overwhelmed

First-Generation College Students' Experiences with Social Capital and Community Cultural Wealth During the College Search Process

Impact of Faculty and Curriculum on Online Doctoral Integration

A Quantitative Perspective

Interview with James Kvaal

Interview with Eric Hoover

THE **FORUM**

CU100 | *Campus Viewpoint* | *Commentary*

C&U 100 YEARS

A CENTURY OF SHARING KNOWLEDGE 100 YEARS AND BEST PRACTICES — 1925 TO 2025

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE REGISTRARS AND ADMISSIONS OFFICERS

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Founded in 1910, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) is one of the nation's oldest and largest higher education associations. Widely regarded as the leading authority on the emerging field of enrollment management, the association is a recognized source of information on student admissions, academic records, technology solutions and international education.

In addition to its professional development offerings, AACRAO serves as an independent advocate for the collegiate sector on a broad range of policy issues in Washington, D.C. The Association's policy agenda is founded on the principles of academic autonomy, access and accountability.

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Editor's Note

Christopher Tremblay
Editor-in-Chief

A Century of Sharing Knowledge and Best Practices

Happy 100th Anniversary to us! Nearly 100 years ago in July 1925, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars (AACR) [prior to the addition of admissions] had the foresight and vision to launch a journal for its members and beyond. During these past 100 years, we have lifted voices, shared knowledge, published research, informed you with studies, brought you uplifting commentaries and interviews, as well as reviewed literature in our field.

Since 1925, our mission has remained the same: deliver high quality content for the field of higher education with a particular focus on admissions, records/registration, financial aid, and much more. Every quarter, we bring new knowledge to the field as part of broadening our understanding of our important work. Thank you for reading and absorbing this new information we share in each issue.

Volume 100 is jam packed with retrospectives, new research, new voices, and much more! We are excited to bring you some exciting pieces in 2025, and that starts with this very first issue of our 100th year. Fifteen authors are included in Issue 1 of 2025 among 12 different pieces. Let's dive in!

Features

This issue kicks off with Peters' research on HBCU first generation college students and their college search process. These in-depth interviews revealed that these students often feel overwhelmed by the information they find online and the process of contacting institutions, but those who receive institutional support feel more supported and are more likely to choose those schools.

This piece is followed by a quantitative research study that identified doctoral students' level of integration with faculty, curriculum, and peers. This research offers implications for considering the enhancement and expansion of integration at the doctoral level to support students' persistence toward graduation.

Next, we have two interviews with two pillars in the field of education. First Sara Sullivan interviews Under Secretary of Education James Kvaal. The interview discusses Kvaal's educational journey, the role of his family and financial aid in his achievements, and his goals in educational policies aimed at expanding opportunities. Kvaal also comments on the state of higher education today, legislative impacts, the importance of diverse educational pathways, and the critical roles that higher education institutions play in student success and social advancement.

I had the honor of interviewing Eric Hoover, senior writer for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* who has written extensively about college access, admissions, and student diversity for two decades. In this interview, Hoover reflects on his career, from his early interest in journalism as a student to his extensive coverage of higher education issues, including the recent FAFSA crisis. He also discusses the challenges of reporting, the essential role of storytelling in journalism, and broader shifts in public perception and the purpose of higher education. You're in for a real treat with these two interviews. I am eternally grateful to former *C&U* editor-in-chief Louise Lonabocker for introducing interviews to the journal.

C&U 100

Starting with this issue and continuing through Issue 4 of Volume 100, we are bringing you content that looks back and looks forward. In Issue 1, we offer four retrospective pieces:

- Our managing editor, Heather Zimar, reflects on what it means to serve AACRAO as a sort of "publications czar," reflecting on collectively what has made this publication a dynamic and influential resource in the field of higher education.
- AACRAO's executive director, Melanie Gottlieb, reflects on the journal's pivotal role in shaping higher education professions through the cultivation and dissemination of specialized knowledge, fostering innovation, best practices, and professional growth among practitioners amid an evolving educational landscape.
- Kimberley Buster-Williams' reflections on 1925 thoroughly explores the career and legacy of Alida Priscilla Banks, an African-American trailblazer in higher education, while examining the historical context, challenges, and milestones of 1925, and highlighting the progress and ongoing evolution of higher education.
- James Paterson reflects on the similarities and differences between the educational challenges of 1925 and today, examining the pivotal events and discussions recorded in the inaugural Bulletin of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars, which mirror modern debates on data use, college value, preparedness, and admissions criteria.

Forum

In this issue, you will read three campus viewpoints and one commentary. Levin and Minichini describe the University of Toronto's online absence declaration (AD) tool. In response to a surge in student absences due to the pandemic, the University of Toronto reviewed and adjusted its online Absence Declaration (AD) tool to streamline the process for students while addressing concerns about rising absences and maintaining academic integrity, resulting in usage limits and enhanced notification features. Next, Johnson explores the organizational structure of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), emphasizing the importance of integrating the registrar's office with both enrollment management and academic affairs to enhance student success and address the ongoing challenges of administrative and academic coordination. Hoskinson's third in the series (see 99–3 and 99–4, respectively, for parts 1 and 2) on registrar's office best practices explores proven practices and how they are shaped and reviewed. Finally, Windholz's commentary, in a "then and now" approach, reflects on 23 years in enrollment management, highlighting the profound changes in the profession, from evolving student priorities and diversified recruitment strategies to the critical focus on institutional survival amidst shifting demographics and increasing operational complexities.

As usual, this is a jam-packed issue with great research and reflections on the current state of higher education.

I also want to share a new bold initiative: Become one of our new 100 authors! We are challenging ourselves in our 100th year to recruit 100 new authors! If you have never been published in *C&U*, please consider stepping up and being a part of this effort. It's as easy as doing a book review.

Celebrating a 100th anniversary is a monumental milestone that signifies a century of dedication, growth, and achievement. It offers an invaluable opportunity to reflect on *College and University*'s enduring legacy, acknowledge the contributions of those who have shaped its journey and set a visionary path for the future. This centennial celebration not only honors past accomplishments but also reinvigorates the commitment to continue making a lasting impact in the years to come. Here's to 100 years of sharing knowledge and best practices!

New Authors
CU100
Home Page

This 100th volume of College & University is dedicated to the many authors who have contributed articles over the years; you do important work every day. Reflecting on, and sharing, this work through research and writing inspires others in the field to do the same. These contributions foster an environment where practitioners are continuously learning, seeking information and insight, and implementing best practices. This knowledge-sharing environment, in turn, positively impacts learner success.

C&U 100 YEARS

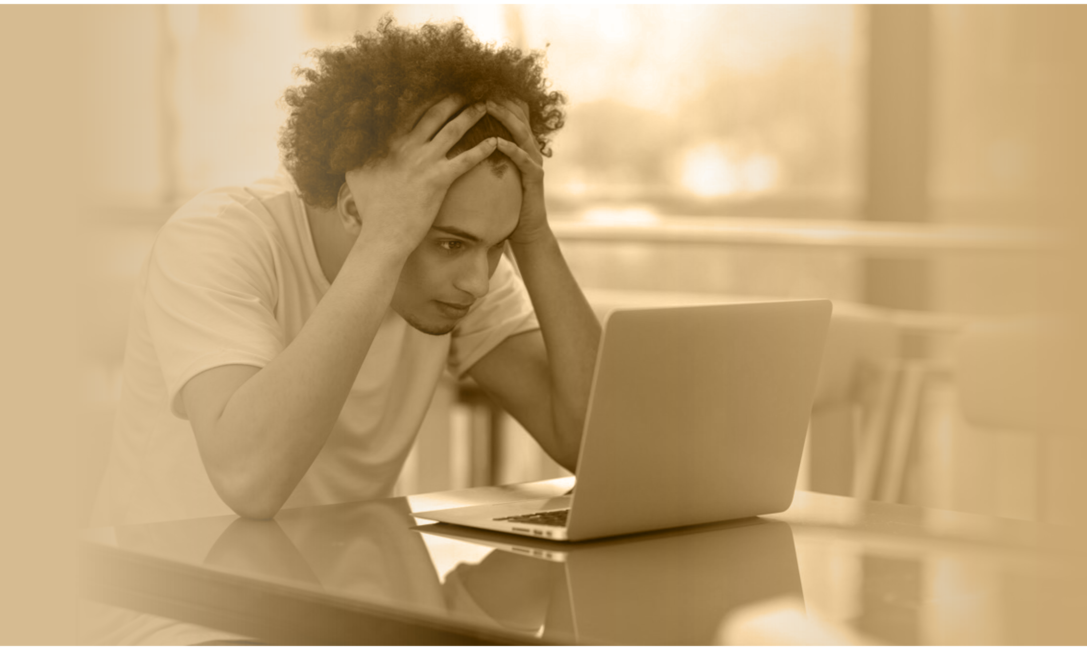
A CENTURY of SHARING KNOWLEDGE and BEST PRACTICES

This volume is also dedicated to all the editors and board members who have provided expertise and support over the last century; your guidance has been vital to the success of the journal. Your careful review of, and thoughtful feedback on, submissions ensures our content is valuable to the higher education community. In addition, your willingness to work together, exchange ideas, and seek out and encourage writers has fostered a sense of community and collaboration.

FEATURE

Feeling Overwhelmed

First-Generation College Students' Experiences with Social Capital and Community Cultural Wealth During the College Search Process



Pamela Peters

First-generation college students, who are often low-income or from minoritized backgrounds, face many challenges when they enter college. As they begin the college search process, they may seek support from spaces outside of their families to understand and find information. This study used in-depth interviews with first- and second-year first-generation college students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to understand their experiences searching online, seeking help, and how that impacts their college choice. This research found that first-generation college students struggle with the amount of information they find and that they become overwhelmed when they begin contacting institutions. Those students who receive help from institutions tend to feel supported and choose those schools.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged students, instructors, and institutions to learn new ways of thinking about higher education (Harper 2020; Nguyen, *et al.* 2021; Sessoms, *et al.* 2021). Many first-generation college students (FGCS) have found themselves struggling to keep up with the financial demands of college (Garces-Jimenez 2020) or contemplating whether college is even attainable (Dwyer and Yoo 2020). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), college enrollment for eighteen-to-24-year-olds dropped from 41 percent in 2010 to 38 percent in 2021, and this is expected to drop more for FGCS (Dwyer and Yoo 2020), who often lack knowledge about higher education. Admissions staff at institutions of higher education are in a unique position to support potential FGCS but may be unaware of all the challenges facing these students.

FGCS often come from minoritized, lower-income communities and lower-education backgrounds (Collins and Bilge 2020), but FGCS are not monolithic. They often lack knowledge about what to expect in college or how to navigate the search and entry process (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020). Specifically, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) serve students from any background, 25 percent of student enrollment at HBCUs is made up of non-Black students, but they were established to support Black students after the American Civil War (Sierra, *et al.* 2023). Also, according to the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (2019), 52 percent of students who attend HBCUs are first-generation college students, compared to 19 percent at predominantly white institutions (PNPI 2024). HBCUs have historically supported underrepresented groups when they enter college, however, when FGCS begin to search for college information, they can advance their chances of entering and matriculating through college when they receive support early and regularly (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* 2018). While technology can offer an opportunity to help successfully navigate the college search process (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* 2018), FGCS may still struggle with the information they are receiving (Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020). Lacking the social capital to understand information can become overwhelming, especially for FGCS, who may go through the process alone (Gist-Mackey, *et al.* 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020).

Social capital is defined as the knowledge we receive through the networks we create over time (Lin 2001; Putnam 1995). Social capital research has tended to ignore individuals from marginalized communities (Lin 2001), such as FGCS. Community cultural wealth (CCW) as a concept recognizes the capital that people from minoritized communities have and seeks to utilize this to better support students from those communities (Yosso 2005). This study seeks to determine the challenges first- and second-year FGCS at HBCUs face when searching for college online and how they are impacted by experiences with social capital and community cultural wealth.

Literature Review

FGCS parents never attended college; they tend to be low-income and often come from racially/ethnically minoritized communities; however, FGCS are not monolithic (Collins and Bilge 2020; Gist-Mackey, *et al.* 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020). Many also tend to experience issues related to systemic inequalities and deficit thinking built out of stereotypes targeting low-income and underrepresented populations (Collins and Bilge 2020; Gist-Mackey, *et al.* 2018). FGCS enroll into higher education at lower rates because they may feel they do not belong or are concerned about the cost of college (Gist-Mackey, *et al.* 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020). Many must work full-time to pay for tuition and living expenses (Collins and Bilge 2020; Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* 2018) or rely on loans because they are less likely to receive financial aid (Gist-Mackey, *et al.* 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020). Since FGCS come from families and communities that lack college knowledge (Collins and Bilge 2020), they may go through the process alone (Gist-Mackey, *et al.* 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020).

Social Capital and Marginalized Communities

Social capital is the relationships developed that allow people to gather information to move up economically, socially, or politically (Putnam 2000). Researchers traditionally recognize those with higher status as having social capital, thus controlling who receives information (Lin 2001; Putnam 2000), which often requires people from minoritized communities to go outside of their communities to gain information (Lin 2001). This causes minoritized communities to be framed as lacking social capital, but CCW recognizes the capital marginalized populations have.

Community Cultural Wealth as Capital

Community cultural wealth is a concept that challenges the traditional ideas of deficit thinking—biases or stereotypes brought to the forefront to blame victims or minoritized populations for the inequalities that exist instead of asking why they exist (Collins and Bilge 2020; Yosso 2005). Social capital research traditionally claims that those from higher socio-economic positions or who are white males tend to have more social capital, which utilizes deficit thinking (Lin 2001). CCW challenges deficit thinking by recognizing other forms of capital (Yosso 2005). CCW challenges researchers to learn from the experiences of marginalized communities to develop an understanding of how systemic inequalities impact their lives.

CCW recognizes six forms of capital that minoritized communities often have: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant (Yosso 2005). *Aspirational capital* recognizes an ability to hope for something better and to persistently pursue goals. This is developed through personal experiences or learning from others (Holland 2017). *Linguistic capital* is the ability to interpret information that is not easily understandable or known within a community. FGCS may lack knowledge about college, but they can learn through peers or older students to navigate their way through college (Holland 2017; Yosso 2005). *Familial capital* is support or passing down of generational knowledge to understand a community or culture. While families of FGCS lack knowledge about higher education, they often provide emotional support (Holland 2017). *Social capital* is similar to traditional social capital but recognizes the importance of networks within marginalized communities and focuses on the betterment of the community (Yosso 2005). FGCS will often seek help from family, friends, or peers (Holland 2017), but when they cannot get answers, they will go outside their communities to find support (Jayakumar, *et al*. 2013). *Navigational capital* is the ability to traverse unfamiliar or uncomfortable spaces or systems. *Resistant capital* is the ability to remove oneself from oppressive or negative situations. Minoritized students may choose to attend a different school when they feel unsupported or to escape oppressive situations, such as experiencing microaggressions (Holland 2017). While FGCS learn these skills, institutions can better support them by becoming knowledgeable translators.

Being Knowledgeable Translators

While FGCS families and communities are often supportive, they usually cannot provide some of the essential information needed during the college search. When students cannot find answers within their own networks, they will seek out knowledgeable translators, which provides an opportunity for high schools, higher education institutions and community centers (Jayakumar, *et al*. 2013). Knowledgeable translators provide instrumental capital in a particular area and share information without expectations (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al*. 2018). Potential FGCS may seek information and support through multiple outlets online, such as group chats, social media, or websites, which might not be legitimate (Gist-Mackey, *et al*. 2018; Rowan-Kenyon, *et al*. 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020), but for FGCS, who are often impacted by the digital divide—lacking access to or technological literacy skills—online spaces can present a challenge (Lund and Wang 2020). While technology offers many benefits, it is not a sufficient space for primary support.

Institutional online spaces tend to focus on selling their school first, instead of connecting with and providing information that could be vital for a potential students' success (Lund and Wang 2020; Rowan-Kenyon, *et al*. 2018). Students frequently begin the search process online, which makes online institutional spaces a good place to connect with and provide vital information to potential students (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al*. 2018). Institutions must identify potential FGCS, develop strategies of support, connect with them early, and stay connected throughout college to make FGCS feel comfortable and important to the campus community (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al*. 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020). Previous research has focused on where potential students find support (Gist-Mackey, *et al*. 2018; Rowan-Kenyon, *et al*. 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020), how community programs can support FGCS (Jayakumar, *et al*. 2013), how online spaces can support recruitment (Lund and Wang 2020), how schools market themselves online (Lund and Wang 2020; Rowan-Kenyon, *et al*. 2018), what information institutions provide online (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al*. 2018), and how to develop supportive strategies (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al*. 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020), but research has been limited on learning from FGCS their experiences during the college search process online. By understanding FGCS experiences, institutions can become trusted knowledgeable translators. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the experiences of first- and second-year FGCS at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) during the online college search process by asking:

- **RQ1:** What are the experiences of first- and second-year first-generation college students during the college search process online?
- **RQ2:** What are the experiences of first- and second-year first-generation college students when they contact colleges and universities during the search process?
- **RQ3:** How do college search experiences and interactions with institutional staff impact

the decisions of first-generation college students when they choose an institution?

Methodology

This study uses critical qualitative inquiry (CQI) as a guide for conducting in-depth interviews with first- and second-year FGCS at HBCUs. CQI requires researchers to 1) be critical about the issues, 2) be critical of their methods and 3) address the issues through reflexivity (Flick 2017; Winkle-Wagner, *et al.* 2019). For this study, CQI was used to support counter-storytelling—a method of interviewing where minoritized communities can share their experiences without the fear of being stereotyped (Winkle-Wagner, *et al.* 2019). Because all the participants identified as low-income, Black, and attended an HBCU, it was especially important for them to feel comfortable with a researcher who identifies as a white female. The researcher's positionality required constant reflexivity.

To ensure counter-storytelling worked, it was essential to establish trust. Emails with a short biography about the researcher were sent to departments at the higher education institutions along with information related to the study. When a potential participant reached out, the researcher responded with a more in-depth email describing the study and the researcher's background. Before interviews began, the space was opened for participants to ask questions about the study or researcher. Once they felt comfortable, interviews were conducted with the understanding that they could stop or ask questions at any point.

Sample Population and Consent

This study involved 26 in-depth interviews with FGCS who were in their first or second year of college at a four-year institution. For this study, FGCS were students whose parents did not attend a four-year college or university. All the participants attended small Historically Black Colleges or Universities, while two attended a predominantly white institution their first year in school.

Admissions and student services departments at 62 institutions were sent emails over a period of eight weeks; several were contacted multiple times. Recruitment information was shared with students at seven colleges and universities who responded. Other participants learned about the study from participants who already took part in the study.

Interviews were conducted over Zoom using a separate link for each to ensure privacy. Prior to each interview, participants were read a verbal consent form. After concluding the interviews, each participant received a $20 Amazon e-gift card that was paid for using a $1,000 grant from the University of Kansas School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Social Capital and Community Cultural Wealth

Questions for this study came out of research related to social capital, community cultural wealth in higher education, digital divide, and FGCS studies. Questions emerged from literature by Chen and Li (2017), van Deursen and Helsper (2018) and van Deursen, *et al.* (2014) whose research focused on how minoritized communities find support on and offline, the challenges they face, how interactions impact outcomes, and whether they find instrumental social capital. By asking participants to describe their experiences the researcher could delve deeper into inequalities that exist (Flick 2017). Questions related to social capital and CCW included: "Can you describe how a faculty or staff member has helped provide you support and college information you were unable to find or understand?" and "What information do you know now that you wish your high school or college would have provided to you when you were preparing for college?"

Data Analysis

This research used a four-step process that is a method of CQI (Reavis 2019). First, interview transcripts were read while the researcher took notes to adjust questions, so participants better understood what they were being asked. Second, low-level codes emerged based directly on the words of the participants. Third, the codes were grouped from the low-level codes into high-level codes and a master codebook was created. Last, high-level codes were grouped into themes related to challenges, interactions, and experiences.

Results and Discussion

Feeling Overwhelmed With Information

All 26 participants expressed frustration over the search process during their interviews. Finding institutions online was easy, but they often felt that either finding information on websites or getting too much information online was overwhelming. Layla expressed frustration when she said: "We have more anxiety with applying to college because we don't really know how to apply. What to apply for. What to look for." Donna said, "[I] didn't really know where to start. I didn't really have one place that I needed to go or wanted to go." Julian found searching for colleges "frustrating and a learning process," adding that "[y]ou don't really have a lot of people who can help you before you go through it." Most of the participants felt they lacked knowledge about the college search process, and this caused them to struggle. Often those from minoritized communities may struggle or must go outside of their immediate communities to find information because they lack educational social capital (Lin 2001). The challenge participants found was figuring out what institutions were the best fit for them.

Many of the participants became overwhelmed by the amount of material they found and had to sort through all the information. Naya found the process to be "terrible," and stated: "My brain was constantly clouded with different types of information. And then being that I met different criteria, it almost felt like I was choosing the wrong thing." Elijah felt confused: "[I was] filling out the application and I didn't know something. I would have to go back to Google to read it, just figure out what it was and then have to go back. I had to do that a lot of times." While the participants could find the information, they lacked the knowledge to easily sort through and understand what was presented to them. Lacking social capital within their families or communities added to their frustration because they often had to navigate the process themselves. However, they had the navigational and aspirational capital (Yosso 2005) to work through the process and not give up. FGCS often lack knowledge but will figure out how to get the information they need, or they will be persistent until they reach their goals (Holland 2017). Although the participants expressed frustrations, they figured it out by conducting searches or working through the process.

The COVID-19 pandemic did play a role for some of the participants during the process. McKenna said:

> *I was applying through COVID by myself, and I wasn't aware of how to do so. I had a little bit of help from an organization, but it was COVID, so she was going through a lot as well. I had no idea what I was doing, especially since the counselors were unable to help me.*

Layla

We have more anxiety with applying to college because we don't really know how to apply. What to apply for. What to look for. ...[I] didn't really know where to start.

As previously stated, FGCS will find outlets to get the information they need or to work through the process on their own (Collins and Bilge 2020; Holland 2017). McKenna found an organization that provided limited help online, but other participants still relied on their high schools for information. Naya could not attend in-person classes at her high school after it reopened. She said: "It was kind of difficult to almost always be placed on a waitlist or the backburner. With college priority deadlines, it's like everybody has a deadline to meet but I wasn't being prioritized because I'm not at school." Like previous research that found FGCS often feel left out (Gist-Mackey, *et al.* 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020), the participants felt they were ignored by schools because they weren't there in-person. Although they had limited access to their high schools and an organization, they could not always get information in a timely manner, which was overwhelming. Colleges can become trusted knowledgeable translators (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* 2018) by connecting with potential FGCS early and developing close relationships with high schools, especially those most likely to serve FGCS.

Elijah

[I was] filling out the application and I didn't know something. I would have to go back to Google to read it, just figure out what it was and then have to go back. I had to do that a lot of times.

Going to Third Party Sites for Applying

Several participants turned to third party websites to apply for college because it was less overwhelming. Common College Application (CCA) and Common Black College Application (CBCA) were popular spaces for participants to learn about and apply to schools. CBCA's (2024) website is designed for students interested in more than 60 Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and the CCA (2024) website provides information to more than 1,000 schools. Both websites allow potential students to apply to multiple colleges for one price, which cuts the cost and provides information in one space.

Dominique found Common Black College App to be "a really good platform, because they have all the information about the school on there. You can message directly with a school. It has everything like the size of the programs, tuition costs, type of scholarships." McKenna added to this stating that she "applied on the Black Common App, where you can apply to a bunch of HBCUs for $20." The ease of access lessened their frustrations, and it helped ease financial concerns related to application fees, which researchers have found can often cause students to question whether to apply (Gist-Mackey, *et al.* 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020). While some financial concerns were lifted, they found the ease of access to information convenient.

Participants often found themselves struggling to understand or find information on colleges, like previous research (Lin 2001; Holland 2017). However, they used their navigational and aspirational capital (Yosso 2005) to find spaces where they could more easily reach their goals. Using these websites also showed their ability to gain CCW social capital (Yosso 2005), because they found these websites through word of mouth and experience. FGCS will regularly learn by watching others or asking questions, which not only shows navigational and social capital, but it is also linguistic capital (Holland 2017; Yosso 2005). The participants used these websites to understand terminology and more easily access college. The websites allowed them to learn about schools and more affordably navigate the process while finding reliable information.

Struggling to Contact Institutions

Another outlet participants utilized was to contact institutions they were interested in to ask for information. They reported mixed experiences in establishing connections. When participants attempted to connect with institutions and often felt they were being ignored. They became frustrated and felt more overwhelmed. Aiyana lived over five hours away from her institution and felt that going to the campus for help was not possible and she struggled with getting answers over the phone:

> *I'm trying to call. Nobody's answering the phone. And when you ask the question, they transfer you to another department. It was just like you're going through a whole chain, and you do it again the next day, and it's the same thing.*

Danielle recognized schools "can be understaffed sometimes," adding that she is "always patient with the staff. It was kind of complicated." Maya found that she had "to be persistent because if you don't, then they won't answer. You have to keep emailing and keep calling the school." While the time and process to get answers on the phone was overwhelming, others could not contact staff. When Melanie contacted admissions, it was "not a person who works there. It is actually a student [who] tells you your information, which I don't think they should be doing that. I think it should be a person who actually works in the office." Melanie struggled to trust the institution because of concerns over accuracy and sharing personal information with students.

Trust is created or destroyed depending on how information is shared among parties and whether an entity is perceived as supportive (Lin 2001; Putnam 2000). Participants questioned whether they could trust institutions when they contacted them and could not connect with admissions or financial aid staff, which caused them to question if they wanted to attend. Institutions can be knowledgeable translators, however, if the potential students feel it is difficult to get the information they need, institutions can be perceived as untrustworthy. Recognizing that potential FGCS may lack instrumental social capital at home can help institutions become better knowledgeable translators by understanding that answers may need to be explained more thoroughly to students who lack educational social capital. This has the potential to show FGCS they care about their success (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* 2018), and working closely with potential FGCS through the process can help them successfully matriculate through school.

Maya

[You have] to be persistent because if [you're not], then they won't answer. You have to keep emailing and keep calling the school.

Gabrielle

I know we're not necessarily on our own, but it's kind of like that's what they make it feel like...

Becoming Frustrated Over Being Ignored by Institutional Staff

Some participants shied away from schools because they felt staff there did not care about them. Gabrielle stated that, "I know we're not necessarily on our own, but it's kind of like that's what they make it feel like, you know, and I really hate that."

Naya said:

> *It was kind of one of those things that I didn't like because I felt like I was just trying to get information and the process of getting information, it kind of scared me because if I have issues on campus, is there going to be someone to help me immediately or will I have to wait? That was something that shied me away from those universities.*

Before entering college, FGCS tend to question whether they belong (Collins and Bilge 2020; Gist-Mackey, *et al.* 2018; Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020), so feeling ignored can cause them to question their self-worth in higher education or, like in Naya's situation, decide not to attend an institution. They showed resistant and navigational capital (Yosso 2005) when they moved on from spaces that felt unsupportive.

When participants felt unsupported by schools, they would often go to spaces like YouTube to find answers. After unsuccessfully trying to connect with staff over several days, Naya "just typed it in on You-

Tube; there's a surplus of videos explaining the same thing in less than two minutes." Similarly, Jayla sought out current students on social media when she was unable to get answers from staff. "They more than likely, they're not going to hold back on what they have to say," she said. Even if an institution is not trying to be unsupportive, if it is perceived as such, then trust is broken or strained (Lin 2001; Putnam 2000) and when an individual lacks instrumental social capital, a perceived lack of caring can further damage trust (Lin 2001). While the participants had less trust in the institutions, they had the aspirational capital (Yosso 2005) to find people or spaces that would support them in reaching their goals.

Connecting With Institutions

Some participants were able to connect with staff and had beneficial experiences. Danielle said, "What made me move to Lincoln was just the way that they engaged with me. I was very drawn to them." Taylor contacted a school that walked her through the process after being accepted:

> *I called; I think it was student affairs. They walked me through the process. They told me everything that was on the paper. They talked about what the letter was actually saying. I felt that was very helpful because they took the time out of their day to accommodate me.*

Both participants felt a connection with the institutions because of the interactions they had with admissions staff. Because they felt the schools cared about them, they chose to attend the institutions.

A few participants chose their institutions because of support from campus staff outside of admissions. Gabrielle was interested in cheerleading, and she said she "got in contact with the cheer coach and got a cheer scholarship added onto my POP scholarship." Similarly, Ashley contacted the cheer coach at her school and asked them "how the team works before I go to the school. Talking to the coaches I was very excited, and I had a lot of options." Again, by making connections with these staff members, the participants developed trust with the institutions.

In all the situations, care and trust were developed because staff acted as knowledgeable translators (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* 2018) by providing instrumental social capital. They also supported the aspirational, navigational, and linguistic capital (Yosso 2005) the participants needed to help make decisions. Aspirational and navigational capital were provided by staff who guided participants through the process and helped financially so they could matriculate toward beginning college. Linguistic capital was provided by staff who walked participants through the process of understanding what they needed to do and what was expected of them. By providing linguistic, aspirational, navigational, and social capital the institutions began developing trust and, in turn, they marketed the school to the participants as a place where they would be supported.

Conclusion

Like previous research (Lin 2001; Putnam 2000), this study found that trust is developed or broken between entities based on interactions, and participants were more likely to choose schools they trusted. Like Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* (2018), this study also found that when schools act as knowledgeable translators, potential students are more likely to gravitate to those institutions. Therefore, when institutions are providing both traditional social capital and CCW, most notably linguistic, aspirational, and navigational capital, the participants felt more drawn to those schools. While institutions tend to focus on marketing and branding (Lund and Wang 2020; Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* 2018), this study found that institutions need to establish closer connections with FGCS to support their aspirations and help them navigate into college by providing adequate information and support. When institutions took time to connect with and provide in-depth answers to participants, they felt more confident and connected to the school.

Limitations

This study involved interviewing first- and second-year first-generation college students who were in high school during the COVID-19 pandemic. More studies should be conducted to determine if the experiences are similar post-pandemic. This study focused on experiences searching for schools and contacting institutions. Future research should use social capital and CCW to determine if these experiences are extended into other areas of the search process, such as financial aid. Future research should focus on institutions and students from other racial backgrounds and institutions to determine if their experiences are similar. Lastly, while this research touched on how FGCS found information outside of institutions, future research should evaluate students' experiences in third party sites or other spaces not involving school staff.

Recommendations

Institutions of higher education have an opportunity to better support FGCS. Because first-generation students often come from lower-income, racially/ethnically minoritized populations and lower-education communities (Collins and Bilge 2020; Rowan-Kenyon, *et al*. 2018; Winkle-Wagner and Locks 2020) they may lack the social capital to easily navigate the college search process (Lin 2001). Creating relationships with high schools, especially those in marginalized communities, to make early connections with potential FGCS can make them feel important and that college is attainable, mirroring research by Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* (2018). This will allow schools to promote themselves, but it should also be used to identify FGCS.

Institutions of higher education must be knowledgeable translators (Rowan-Kenyon, *et al.* 2018) and should be a first access point for students seeking a college degree. Creating centralized spaces where potential students can be directed to ask trained staff questions could make the process less daunting. Providing information or links in spaces students frequent, like social media, YouTube, or third-party sites, can establish early trust. Reaching potential FGCS early is essential in establishing their sense of belonging. This will not eliminate all the frustrations or feeling overwhelmed, but it can make them feel comfortable in asking for help. When FGCS feel supported, they are less likely to give up or choose another school.

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FEATURE

Impact of Faculty and Curriculum on Online Doctoral Integration

A Quantitative Perspective

Marlene Blake, Sushil Jindal, and **Martha Zepeda**

The purpose of the quantitative study was to identify doctoral students' level of integration with curriculum, peers, and faculty. Two hundred and sixty-five participants completed the Distance Doctoral Program Integration Scale (DDPIS) designed to measure academic and social integration. Key findings indicate higher levels of integration with specialized doctoral faculty and research focused curriculum with structured support.

Identifying best practices in higher education to support lifelong learning and the value of a degree reflect areas of opportunity for leaders to continually consider. The doctoral degree is the highest level in academia and can positively impact an individual's career and income (Brill, *et al.* 2014). Individuals with a doctoral degree have high weekly median incomes and low unemployment rates (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019). Considering the benefits of the doctoral degree to professional advancement and educational needs for flexibility, learners are increasingly seeking online programs (Massyn 2021). Distance learning provides flexibility, which leads to the popularity of online course enrollment (Zimmerman 2012). With the increasing interest in online learning and steady growth, student retention is lower than the traditional environment and a continuous concern to the education leaders (Muljana and Luo 2019). Higher education leaders continue to focus on strategies to strengthen student success, achievement, and retention. When evaluating online student retention strategies, various variables can contribute to student success including institutional support, promoting a sense of belonging, learning facilitation, level of program difficulty, and additional areas (Muljana and Luo 2019).

Although flexible and convenient, distance education includes complex challenges in doctoral student persistence. The broad problem accounts for the number of doctoral students not persisting to graduation at 40 to 60 percent (Cochran, *et al.* 2014). Student attrition in doctoral degree programs increases in the distance education environment. Kennedy, Terrell, and Lohle (2015) highlight how the attrition rate is 10 to 15 percent higher in online, hybrid, or limited residency programs. Integration socially and academically are key factors in doctoral program completion (Massyn 2021). With the continued growth of online doctoral programs coupled with the attrition challenges (Lively, *et al.* 2021), identifying factors and developing interventions to promote program integration is increasingly important (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Holmes, and Stephens 2019). Discovering unique approaches to support student success and facilitate connectedness by increasing integration in doctoral distance education may assist in improving issues related to the complex challenges of persistence.

Problem Statement

The problem for doctoral students in online programs included fewer desirable levels of connectedness (Bireda 2019), resulting in challenges during different phases of programs. To contribute to this gap, researchers recommend determining "integration differences of doctoral students in various program stages" (Holmes and Rockinson-Szapkiw 2020, 192). The purpose of the quantitative study was to identify doctoral students' level of integration with curriculum, peers, and faculty. The following research questions guided the study:

- **RQ1:** What is the online doctoral students' integration level with faculty, peers, and curriculum?
- **RQ2:** What is the difference in the integration level of students with faculty, peers, and curriculum who joined the program before and after the revision of the program in 2020?

Literature Review

Various factors can contribute to student success. For instance, Kebritchi, Rominger, and McCaslin (2023) found indicators including grit, program details, faculty relationships, specific skills such as feedback implementation, while balancing social support and academic activities, as contributing factors for student success. Researchers reveal that student success extends beyond instructor presence wherein a student's connectedness and sense of belonging can greatly impact retention (Peacock and Cowan 2019). Student connectedness relates to feelings of involvement, integration, and closeness in a specific group, environment, or organization (Townsend and McWhirter 2005). To that end, cultivating connectedness and integration to support self-directed doctoral online learners is fundamental in contributing to student success (Blake 2018).

Given the various ways doctoral programs are structured, it is vital to explore integration to further understand the factors contributing to the gap in doctoral student connectedness to faculty, fellow peers, and curriculum. Bireda's (2019) research revealed lower levels of connectedness with doctoral student peers along with slightly above average perceptions with their supervisors highlighting the need to further support socialization. Breitenbach (2019) also highlighted how social connectedness, instructional strategy support, along with curriculum structure, are critical components throughout the program that may contribute to student success and completion of the doctoral program.

Considering the valuable role of college connections is imperative in higher education. Encouraging students to embrace the opportunity to establish relationships with faculty, peers, and the institution can contribute to foster a stronger sense of connection (Bongiorno 2022). Accordingly, understanding the relevant role of student, faculty, and curriculum integration offers integral insight to help facilitate crucial college collaboration.

Understanding the role of peer support in online programs is necessary to consider. For instance, Berry (2017) focused on exploring how online doctoral students define community. The methodology included a review of online course classroom video footage, classroom message boards, and 20 interviews with first- and second-year students. The data analysis results revealed a more peer-centered sense of community in the online program, versus a face-to-face program. The conclusions reached in the study suggested that peers in an online program relied on each other, and less on faculty, for support and community.

Faculty interaction is equally essential to student integration. Researchers explored personal factors and program factors that may influence online doctoral integration and persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Holmes, and Stephens 2019). Through the study findings, students in a cohort reported higher program integration while also reporting an opportunity for a greater amount of synchronous communication. Both factors can lead to higher faculty interaction. Blake (2018) also explored the faculty role in enhancing the connectedness of doctoral students in the dissertation phase. The Doctoral Student Connectedness Scale was administered as a pre-test prior to a dissertation resources workshop and as a post-test after the workshop. The study results demonstrated that intentional efforts to establish feelings of connectedness within the student population must be proactively present throughout the doctoral program. Another consideration includes the intentional efforts of faculty to create connections with students. In one study of social work doctoral students, researchers analyzed the effectiveness of online learning in comparison to face-to-face learning (Myers, *et al.* 2019). In the area of social connectedness, both students and faculty found difficulties in forming a connection in the online environment. Faculty expressed the need for more intentional efforts on their part to form relationships with their students. There was also the feeling of not being able to become familiar with their students on a more personal level in the online environment.

When examining the factors of persistence in doctoral programs, it is also ideal to consider the faculty influence on student success. In an integrated literature review, Lehan, Hussey, and Hotz (2021) highlighted how consistency in the student-faculty relationship added a sense of community and was a positive factor in student persistence in their program. Breitenbach (2019) also evaluated the effect of instructor influence using a survey to examine the Ewing Model for online doctoral program project completion. Student social connectedness was evaluated as one of the predictors of connectedness. The findings indicated that instructor feedback helped students improve in their course work, and students felt a high connectedness to their instructor. Results also showed that students had a higher feeling of connectedness to their instructor than their peer students.

Identification of the varied needs for student support through defined phases of the doctoral program may help with persistence to program completion. Blake (2018) indicated that intentional implementation of peer, faculty, and university resources permeating throughout the doctoral degree experience may contribute to enhancing connectedness, which can contribute to integration and involvement. Furthermore, highly-developed and targeted curricula within online coursework can have a significant influence on graduate students—not only their learning but other behavioral and health outcomes as well (Brett, *et al.* 2020), implying a strong sense of integration into coursework. Accordingly, by using the Distance Doctoral Program Integration Scale (DDPIS), program integration can be measured at any stage (Holmes and Rockinson-Szapkiw 2020). Further exploration into how intentional integration support can be tailored to various, defined stages of the doctoral program needs further study.

Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical framework focuses on Tinto's Student Integration Model (1993), which provides a foundation from which to consider doctoral-level learning despite differences in the traditional undergraduate experience. The model aims to understand and identify various factors influencing persistence in college students. Tinto defined persistence as a longitudinal process that incorporates the academic potential of the student as well as the institutional social systems. The learning experience in the classroom with a focus on expectations, support, assessment, and involvement greatly influences student persistence (Tinto 2012). Tinto's "Model of Institutional Departure" states that, to persist, students need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems (Tinto 1993).

Study Significance

The study significance includes insight on specific curriculum content that can contribute to increasing integration for doctoral learners in online practitioner programs. The updates which were a primary part of this study consisted of curriculum changes with a specific sequence of courses in doctoral degree phases versus a prior focus on the dissertation at the end of the program. Key dissertation elements were intentionally integrated into each of the five phases within course curriculum offering opportunities for student research, development, resource guidance, and structured support with embedded feedback reviews. The five phases allow students to provide a plan for the study while researching, revising, and writing throughout the iterative as well as rigorous dissertation process. Student expectations consist of completing checkpoints in the phase process with a focus on meaningful milestones including an outline (1), drafting chapters (2–3), refining the proposal (4), and preparation for IRB approval to collect and analyze data for the final report to present during an oral defense presentation (5). In combination with curriculum enhancements, dedicated faculty focused on specific roles, continued collaboration, consistent support, and student success contributed to strengthening the program.

Identifying initiatives to improve integration may impact doctoral persistence. Integration is a key factor associated with the decision to leave or stay in a doctoral degree program. Tinto (1993) suggested that doctoral student persistence is "shaped by the personal and intellectual interactions that occur within and between students and faculty and the various communities that make up the academic and social systems of the institution" (231). Holmes and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2020) in their instrument validation found that academic and social integration are intertwined for doctoral students in online programs. Tinto (1999) pointed out the integration of academics with social involvement and engagement as critical to student retention up to and including graduation. Roach and Lemasters (2006) also emphasized the importance of integration by stating that online delivery of instruction does not refute the need for building a sense of school community to increase student satisfaction and retention; it simply changes the way to interact. Thus, mentoring and faculty support in an online learning environment allow the doctoral student to persist in completion of the program (Erichsen, Bollinger and Halupa 2014).

Developing a sense of belonging and engaging in social integration in online learning tends to challenge college communities. There are five factors that can assist in building online learning communities. These factors are humanizing the instructor by allowing students to become acquainted with the instructor; incorporating video into course delivery, which can be accomplished through video discussion boards or synchronous video-conferencing class sessions; meeting in real time with the incorporation of residencies or other high-impact events; encouraging learners to work together and become resources for one another; and requiring consistent interaction among class members (O'Malley 2017). Combined, the five factors can impact integration based on the additional areas incorporated to build community while creating connections with instructors, class members, and curriculum. Considering the viral role of connectedness to integration, the current study was conducted to discover how integrated students feel with the faculty, fellow students, and curriculum in online doctoral degree programs.

Method

The data collection tool Distance Doctoral Program Integration Scale (DDPIS) used in this quantitative study was developed and validated by Holmes and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2020). The DDPIS instrument in Appendix A (on page 26) consists of 32 items. The survey is designed to measure elements of academic integration (satisfaction with the academic program, student-faculty interaction, and student-student academic interaction) and social interaction (satisfaction with the nature and quality of student-faculty non-academic interaction and student-student non-academic interactions). The survey included Likert-type questions in which participants rated the level of satisfaction with response options consisting of very high (5), high (4), medium (3), low (2) to very low (1) with higher scores indicating stronger integration. The demographic information included collection of participant program, phase, start year, gender, age, and ethnicity. The start year was divided into two categories, one prior to 2020 and a second from 2020 to the current year to align with the program revision in 2020.

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, data were collected between January 10 through 31, 2023. A convenience sample of current doctoral students at an online practitioner-based institution in the Southwestern United States consisted of the study population and participants who met the inclusion criteria received the survey via email. Although participants completed courses during the COVID-19 pandemic, the program is designed within an online learning environment for non-traditional students. Data analysis included the 265 completed responses.

Results

A total of 265 participants completed the demographics and DDPIS. Participants were asked a series of demographic questions to describe the sample reflected in Table 1. The majority of respondents were female, 185 (70%), and 79 (30%) were male. Most participants (57 percent) were in the age group of 38–52 years, while 11 percent were in the age group of 23–37, and the remaining 32 percent were 53 years or older in age. In response to phase of the program, 26 percent were in phase two, 20 percent in phase one, 18 percent in phase three and four, while 19 percent were in phase five. In response to the degree program enrolled in, 58 percent were in business, 25 percent in education, and 17 percent in health administration. Thirty-five percent of students who completed the survey were white, 41 percent Black, 13 percent Hispanic, and the remaining 11 percent were Asian, Native Hawaiian and other.

The following research questions guided the study:

- **RQ1:** What is the online doctoral students' integration level with faculty, peers, and curriculum?
- **RQ2:** What is the difference in the integration level of students with faculty, peers, and curriculum who joined the program before and after the revision of the program in 2020?
- **H2o:** There is no statistically significant difference in the integration level of doctoral students with faculty, peers, and curriculum who joined the program before and after the revision of the program in 2020.
- **H2a:** There is a statistically significant difference in the integration level of doctoral students with faculty, peers, and curriculum who joined the program before and after the revision of the program in 2020.

Table 1

Demographics

Demographic	n	%
Gender		
Male	79	30.0
Female	186	70.0
Age (years)		
23-37	28	10.6
38-52	151	57.0
53+	86	32.5
Ethnicity		
White	92	34.7
Black	109	41.1
Hispanic	35	13.2
Other	29	10.9
Program		
Business	154	58.1
Health Administration	46	17.4
Education	65	24.5
Program Start Year		
Before 2020	94	35.5
2020 and Beyond	171	64.5
Program Phase		
1	52	19.8
2	68	25.7
3	48	18.1
4	47	17.4
5	50	18.8

To examine the hypotheses regarding the difference in the integration level of doctoral students with faculty, peers, and curriculum who joined the program before and after the revision of the program in 2020, a t-stat was computed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to assess if there was a statistically significant impact on the integration (faculty, student, and curriculum) subscale scores. The level of significance was set at $p = 0.05$, which lowers the chance of a Type I Error or inadvertently rejecting the null hypothesis when it is true (Salkind 2009). Salkind reported that the size of the sample must be greater than 30, which it was in this study. The large size of

Table 2

Distance Doctoral Program Integration Scale Scores

	Faculty		Student		Curriculum	
	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD
Total	47.91	14.06	38.06	15.31	24.01	5.09
Before 2020	45.21	14.21	36.30	15.64	23.16	5.56
After 2020	49.39	13.79	39.03	15.08	24.65	4.39
Impact t	-2.33		-1.39		-2.24	
p-value	0.02[a]		0.17		0.03[a]	

Key

- SD = Standard Deviation
- [a] Level of significance set at p = 0.05

the population also helped to reduce Type II errors, which is "inadvertently accepting a false null hypothesis" (Salkind 2009, 176).

A significant impact was shown on students' start year of the program for faculty and curriculum integration subscale scores reflected in Table 2 wherein the null hypothesis was rejected. The maximum score for faculty and student integration includes 65 and 30 for the curriculum sub scale. Participants who started the program in 2020 or after had significantly higher mean ratings in comparison to those who enrolled prior to 2020. Table 2 includes the research results for RQ1 with the overall online doctoral student integration level with faculty, peers, and curriculum.

Discussion

For the first research question, the integration level is relatively high based on the scores included in Table 2. Using the DDPIS higher scores indicate stronger integration. Research question two included a higher impact in faculty and curriculum integration representing significance of the mean based on start year differences.

Overall, the findings align with elements of Tinto's Student Integration Model (1993). Specifically, the significance of faculty and curriculum integration is consistent with the influence of academic experiences and instructor interactions for student persistence. The curriculum and faculty focus emphasizes the impact of expectations, support, assessment, and involvement in the learning experience (Tinto 2012). Highlighting how educators can intentionally ensure this framework is included in the classroom curriculum and when collaborating with learners can contribute to successful student integration.

Several strategies have been evaluated to assess the impact on student integration. This study explored student integration from the standpoint of three perspectives: faculty, fellow peers, and curriculum. The student and faculty connection for doctoral education is crucial to consider. One study found that peer-to-peer connectedness was valued more than a student-faculty relationship in an online environment (Berry 2017). In the current study, the student-faculty results demonstrated a higher mean rating on the DDPIS for student-faculty integration for learners with a start year of 2020 and after than those with a start year prior to 2020. Though, the student-student findings were not found to be significant. This indicates that the student-faculty relationship in this study created greater feelings of connected integration with the same subset of students than the student-student relationship.

Varying results have been reported related to the level of student integration in an online doctoral program. For instance, previous studies have shown the significance of student-faculty integration through various mechanisms: synchronous communication (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Holmes, and Stephens 2019), establishing intentional connectedness with students (Blake 2018), and instructor feedback (Breitenbach 2019). While this study did not explore interventions contributing to connectedness, this research explored student-faculty integration based on program entry year.

A similar study explored the impact of demographic factors for students. In a predictive, correlational and multiple regression design study, Rockinson-Szapkiw, Holmes, and Stephens 2019 developed an online, doctoral program integration model. The impact of personal factors and program factors on integration of doctoral students was explored. The researchers found that their entire model was significant. Another of the program factors in the Rockinson-Szapkiw study was student stage in the program. While program stage was not independently impactful in program integration, the researchers stressed the importance of all factors studied within the model to play an important part in doctoral program integration. In contrast, this present study found that students in the program phase with the start year of 2020 and later, demonstrated significantly greater faculty and curriculum integration.

Previous scholarly studies have considered curriculum integration and the many factors contributing to connectedness with students. Involving students as much as possible into development of materials (Mackness, Mak and Williams 2010) and incorporating connectedness into the curriculum (Barnett, McPherson and Sandieson 2013) have been noted as important. In looking at the program phases approach of this study, curriculum integration demonstrated a significantly higher mean score for those students starting their program in 2020 or later than those starting their program before 2020.

In general, the results suggest a strong connection to faculty and curriculum for doctoral student integration. This finding aligns with research regarding the relationship with faculty (Kebritchi, Rominger, and McCaslin 2023) and mentors as a major factor in the successful completion of the doctoral program in the dissertation process as supervisor and guide (Hill and Conceição 2020). Moreover, Lim, *et al*. (2019) shared strategies for doctoral students by cultivating a shared culture of effective communication, commitment, and collaboration with faculty along with other student researchers. Accordingly, availability and effective faculty feedback along with the use of technology to create connections to interact were identified as proactive support strategies.

Implications and Recommendations

This study findings provide positive implications to consider increasing and improving integration at the doctoral level to promote persistence to graduation. Faculty hold a critical role in increasing integration by fostering continued student success with structure support and dedication to individualized feedback. For faculty integration with doctoral learners, a primary recommendation consists of creating specialized instructors with a focus on embedding dissertation resources and structured support throughout the classroom experience. An essential element of faculty integration includes offering opportunities to provide synchronous support to create connections and add exemplars aligned with the curriculum. To further support faculty and curriculum integration, the inclusion of guided synchronous support may include sessions discussing dissertation resources and writing tips. Creating consistency with focused faculty members may include a structure shift from adjunct instructors to a contracted staff function allowing more institutional connections to the culture and in providing holistic student support (Boone, *et al*. 2020). Implementing a unique faculty role to specifically support doctoral students could contribute to higher levels of engaging experiences.

Another recommendation for further student integration includes the use of consistent synchronous support embedded within online asynchronous programs. With the flexibility of online courses, this may present a challenge in integrating curriculum requirements with synchronous components for students and faculty proactively versus strongly encouraging this learning approach when necessary. Connecting with students using virtual technology tools can support an elevated form of engagement, valuable interaction, and an increasingly important faculty presence (Allen and Seaman 2013; Thompson, Ballenger and Templeton 2018). Maul, Berman and Ames (2018) found that using video technology, specifically, by dissertation chairs to advise their students resulted in improvements in the process and in student retention. Additionally, online discussion forums have been found to support social connectedness (Swaggerty and Broemmel 2017) and a sense of community (Trespalacios and Perkins 2016). Some of these technologies include streaming video, case simulations, use of Skype, Microsoft Teams, Google+, Zoom, and other real-time collaborative platforms that can have real potential for assisting with content retention and enhancing an interactive learning environment.

The final recommendation addresses the area of student-to-student integration. Ensuring educational leaders encourage students to create connections with peer groups is instrumental to increasing integration. Obtaining insight from students regarding their socialization needs is also vital to the learning experience (Blake, Jindal and Keleekai-Brapoh 2023). Gathering student insight may include involvement using synchronous focus groups in combination with evaluating end-of-course surveys. The use of technology tools and academic social groups may help to enhance student integration in doctoral program goals. For instance, Boone, *et al*. (2020) highlight how student social networks assist with gaining support emotionally and academically to complete graduation goals. Faculty can also add opportunities for students to collaborate with class colleagues during discussions and/or synchronous sessions. Providing resources to support students in building and discovering peer college communities is vital to help increase integration in doctoral learning.

Limitations

With a focus on current doctoral students at an online practitioner-based institution in the Southwestern United States, the resulting data may not be generalizable beyond the study population. Further research is recommended to identify success strategies to effectively establish doctoral student integration with faculty, curriculum, and peers. In addressing the study limitations, a future research recommendation includes gathering data from the participants on experiences regarding resources from faculty, courses, and peers who contribute to increasing feelings of integration within the program. Exploring integration with peers who are course colleagues and beyond the online classroom is especially essential to cultivate connectedness during the doctoral journey.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the increasingly important role of faculty and curriculum to higher levels of online doctoral student integration. A critical component of the findings highlights an enhanced emphasis on specialized doctoral faculty and research-focused curriculum with structured support through relevant resources. Providing additional opportunities for students to connect with other peers and/or researchers is recommended to continue connection options. Ultimately, encouraging faculty to create connections with students using synchronous technology tools to strengthen integration is suggested to enhance the doctoral experience. Higher education leaders can empower faculty by sharing strategies to elevate student integration. Faculty share the responsibility of program progress and completion with doctoral students. Intentional integration of research throughout courses to contribute to the dissertation process is equally essential from the curriculum perspective.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Distance Doctoral Program Integration Scale

Item	Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
Faculty Integration					
How the faculty care about you as a real person	○	○	○	○	○
How well faculty members foster feelings that you personally belong in this program	○	○	○	○	○
The quality of academic-related contact you have with faculty (consider all synchronous and asynchronous interactions)	○	○	○	○	○
The enthusiasm faculty demonstrate for your academic work	○	○	○	○	○
The availability of the faculty to discuss academic issues	○	○	○	○	○
How easily you can approach faculty members with your personal concerns.	○	○	○	○	○

Scale: Level of satisfaction: 1 = Very Low; 2 = Low; 3 = Medium; 4 = High; 5 = Very High

Item	Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
The amount of academic-related contact you have with faculty (consider all synchronous and asynchronous interactions)	○	○	○	○	○
The quality of academic feedback provided by the faculty	○	○	○	○	○
The encouragement faculty members provide you	○	○	○	○	○
The guidance faculty provide about the dissertation process in this program	○	○	○	○	○
The quality of academic support in your program (*e.g.*, statistics assistance, writing assistance, and research assistance)	○	○	○	○	○
The timeliness of academic feedback provided by the faculty	○	○	○	○	○
The relationships you have developed with at least one faculty member	○	○	○	○	○
Student Integration					
The sense of social connectedness between you and your fellow students	○	○	○	○	○
The level of social support you receive from fellow students	○	○	○	○	○
The amount of social interactions you have with your fellow students	○	○	○	○	○
The personal relationships you developed with your fellow students	○	○	○	○	○
The quality of social interactions you have with your fellow students	○	○	○	○	○
The opportunities you have to learn from your fellow students	○	○	○	○	○
The amount of constructive feedback you receive from your fellow students	○	○	○	○	○
How using various distance methods to communicate (*e.g.*, telephone, live video, online chat, email, and/or social media sites) has helped you feel personally connected with other students	○	○	○	○	○
The level of cooperation with your fellow students when completing program requirements	○	○	○	○	○
The quality of academic-related interactions you have with other students	○	○	○	○	○
The willingness of students to provide academic -related help to other students	○	○	○	○	○
The level of mutual trust among the students in this program	○	○	○	○	○
The frequency of academic-related interactions you have with other students	○	○	○	○	○
Curriculum Integration					
The quality of the curriculum in your program	○	○	○	○	○
The relevancy of the curriculum to your goals	○	○	○	○	○

Scale: Level of satisfaction: 1 = Very Low; 2 = Low; 3 = Medium; 4 = High; 5 = Very High

Item	Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
The quality of instruction in your program	○	○	○	○	○
How you are finding the coursework in your program to be a good fit for you (e.g., there is good alignment with personal interests, application to future job goals, application to real life, or other similar reasons)	○	○	○	○	○
How the coursework prepares students for the dissertation process	○	○	○	○	○
The sequencing of the coursework in your program	○	○	○	○	○

Scale: Level of satisfaction: 1 = Very Low; 2 = Low; 3 = Medium; 4 = High; 5 = Very High

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FEATURE

Interview with James Kvaal

Sara CW Sullivan

James Kvaal served as Under Secretary of Education from September 2021 to January 2025. Kvaal led the Department's work on higher education, student financial aid, and career and adult education. He worked to build an inclusive higher education system that helps all students graduate and go on to a better life. His work led to millions of borrowers receiving student loan forgiveness, more affordable repayment plans for future students, and stronger safeguards against future unaffordable loans.

Earlier in his career, Kvaal served in the White House under President Clinton and President Obama, including more than three years as deputy domestic policy adviser to President Obama. He was the policy director on President Obama's 2012 campaign, a co-chair of the Biden-Harris campaign's education advisory committee, and the deputy lead of President Biden's Department of Education transition team.

Kvaal has also served as Deputy Under Secretary at the Department of Education and as a professional staff member in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Immediately prior to joining the Biden Administration, Kvaal was president of The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS), a research and advocacy nonprofit dedicated to affordability and equity in higher education. Kvaal taught at the University of Michigan's Ford School of Public Policy, and he graduated with honors from Stanford University and Harvard Law School.

Sullivan: Thanks for being here today. Can you tell us a little bit more about your personal journey through education, including higher education, and how you got to be the under secretary?

Kvaal: Sure. Thank you so much for this opportunity. You know, education was a very high priority for my family, especially my parents. They made a lot of sacrifices to get the best education possible for my brothers and for me. We were fortunate to grow up in a town with an excellent public school system. From there, I was fortunate enough to go on to two great research universities; I completed my undergraduate degree at Stanford University and then I attended Harvard Law School. Those educational experiences created so many opportunities for me. I have always been thankful for the start in life and the options created by those schools. They would not have happened without my parents' sacrifice along with the help of student loans and Pell grants. You know, now I have a three-year-old son (coincidentally, it's his first day of preschool today).

Sullivan: Aw, congratulations, that is a big step!

Kvaal: Yes, and, you know, those are the same kinds of opportunities I hope to be able to offer him, and I believe every young person should have. So, that has motivated me ever since I left college, and still motivates me, the idea, "how can I help ensure everyone has the kinds of educational opportunities that I know will have a tremendously positive impact on their lives, their families' lives, and the communities that surround them?"

Sullivan: Thank you. We are in kind of an interesting place in higher education right now. Can you comment on the state of higher education and the things we are facing in this moment?

Kvaal: Well, I think higher education is getting a lot of attention and in many ways that is recognition of how incredibly important it is to our country. We are also in a time of some anxiety, rapid economic change, and living standards that have been stagnant for a generation. Amid all this anxiety, people are reaching out to look for the most security they can find and have pinned a lot of hopes on a college education, and rightly so. We know that colleges and universities create a lot of opportunities for people; people from all backgrounds get a boost from going to college, and it can be one of the best investments in oneself and ones' future that young people can make. At the same time, we do have some challenges keeping our higher education system from living up to its potential. We also have some colleges and universities that do not consistently graduate all their students or do not adequately prepare them for their careers, which impedes their pursuit to live a better life. And so, I think there is a challenge; how do we make sure that we are consistently living up to the potential that higher education offers our country and rising to the challenge people have set for us.

Sullivan: Absolutely. You mentioned the importance of higher education, and I would love for you to expand on that. What is the importance of a college degree in today's landscape, in the context of the intersection of society and education?

Kvaal: Yeah, college degrees are an incredible passport to a career and to a better life. We know that college not only changes the trajectory of the life of a student, but it also can change the trajectory of an entire family's history. It also has widespread benefits for our communities. College graduates often go into public service or contribute as entrepreneurs in myriad ways. We all have a stake in producing more college graduates and creating more opportunities for people to go as far as they want to or can go. And I'm talking about all kinds of degrees here. When we look at the industries of the future from microchips to clean energy to health care, we're going to need people with advanced degrees and bachelor's degrees and associate degrees and certificates and many other kinds of credentials working side by side, building the kind of country we want.

Sullivan: I appreciate you including all sorts of degrees, and I know my colleagues in higher education in the diverse array of institutions in our country will, too. It is personal for me, too. My son is pursuing an associate's degree right now, and some of his high school classmates saw that as an easier or lesser route. It is not; it is a different way to pursue his goal and the reach for a better life as you discuss, so I am I'm so glad to hear that you find importance in that as well. The diversity of American higher education is part of what makes it so great.

Kvaal: Absolutely. I mean, community colleges in a way are such a quintessentially American institution. They meet people where they are and support whatever they're looking for: language skills or a GED or a job or the start of a long academic career. And they're affordable; they're practical; and they're deeply rooted in their community. So, I think we're very fortunate in our country to have the network of community colleges we do.

Sullivan: I agree. As we all know, higher education and legislation are inextricably intertwined. Currently, higher education is responding to and trying to comply with many pieces including a few heavy hitters like the new Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) roll out and Financial Value Transparency & Gainful Employment (FVT/GE) act. Higher education professionals see the impacts locally on their campuses, but can you comment more broadly about the political and legislative impacts on higher education?

Kvaal: Sure. While there's a lot going on right now, I think there *always* is. But it has seemed unusually busy lately. We live in a time when there's a lot of controversy, and people seem to have divided views on a lot of topics. Unfortunately, higher education isn't immune to that. We've seen a lot of debates over topics ranging from the war in Gaza to D-I initiatives to the role of student debt, and we know there are very strong opinions on *all* those things. That said, I do think there is consensus about the kind of higher education system we want. When I travel to blue states or red states, people may use different terminology, but we all want colleges and universities that are open to everyone in the local community, that help them graduate and go on to a career and a better life, and that help contribute to the local economy. The steps we will take, or want our colleges and universities to take, to achieve those goals, whether we frame them as equity or reframe them as workforce development or something else, are very similar across the country. And that gives me a lot of hope.

Sullivan: Absolutely. I serve AACRAO as the Chair of our Public Policy Advisory Group and have served as a Hill Day Advocate. I am fortunate to get to see firsthand the impacts advocacy and higher education using its voice has on that legislation. So, I truly appreciate that avenue to be a representative of higher education and to speak with several congressional offices. It's interesting and intriguing to hear how most of them are on board with the outcomes, but it's how to get there that introduces difference; but the ideas themselves are quite bipartisan. So that gives *me* hope.

Kvaal: Well, thank you for doing that! I think people underestimate how important their voices truly are. I always encourage people to participate in those processes and share their experiences. It's important, and it's very helpful to me and my understanding.

Sullivan: You are here today, listening and answering our questions, and that is a testament to how willing you are to engage in these important conversations, so thank you again! Looking to the future, what are your predictions for higher education? Similarly, what's your vision and what would you love to see?

Kvaal: Well, I think we live in an exciting time in higher education. The national graduation rate is now about 62 percent, which is not as high as it should be, but it's much higher than it was ten years ago. And we have seen more initiatives or programs or colleges that have found ways to graduate students from all backgrounds. We have seen, I think, a culture shift in higher education from a generation ago when we thought many students were perhaps not college material and we had gateway courses designed to weed students out. But now, I think we recognize many more students can succeed if we provide the right kind of support. I think that culture change is very transformative and something worth celebrating. So, I hope that we will continue to see efforts to not just offer seats to students, but to also take responsibility for their ability to navigate across the finish line and go on to a better life. This is the reason we are doing all these things. There are a lot of different strategies; there are just as many ways to accomplish these goals as there are colleges and universities. Overall, I think we are in a very exciting movement right now.

Sullivan: We talked a bit about our paths to our current positions. I was that public school teacher who dreamed of working for the Department of Education, though I am not sure I knew what the under secretary of education really did! Can you talk to me about how your post as under secretary influences the American system of higher education?

Kvaal: Well, come back, we could use you! We need all the help we can get! Our role in higher education is probably best known for financial aid programs. We spend more than $100 billion a year in grants and loans to help students pay for college and postsecondary opportunities of all kinds. And under this secretary, we have worked hard to try to make sure those benefits are reaching students to the greatest extent possible. For example, we took the number of people utilizing public service loan forgiveness from 7,000 people in a program that really did not work well to almost a million people in a better program. We understand we have a responsibility around consumer protection and taxpayer protection to ensure when students take out a loan, they are getting what they pay for, and our taxpayer's dollars are well used. Unfortunately, that's not always the case. We have seen some problematic for-profit institutions and others that have taken advantage, so we take that responsibility very seriously. We also have some resources around promoting equity and innovation; we invest particularly in under-resourced institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities or other Minority-Serving Institutions. Further, we try to put resources behind new and innovative things colleges and universities can do, such as finding ways to raise graduation rates. I'm really proud of the work we have done recently to call attention to those colleges and universities that really excel at that mission because our system is so oriented to a handful of institutions with large endowments that have been around for a long time. And we're very lucky to have those places in this country, but there is more than one vision of what it means to be an excellent college or university. We also need to appreciate the places creating opportunities for people who otherwise wouldn't have them and who are driving local economies.

Sullivan: Wonderful, so, on the opposite side of that, what role do organizations like AACRAO play in working with the Department of Education, and what are some things that we can do better?

Kvaal: I really appreciate the partnership of AACRAO and its members and reaching toward those goals. When we think about college completion and the places I have visited that are really moving the needle, it's a responsibility across the institution to take ownership over those challenges. And, you know, there may have been a time when we were looking for single bullets or standalone new initiatives; but the places I have seen really work, come together around data, sit around the table, and try to find ways to knock down barriers one at a time. Some may be small, but I've met students who struggle with course registration when they don't have their financial aid done yet; students who were in an academic program that was going to take them eight semesters to complete, but they only had six semesters of Pell Grants, and no one told them until they ran out of Pell Grants. So, I think a challenge that college administrators of all stripes have is how do we better work together as a community to support our students?

Sullivan: Absolutely. One of my previous responsibilities was working with the Veteran and Military-Connected community, and many times the benefits from the military are in a similar boat, taking courses that aren't always covered or other compliance difficulties. Funding is definitely a real consideration in access, persistence, and success; it's so specialized and it's so difficult to understand all the different avenues. I appreciate you mentioning the intricate complexity of funding.

Kvaal: You mentioned the FAFSA earlier, and I didn't get to it, but I do know this has been a really challenging year because of all the delays and errors in the FAFSA. It's been frustrating for students and parents. And it's meant a lot of extra effort for colleges and universities and for administrative officers. We lean on our university partners a lot every year to deliver the benefits of the federal programs, but that's been especially true this year. So, I wanted to say thank you to all the AACRAO members who are putting in long hours and are trying to find new and different ways of reaching students over the spring and summer. I know it's been a hard year, and I appreciate all those efforts.

Sullivan: Yes, thank you for acknowledging that. I think anytime there's a new systematic rollout, it's difficult; even understanding the terminology behind those systems and programs holds a large learning curve. It can be difficult and there's a lot.

So, I appreciate you recognizing the extra hours because that impacts other areas like the Department of Labor overtime rules and other areas as well. It is nice to be seen and to know *you* know it has been a large lift for us and a frustration for the students as well; sometimes just acknowledging that it's been hard is enough, so thank you for mentioning that. Moving on, you mentioned DEI earlier, and I wanted to hit on that as part of the greater scrutiny of higher education. Can you please talk about the potential impacts of the scrutiny of and focus on DEI to higher education?

Kvaal: Sure, I talked about visiting some of the places excelling as forces for upward mobility, forces for economic development. In addition to data and culture change, one thing they have in common is an effort to give all students a sense of belonging and a belief that they can succeed or have already succeeded; they have a community there. I think it is absolutely essential for higher education to continue to serve as a catalyst for social progress and to continue to address some of the most critical problems or challenges our country faces. Part of the success of higher education is exposing people to diverse viewpoints, to introducing people to others with different backgrounds and continuing a journey of growth, empathy, and understanding across the divides we have in our society. I have been to campuses where people have felt they need to scale back their vocal support for certain communities on campus. I've talked to faculty members about how demoralizing that can be and their fears about the very real impacts that will have on their students. I just think we need to acknowledge that our country is more diverse than it ever has been before, and our colleges and universities need to be committed to helping students from *all* backgrounds succeed.

Sullivan: Thank you. We have talked a lot about higher education obviously, but how do you see K–12 initiatives and focus impacting higher education?

Kvaal: I appreciate the question because we are all part of one education system and a lot of the challenges we have are not within a particular school or institution, but at the seams of our system when we hand students off from one to the next. We are very fortunate to have a system as diverse as the American system of postsecondary education, but it can also be a bit overwhelming and a bit challenging for people to navigate. So, obviously academic preparation is an important topic. I think it is important for colleges and universities to engage with what's being taught in K–12 schools and make sure students show up ready. You know, we've seen large learning gaps emerge because of the pandemic, especially in math, and that's going to be a challenge for colleges and universities in the coming years. At the same time, I don't think we can accept that as an excuse. We do know there are things we can do to help students catch up to make sure that they have the math that they need for their academic program and it's not an unnecessary obstacle. Another important aspect of the relationship, I think, is dual enrollment. We've seen that as an opportunity for students to get a jump on college and save a little bit of money and possibly time. But it's also important to expose people to experiences on college campuses; it can really change expectations about what's possible.

Sullivan: Indeed, there are a lot of things that we are improving, but we can certainly keep improving and evolving toward better outcomes. I talked to you a little bit in our introductions about AACRAO supporting sending advocates to Capitol Hill to educate about issues influencing higher education and urging representatives to consider how they impact students and professionals. So, I have a list of the issues we spoke about. I would welcome thoughts on those particularly salient to you. They include: the College Cost Reduction Act, Department of Labor Overtime Rule, Double Pell, the FAFSA (which we have already addressed), Financial Value Transparency and Gainful Employment, Reverse Transfer, and Short-Term Pell. Are any of these topics of particular interest to you that you would like to comment on?

Kvaal: Yes, we have done a lot of work on initiatives in addition to the FAFSA, though that was big. The first is doubling the Pell Grant. That's something that has been a high priority for President Biden. Pell Grants, of course, have gone up by $900 under his leadership this term. He included in his budget a proposal to double Pell Grants in the coming years. I just want to underscore that, because doubling Pell Grants sounds like a very ambitious or even pie-in-the-sky proposal. In fact, it is possible within the confines of a budget that also reduces the overall deficit if we make the right choices and have the right sets of priorities. Pell Grants were a huge help for me, and I think we know from the research they're one of the best investments we can make in our young people. So, you know, I hope Congress will see the wisdom of those investments in Pell grants, Gainful Employment, and Financial Value Transparency. You mentioned, and I know it is a lot of work for campuses across the country, especially this fall, there has been a crunch on time for the data production. I want you to know that we don't take any of that lightly. We are very cognizant of administrative burdens on our partners and try to minimize that whenever we can. These data, we think, are very important for students to have. The gainful employment rule sets minimum eligibility requirements for career programs, which for-profit colleges often offer but end up burdening students with debts they can't afford. We look at their actual debt burdens; we look at their career earnings; and when students are being left with loans that are not reasonable for their career outcomes, we are telling those programs "You have to improve." I think many of them can improve, or else we think students have better choices; and that rule is going to save 800,000 students a year from being left with unaffordable overburdensome debt. So, in our view, this is an integrally important part of the solution to the student debt crisis, alongside debt relief initiatives and some of the other things that we're doing. Financial Value Transparency is not connected to any eligibility. I think, across higher education, the questions are a little more complicated, because there are a lot of programs not intended to have that ROI to an individual student. But I think it is important to have that information to look at those programs leaving most graduates with loans they can't afford to repay and have an honest conversation about how we want to finance those programs. Because if our goal is creating equity or opportunities for people who otherwise wouldn't have it, if our goal is to advance some of the intangible benefits of civilization, from religion to the arts and beyond, I think we should investigate whether unaffordable student loans are the right tool to reach those goals. Or are there alternate ways through Pell grants or tuition-free programs or other innovative ways we can invest in creating the kind of opportunities that we want to create for our young people? I think there are.

Sullivan: Under Sectretary Kvaal, on behalf of my AACRAO colleagues, thank you so much for your time.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This interview was conducted in fall 2024.

About the Author

Sara CW Sullivan is a Senior Associate Registrar, Strategic Initiatives, at the University of Iowa. She holds a B.A. from the University of Iowa, M.Ed. from Upper Iowa University, and an Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership from Maryville University. She has served UMACRAO and AACRAO in various positions since 2015.

FEATURE

Interview with Eric Hoover

Christopher W. Tremblay

Eric Hoover is a senior writer for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and has written extensively about college access, admissions, and student diversity for two decades. His journalism has also appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Washington Monthly*, and *Nautilus*. Eric has received numerous journalism awards and is a two-time winner of the Education Writers Association's Eddie Prize, which recognizes distinguished reporting on the challenges facing low-income and first-generation students.

Tremblay: Let's start by telling us about your history at *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. When did you begin, and what brought you there?

Hoover: I started at *The Chronicle* in 2001. I'd worked at two local newspapers prior to that, and I guess I was the rare person who had heard of *The Chronicle* coming from outside higher ed. I started reading it when I was a college student. I was the number-two editor at my student newspaper for a year, and a print edition of *The Chronicle* came to my mailbox every Tuesday or Wednesday. I would read through it to try to get story ideas and figure out what was happening on other campuses, and it helped me better understand what was happening on my own campus and helped me come up with story ideas. I came to *The Chronicle* because I wanted to work at a larger publication. I thought covering higher ed would be very important, but also kind of dry and boring. I was right about the first part and wrong about the second part. It didn't take me long to realize that it's not boring at all, and so I gradually got hooked on the idea of being an education reporter for the next two decades.

Tremblay: I want to go back to your student newspaper days: what was your favorite experience or memory from that time?

Hoover: It was going to rock concerts in Charlottesville and writing about them and getting to interview musicians. I thought I wanted to be a rock music journalist, and so that was kind of my way into the student newspaper. I don't think I gathered a ton of intricate knowledge about journalism in college. Being a student journalist at a newspaper that did not have faculty advisors—it was completely student-run—had some upsides and downsides to it.

It made me confront at an early age, before I was old enough to drink, that if you're writing about people, even if it's not a life-and-death issue, it requires you to proceed with caution and care. I think I had to grapple early on with the responsibility of journalism and what it means to write about someone in-depth, with clarity and with precision, but also with empathy and respect for their humanity. That's something that I saw firsthand as a student journalist, and it wouldn't be until years later that I really started to put some of those lessons into practice, writing in-depth about students' experiences as they're going through the admissions process, and then trying to succeed in college.

Tremblay: Let's talk a little bit more about your college journey. What did you study in college, and was it related to what you're doing now, or was that a later path?

Hoover: I didn't give it much thought. I'm the son of a high-school English teacher. I chose my university, in part, based on the strength and reputation of the English department.

I wanted to read books and I wanted to immerse myself in literature. And I thought I would work in journalism for a couple of years before going to graduate school and getting a Ph.D. in English or an M.F.A. in creative writing. Then, my two years became a whole career in journalism, and I'm glad I made that choice.

Tremblay: What an experience; you've been able to write about so many different topics in higher education and seeing all the changes. Remind us of where you went to college.

Hoover: I went to the University of Virginia.

Tremblay: As you think back about those academic classes that you took, was there a favorite class that jumps out to you that you enjoyed?

Hoover: I was lucky enough to squeeze into probably the most popular class at Virginia when I was there: The History of Civil Rights, which was taught by Julian Bond, a civil rights hero himself. He was an incredible storyteller — didn't just get up there and lecture. He was engaging; he had a theatrical way of telling a story.

Taking that course in my third year of college helped me understand that if you want people to learn and to absorb some truths, you can't just give them a bunch of facts; you have to tell them a story and make it as vivid and compelling as possible. So, I think that exposure to a giant of American history who happened to be an outstanding storyteller really made an impression on me.

Tremblay: Wow, that's pretty amazing. Let's go back to 2001. You've arrived at *The Chronicle*, and do you remember the first story that you ever wrote or first beat you covered?

Hoover: I don't remember the first story I reported and wrote, but I do remember my first reporting trip. I found myself on Penn State's main campus. There was a massive sit-in protest in the student center—students of all backgrounds protesting and reacting to some racist incidents on or near the campus. And students, as I recall, were upset with the university's response.

And so right there, I'm this outsider. At the time, I wasn't much older than most of the undergraduates I met, and I certainly didn't really look any older than they did. I was trying to figure out the best way to dive into a campus that I did not know and to gain people's trust on the fly. I recall walking up to people on the quad, trying to gain access to the part of the student center that was being occupied. I talked to white students who were, in some cases, conflicted about what was happening. They were concerned about these racist incidents, but maybe they didn't agree that the student center should be partially shut down. And then I was trying to talk with folks of color who, in many cases, felt very anxious, if not frightened, on their campus.

And here's this reporter trying to talk with them, trying to make sense of what was going on there in this very fluid situation. It was pretty intense. It was more than your average protest. There was a lot of fear. It was like a crash course in how you just parachute into a campus and try to find people who will help you. In some cases, that just means finding someone who will introduce you to the next person who might be willing to talk with you.[1]

Tremblay: You mentioned travel a couple of times, and it sounded like that was an appeal to you. How much travel do you do in this role, and has that changed since the pandemic?

Hoover: I used to travel for many, if not most, longer-term articles, as well as some very quick hit assignments. Something's happening on a Mon-

[1] To read Eric's 2001 story about Penn State, *see* <chronicle.com/article/penn-state-u-strikes-deal-to-end-sit-in-spurred-by-racist-letters-to-black-students/>.

day, and then I'm on a campus that Tuesday, and I come home that Wednesday or Thursday and write a story that's out by the end of the week. I used to travel a dozen or more times a year, including conferences, but mainly going to campuses near and far. I do that much less frequently — I don't feel the need to travel for every single story.

The Chronicle sent me to Nepal once, and I was there for twelve days. That's a pretty extreme outlier case. I just travel less because I probably don't write as many stories as I used to, and so I'm more selective about asking, "Where do I really think I need to travel to tell this story?"

Tremblay: Okay, so you also just hinted a little bit about being selective. How much choice do you have about what you write about? Is it more assigned to you, or do you have a voice in the matter, or do you bring topics to the team?

Hoover: I'm lucky. I mean many reporters aren't in this position, so it's a position of privilege here when I say that almost every article I write in a given year was my idea, or it wasn't my idea, but it was just something that was happening. Most of what I've written about in 2024 has been the ever-unfolding FAFSA crisis, and so some things that I've written this past year have just been news developments that were unavoidable or obvious. The Education Department has announced the latest broken promise, right? Well, I'm going to write a news story about that in most cases, but then I've got this long list of potential FAFSA stories. Just today, before we spoke, I was looking at this list of three or four ideas. Some of them are heavier lifts than others, and I was thinking, okay, after a little time off I have coming up, which of these am I going to jump into first? Which one should I kind of have on the side? I have a great team of editors, and my own editor and I talk regularly about what I'm doing next, and sometimes we'll talk on a Thursday and we'll have a plan set for the next few weeks, and then news comes on a Friday, and we might have to readjust the plan.

So it's not like I'm a total nomad. I'm often pinging ideas off my editor, and he'll say, "These first two sound crazy, but this third one really intrigues me. Let's talk about it. Let me tell you why I'm interested." And so there is a collaborative element to it, even though I do have a lot of independence and freedom to choose one story versus another, or figure out which of a handful of story ideas I should prioritize.

Tremblay: That's pretty great to be in that position. Let's circle back to the FAFSA crisis. What's been the hardest thing about covering that story?

Hoover: One key challenge is that there have been so many incremental news developments. To write about this crisis, sometimes I've been going in depth and trying to really make my way toward students and to locate people who work with students. I am often trying to center my reporting, for many articles, on the lived experience of students themselves, be they students trying to get into college or students trying to get through college, and so I put a premium on that. But sometimes it takes a lot of work just to get through to one student.

And once you do, there's no guarantee that it's going to work out. That student may or may not want to participate fully in my article, and it takes some time to establish trust. And even when a student is willing to spend some quality time, trying to report that story in some detail is a time-consuming process. And so it relates to the challenge I mentioned a minute ago, which is just figuring out the elements of the FAFSA saga that are changing. If I talk to a student one week, their situation might change a little bit a week or two down the line. And so I try to figure out the balance between a timely report about an issue that's arising or an issue that's been affecting students: How is that story still going to be relevant in a week or two, or a month, when I don't know if a particular FAFSA challenge or issue will be resolved by the time my article comes out?

Or maybe the issue isn't resolved, but the student who I was talking to last week, whose parents couldn't create a Federal Student Aid ID, tells me a week later, as I'm wrapping up the story, "Oh, my parents are finally able to complete it. I got my aid offer." Their situation has changed, and I'm happy for them, but if I'm writing a story about students who are stuck and having problems, is that still going to be true at the point that the story comes out? I've been trying to balance the timeliness of FAFSA reporting with *The Chronicle*'s wish to have more in-depth renderings of how this is playing out for people.

Tremblay: Did you think when this story first broke, or when this news came out, that it would go on for this long?

Hoover: I didn't have any idea that it would be quite this bad, but I do remember meeting with some college-access folks in the summer of 2023, in Washington, D.C. They had come up for a special training on the new FAFSA that was sponsored by the Federal Student Aid office. They were there all day asking away, looking at slides, getting previews of the new FAFSA. I met with some of them after that day-long training, and they were alarmed. They felt like many of the basic questions that they posed to folks from the Federal Student Aid office weren't being answered or weren't being answered fully or satisfactorily. And they told me, "This is going to be bad." So, I had an inkling based on the wisdom and insight of some really knowledgeable practitioners who were getting a peek under the hood of the new FAFSA months before it finally became available.

They didn't know about these glitches that were coming, but they could see that parts of the new federal aid system maybe weren't going to work well, particularly when it came to getting clarity about how this new process is going to work for parents who don't have a social security number. So I had that in the back of my mind, because I know these people know their stuff, and I thought, "Are they just being super negative or do they have an insight here?" I was often impressed by how prescient some of their concerns were six months before the FAFSA finally went live.

Tremblay: It was a lot of change all at once and obviously Federal Student Aid was not prepared to implement it. I want to circle back to what is a week like for you in your role as a journalist?

Hoover: Most weeks involve a lot of reading. I read higher ed coverage and general education coverage pretty much every day. I'm reading not just mainstream newspapers, but education-specific content such as newsletters, blogs produced by associations, or individual scholars who cover issues I tend to write about, especially college access. I have this rule that I try to follow: If I'm only talking to people in Washington D.C., I'm probably not doing my job well.

Sometimes I'm just circling back to someone I haven't talked to in a while who's helped me in the past, and I'm saying, "Hey, what's on your mind? What do you make of this thing that's in the news? What's not being covered?" It's hard to squeeze in those calls that maybe don't have an immediate purpose. There's no substitute for a good conversation. Even a short chat is valuable because I'm often stuck here in my dining room or in my cubicle on the west side of Washington, D.C., and higher ed is this giant universe that's happening all over.

I'm always looking for ways to get a glimpse of what someone's day is like. If I'm talking to you on a Tuesday, I want to know what you woke up worrying about and what your meeting that's happening after our phone call is about. I'm always looking to talk to people who are new to me and reconnect with people who I know to be keen observers who have a hand in the issues that I write about. My most essential calls are often to school counselors, college counselors, and folks who do college access work at community-based organizations because they're on the receiving end of everything colleges throw at students, and they're so closely tethered to the concerns of students and families, particularly underrepresented, low-income, and first-generation students, which is where a lot of my reporting is drawn from. If I'm not talking to a school counselor or college access expert every couple days, I get antsy and feel like I need to build in some quality time to talk with folks.

Tremblay: You talked about the news sources that you pay attention to. You can either think about this from a personal or a professional standpoint, but what's your favorite news source and why?

Hoover: Since I grew up right outside Washington D.C., *The Washington Post* is my hometown paper. My wife is a reporter for *The Washington Post*, and she's

my favorite journalist. When it comes to education coverage, I'm a huge fan of *The Hechinger Report*. I really respect and admire the work that they do, the integrity of their reporting, and their close attention to the issues affecting disadvantaged students. Unlike many mainstream papers, they cover higher ed and its great diversity. They acknowledge that they are more than fifteen colleges and universities that matter and that are worth covering in so many ways.

Tremblay: What would you say is the most challenging aspect of covering higher education?

Hoover: In my 20-plus years, I've seen the impact of the corporatization of higher ed in general and particularly when it comes to journalists' efforts to knock on the doors of people who work at a given college and try to have a conversation with folks, whether it's a professor or a dean of admissions, a VP for enrollment, or a college president. It's become harder to get through. It's become harder to have any kind of conversation even with people in very prominent leadership roles. I would say at more and more institutions, there's much more of a top-down, communications strategy. I used to be able to have a one-on-one conversation with so many more admissions and enrollment leaders than I am now, at least a one-on-one conversation that isn't sort of supervised by one or more communications people.

Some communications people are a total delight to work with, and they're pros, but others are really just terrible. Their job is to interrupt the reporter and to short-circuit the reporting process, in my view. So, I'd say that has become harder. Colleges are so deeply conscious of their image. I think they are often operating in a state of great anxiety. There are not just reporters writing about colleges. There are bloggers and concerned citizens who are scrutinizing an institution who can, in a given moment, post a thread on X about something they don't like about that college, and so I think colleges feel bombarded. They're very wary of not just negative coverage, but even coverage that even if they think it's fair, it doesn't sit right with them. Colleges just have their backs up for better or worse in a way that they didn't 20 years ago.

Tremblay: Are there any other kinds of higher ed issues that keep you up at night or make your head spin or just that you're like, how do you wrap your arms around that? Anything that is out there right now, or is really FAFSA the beast?

Hoover: FAFSA just reminds us of these eternal challenges in higher ed, like the complexity of affordability. What is a given college's true commitment, not just what they say, but their true commitment to underrepresented students and to low-income students? I'm often struck by how some people get it and others do not — just how much of a struggle it is for students, be they eighteen or 38, to get through college without wrecking themselves financially, without knocking themselves out. I'm often struck by how narrow many people's understanding of college is. Is it a residential campus attended by an affluent student at an incredibly well-resourced institution that's in the top, whatever, 30 or 40 of *U.S. News* rankings? Is that college?

We know that is *not* college for most students, and that is not what most institutions look like, but I am often struck by the public's fixation on a very narrow band of colleges and a relatively narrow band of college students. I don't think many people, even people in some cases who admit students and who teach students, get the immense challenge that so many students of all ages face trying to get through college, often while working one or more jobs, in many cases with a kid or three. And this financial aid package your college is so proud of might've covered tuition, but the day-to-day expenses of college students, I think, remain an under-examined and under-appreciated issue when it comes to why students get derailed. It's often that blown tire, or the kid who got really sick and needed to go to the doctor three times. That's not a front-page issue in mainstream publications, and it kind of bugs me.

Tremblay: Let's go back to the perception that higher ed is more than these 20 institutions that everybody thinks they want to get into and need to be at. How do we go about changing that? How do we tackle that as an industry and as a country to say that there are lots of institutions that can serve you well?

Hoover: I wish I had an answer. I feel like there's real power in story. Can we write about the homeless student who got into an Ivy League college and got a full ride? Sure, we can do that. We should do that. Those stories matter. I'm not going to ever knock them. What bothers me is that we get that story, but it's all tied up in a bow. We don't hear about all the homeless students who didn't get into Harvard or didn't get in anywhere. Or what about the students who come from a very difficult background, who have a trying circumstance and many challenges, who go to that two-year institution and then transfer to a four-year, or they just graduate from a two-year institution.

We don't honor those stories. There are many journalists who really embrace the idea that those stories are important. There is power in local and regional reporting on these issues. In some communities, no one has a neighbor, or at least to their knowledge, who has ever set foot on a community college campus. In other communities, everyone knows someone who works at, or who has attended, the community college in their neighborhood or in their town or city or in their region.

We need more in-depth, higher ed reporting on why those institutions matter, and why those experiences that students have, at two-year institutions, or regional four-year publics, or private colleges that don't have giant endowments, matter. The how and why of students' experiences at institutions like that are just so important to cover, and I'm seeing more of it. I don't think that fixes it, but I think you have to just put other narratives out there too. You're never going to conquer the obsession with a very narrow band of big-name colleges.

Tremblay: Point well taken. I'm going to switch gears and talk a little bit about just the changing nature of journalism. So how would you say artificial intelligence (AI) is changing how you write and or report, if at all?

Hoover: AI does have a role in my life, and that is to transcribe interviews. I have the premium subscription to Otter AI, and I run so many interviews that I've recorded, with permission, through it. For example, I spent a whole day with the micro recorder at a high school in Brooklyn this spring, and that was eight-and-a-half hours of recording, and I ran all that through Otter.

Besides the transcript, I can play the recording again and again to hear, "Okay, this person talking really emphasized that third word she spoke in that sentence. What does listening to that a few times mean? How does that change the meaning?" And so, I think in that sense, AI transcription in the 21st century has made me a better reporter and writer, but that's all I'm willing to give AI at the moment.

Tremblay: If you had full access to any info or content about college admissions, what would you want to dive into and report on and why?

Hoover: I asked some folks who are smarter than me, who are on the advocacy and research side, a similar question recently. In 2025, we're going to get federal data on the race and ethnicity of applicants and admits for regular admission and early admission. I know many people would like to see better, more nuanced data when it comes to legacy admits. And I'd love to have just a representative sample of colleges where I have their recruitment strategies overlaid with their recruitment budgets. Where do they spend their money? We all hear that some high schools get 200 colleges visiting a year and some get two, but what if you were to look under the hood of a bunch of college's recruitment budgets and see how they've maybe shifted those budgets over time, what they've put more into, what they've maybe taken away from? What might that tell us about their priorities and whether their stated mission matches where they're spending their money?

My colleague, Beckie Supiano, did a great piece[2] years ago. It was about just one small college that shared anonymized financial aid packaging data. Therefore, we could see this college gave this kind of aid award to families in this income band, but it gave this aid package to students and families in this different income band. It was really fascinating

[2] *See* <chronicle.com/article/what-students-really-pay-to-go-to-college/>.

to see how the sausage is made on the financial aid side as opposed to just who gets admitted.

And that's where the rubber really hits the road. I'd love to find ways to get even some degree of specific data that might help us understand how colleges use their financial aid, how they break up their financial aid budget, and how they try to balance different priorities.

Tremblay: Let's have a little bit of fun here. If you had a podcast, what would you name it and why? Just for fun.

Hoover: Let me answer by putting in a plug for a dear friend and colleague, and a bit of news. *The Chronicle* just unveiled its first-ever podcast, called *College Matters*[3], a weekly robust podcast about any and all issues in higher ed. It's hosted by a fantastic journalist, my longtime colleague Jack Stripling, who's a particularly skilled interviewer. We recorded an episode[4] about the FAFSA crisis, but you might hear a podcast about any issue that's in the news as long as it's related to higher ed, and I'm excited about that because it'll be another way for busy folks to absorb some thoughtful in-depth, higher ed reporting.

Tremblay: Why should AACRAO members pay attention to *The Chronicle*?

Hoover: I would hope that AACRAO members would find that *The Chronicle* approaches the range of issues affecting people who work in higher ed, and that we tend to approach stories with an eye toward nuance, detail, and depth. If we're not offering you something that you can't necessarily get an abundance from other outlets, then what's the point of *The Chronicle*? We are often embracing complexity and often running at the cognitive dissonance that's evident in so many things we report on. We're writing about not just issues, we're writing about people, as trite as that sounds. You can read a lot of stories that are about issues and that have quotations in them, but you don't really feel like you're getting a sense of the people and what their lives are like. I don't just mean students, I mean people who teach at colleges, who make colleges run, and who are decision-makers on campuses. Not every story is going to be an in-depth profile of a college president or an adjunct professor or a group of students. But when you read a story and you get a sense of the complexity, of the day-to-day, week-to-week challenges that are evident in whatever group of people or whatever college you're writing about, I think it draws you in. I think it makes our in-depth coverage, whether it's a long article or a short article, authoritative. I think you'll get a balance in a good *Chronicle* story of national context that's essential that you may not get from every local or regional story.

I try to think about how can *my story* be a little different? How can it be something different from that local story or that AP story, or that story in your regional paper? So we're often looking at a story idea that interests us, a story we think is important, and then another set of questions we're asking as writers and editors is, "Okay, but what makes this a *Chronicle* story?"

And by that, I just mean how can we bring in a complicating thought or idea to do justice to the fact that most things you're writing about in higher ed aren't a matter of black and white, good versus evil. It's a gray issue. It's messy, right? I think we're often running toward that messiness, as opposed to running away from it, in an effort to do justice to the reality of the challenges that you all face working on college campuses. No matter which campus you work on, you have problems and concerns. So let's deal with those.

Tremblay: What else did I not ask about that we should know about you and or your work?

Hoover: Sometimes people ask: What story taught you the most? And maybe that tells folks something about me. The story I'm most proud of was a piece I co-wrote with my colleague Sara Lipka many years ago. We spent a semester embedded in a developmental writing course—some people might call it a remedial writing course—at a community college, getting to know several of the students in the course as well as the wonderful instructor. It was a slog for everyone in that classroom. The class met twice a week, and one of the students was eager to be there.

[3] *See* <chronicle.com/podcast/college-matters-from-the-chronicle>.
[4] *See* <open.spotify.com/show/1XXD5ixqPpmVIHJXpxuORv>.

They had to pass this developmental writing course before they could go on to do whatever they were in community college to do, to become a nurse or an accountant, whatever. For many of them, it was an incredible struggle.

We tried to bring those issues to life in a way that we hoped was vivid but respectful, unflinching and yet empathetic. It was a challenge, but I think we kind of nailed it. That story resonated with people. Lots of people told us they read it and re-read it, and if the story's good, maybe someone will stick with it for fifteen minutes or however long it takes to read it. By that point, I had read many articles about the issue of remedial education and what was tough about it, or why colleges struggle to deliver it effectively. But this was a *story*— a human story that brought out some of those issues you might read about in a policy brief, told through the lived experiences of a handful of people who happened to be in this one remedial writing class in suburban Maryland.

That project told me that no matter what issue you're thinking about, there's a way to tell that story through the eyes of, and over the shoulders of, people who are living through it, and that kind of changed the way I thought about myself as a reporter. Yep, I'm a higher ed reporter working for a specialty trade publication. That's true, I'm happy to be that, but I can still pick my spots and be a storyteller and tell you a good, true, accurate, meaningful story that yeah, runs in this nerdy publication called *The Chronicle*. Many of my colleagues embrace that. We're kind of a throwback: We still have a commitment to that time-consuming, heavy-lift kind of journalism. It's certainly not every story we write, but it's definitely in the mix. And that's why I still like working at this quirky place after 23 years.

Tremblay: Any final thoughts?

Hoover: When I started at *The Chronicle*, I felt like, sure plenty of Americans might've been suspicious of college in general. But it was much more likely to be true that I was talking to people all throughout the country who had faith in higher ed or some degree of respect for it. And there's this quote that has really stuck with me, from an enrollment vice president who left the profession a few years ago in utter exhaustion. She said "Five or six years ago, students and families were questioning the cost of higher ed. Now more and more are questioning the purpose of it, for whatever combination of reasons." That is a profound change that everyone in your membership is certainly aware of. That has been the biggest fundamental shift I've seen in my two decades at *The Chronicle*.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Readers can follow Eric Hoover on Twitter @erichoov and The Chronicle profile page: chronicle.com/author/eric-hoover

About the Author

Christopher W. Tremblay, Ed.D., is Editor-in-Chief of *College and University* as well as Executive Director of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs at the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. He also serves as Director of AACRAO's Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Endorsement Program. Tremblay has more than 30 years of experience in college admissions and enrollment management, having served as vice chancellor for enrollment management at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, associate provost for enrollment management at Western Michigan University, and assistant vice chancellor for enrollment management at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, among other positions. Tremblay earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees from Western Michigan University. He has a post-master's certificate in enrollment management from Capella University, and doctorate of education in educational leadership from the University of Michigan-Dearborn.

CU100

A collection of Centennial reflections, insights, and visions

Reflections on Two Decades as Managing Editor of *College and University*

Heather Zimar

As managing editor of *College and University* for nearly 20 years, I've had the pleasure of working with, and learning from, three fantastic editors-in-chief, each with their own style and contributions to the work. When I joined the journal in 2006, I instantly connected with Boston College's Louise Lonabocker. Louise was judicious and discerning. Her sharp, clear vision for what works (and what doesn't) ensured the journal was always relevant and forward-moving. She introduced to *C&U* some wonderful interviews, which was the beginning of the journal's now long-time interview series, as well as a collection of articles on leadership, which later became a book. Louise never "sweat the small stuff" and operated with an ease I've always admired. She also has a wonderful sense of humor and is deeply interested in the work and lives of others (you'll see what I mean when you read her thoughtful articles in this 100th volume).

Boston University's Jeff von Munkwitz-Smith came on board in 2016 and was a pillar of support. He listened and looked for content everywhere and encouraged new writers across the professions that they had something valuable to contribute. Jeff saw the benefit of placing the work of *C&U* in historical context, advocating for the digitizing of our archives, and writing reflections on some of those pieces from a modern-day lens. He helped develop a mentorship series in the journal that was later turned into a book. He also strived to connect other association work, like AACRAO Research and AACRAO's core competencies initiative, to the journal. Jeff is steady, patient, and quietly motivating. I'm honored to share his reflection article in this volume.

Our current editor, Christopher W. Tremblay, University of Michigan, has an unrelenting, tenacious work ethic. He has a never-ending stream of creative ideas as well as the organization and drive to follow through. When Christopher came to *C&U* in 2020, he worked quickly to establish two new series addressing significant, timely topics, including higher education's response to COVID-19 and test-optional admissions. He also revamped the journal's book review column to include reviews of other important content, such as reports, e-books, and documentaries. His commitment to teamwork and collaboration has helped foster a sense of community and engagement among our editorial board and authors. Christopher is a talented writer, detailed editor, and responsive colleague. He is celebratory of large and small accomplishments, and his pride in the journal is contagious. You will enjoy reading his thoughts throughout this volume.

In addition to these amazing editors, I have been grateful to be able to work long term with our talented graphic designer, Jim Graham of Pixels and Strings. For more than two decades, Jim has provided artistic direction for the journal, ensuring its design remains up to date, professional, and on brand. He is intuitive, creative, and always presents content in a way that is understandable and visually interesting. I cannot count the number of times our authors have expressed excitement over how their content comes to life through his design work. You'll get to read more about Jim's work later in 2025.

Finally, I've worked with hundreds and hundreds of authors. I truly believe that everyone has something interesting to share about the work they do every day. Helping practitioners feel inspired and empowered to put their own individual experiences and expertise into words is a role I take seriously. To me, there is nothing more exciting than being able to guide new writers from having a spark of an idea to creating a published piece of work. I share in their pride, every time. I am also always thrilled to collaborate with authors who share their knowledge and ideas over time, affirming that they had a good experience publishing with AACRAO and that they think of us when they have new research and best practices to share.

My role on *C&U* has made this clear: Writing inspires individual as well as collective growth—authors' growth, the journal's growth, and the growth of the field. It has been a pleasure to be a part of this journey.

About the Author

Heather Zimar is Managing Editor of Journals and Publications at AACRAO. Zimar works with higher education researchers and practitioners across the globe to develop and publish content in the fields of admissions, registration, and enrollment management. She is responsible for all aspects of the AACRAO publication process, including recruitment, editing, design, and production. She co-edited *The SEM Anthology, Leadership Lessons: Visions and Value for a New Generation*, and *Mentorship in Higher Education: Practical Advice and Leadership*. Zimar has also worked in public relations and communications for local education nonprofits and as a freelance writer. She has a B.A. in print journalism and a M.S. in communications from Ithaca College.

CU100

A collection of Centennial reflections, insights, and visions

Celebrating a Century of Scholarship: The Indispensable Role of Research and Inquiry in the Development of a Profession

Melanie Gottlieb

As AACRAO's *College and University* journal marks its centennial volume, it is a fitting moment to reflect on the pivotal role it has played in shaping and elevating our professions. At AACRAO's founding in 1910, the professions we serve were quite young in the United States. As the population and functions that higher education was called to serve grew and diversified, the complexity of the operations called for a level of knowledge and expertise that required cultivation. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a profession as a calling requiring specialized knowledge. The AACRAO professions, which serve the learner at every stage of their journey, have grown in required knowledge and scope over the last century, and the complexities navigated by our professionals have expanded exponentially. The administrative activities at the heart of our professions originally emerged from faculty bodies and, naturally, those serving in the roles would turn to research and discourse as a means to grow and develop the body of knowledge required to be successful. In the academic world, a peer-reviewed journal is an avenue to support the creation and sharing of specialized knowledge that higher education both understands and values. And so *C&U* was born.

To be effective, those who serve in the AACRAO professions must apply evidence-based knowledge, data-informed strategies, ethical principles, and established standards to decision-making and actions within their institution. Their competencies must encompass effective leadership and problem-solving, strategic planning, resource management, regulatory compliance, learner-centered approaches, and a commitment to continuous improvement, all while navigating complex stakeholder relationships and adhering to the unique and dynamic context of the institution and the diverse community it serves. Across the decades that their career might span, the landscape will shift, more than once, and they will need to act and react with expertise and integrity to achieve positive outcomes for learners and their institution.

Since its first issue in 1925, the dialogues at the center of *C&U* fuel an important engine that drives innovation, informs best practices, and challenges the status quo in ways that have shaped the overall direction of the field. The specialized knowledge that defines the profession has been specifically cultivated within its pages. Engagement with the journal has enabled practitioners to stay current with emerging trends, expand their knowledge, and reflect on their individual institution's circumstances within a broader scope. Perusing the archives shows a persistent array of topics that still seem quite relevant today—topics like admissions standards, retention and learner success challenges, equitable access, managing enrollment through changing demographics, and maintaining trust and credibility in credentials. While the circumstances and cases that inform the dialogue may have evolved and changed over the last 100 years, the themes in the articles are remarkably consistent and aligned with AACRAO's values of collaboration, innovation, inclusivity, inquiry, and integrity.

C&U has served as a crucial resource for AACRAO professional practitioners and a catalyst for their growth and development. Regardless of the position

Praise from Our Peers

"We congratulate *College and University* on its 100th anniversary. This is a remarkable accomplishment—and very important for higher education. Providing a space for discussion and debate is central—and to do it for a century—is impressive. Our publication, *International Higher Education*, has provided a similar service, bringing an international perspective on higher education to a worldwide audience for more than two decades. Congratulations to *C&U*!"

C&U 100 YEARS
A CENTURY of SHARING KNOWLEDGE and BEST PRACTICES

(pictured) **Philip Altbach**
Hans deWit
Chris Glass
IHE Editors

they hold at their institution, the authors who share their thoughts, observations, opinions, and research in *C&U* are the leaders who have inspired change over the last century. While the published articles on their CVs may have served to support their own professional growth, their contributions provide the solid foundation upon which our association is built. In addition to the practical benefits of applying research to develop association guidance and standards that improve professional practice, the dialogue also inspires and motivates professionals, sparking new ideas and encouraging the desire for excellence.

The collection, dissemination, and discussion of knowledge and research has contributed to the ongoing development of the roles that we serve. By providing a platform for scholars and practitioners to share their work, the journal has helped to create a vibrant community of inquiry and learning. It has also served as a valuable resource for professionals seeking to stay informed about the latest developments in their field.

In an era of rapid change and increasing complexity, continued engagement through research and inquiry will be more important than ever in helping professionals navigate the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. As AACRAO's *College and University Journal* enters its next century, it is poised to continue its tradition of excellence, and the association reaffirms its commitment to scholarly inquiry and research and its transformative power in shaping the future of higher education, the professional growth of our members, and the success of our learners and our institutions.

About the Author

Melanie Gottlieb is the Executive Director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. She is the first woman to hold the role of executive director in the association's history after nearly six years as the deputy director. She brings a global perspective rooted in an understanding of the technological proficiency and flexibility needed to move AACRAO forward.

Gottlieb came to the national office with eighteen years as an AACRAO member, with experience in records and registration, enrollment management, international recruitment, and credential evaluation. She has served the association in a variety of volunteer leadership roles throughout her career, most recently as vice president for international education on the AACRAO Board of Directors. Gottlieb earned an M.A. in information science from the University of Missouri-Columbia and a B.A. in history/American studies from Marlboro College in Vermont.

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CU100

A collection of Centennial reflections, insights, and visions

American Higher Education in the Year 1925: Through the Lens of Dean Alida P. Banks

Kimberley Buster-Williams

2025 marks the 100th anniversary of AACRAO's *College and University*. As I reflect on this milestone, I wonder what the landscape looked like through the lens of a practitioner—more specifically, an African-American practitioner named Alida Priscilla Banks. Alida P. Banks was my great-great-aunt and a higher education trailblazer. My grandfather's mother's sister, Alida graduated from Hampton Normal School in 1909, just 46 years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863. Alida P. Banks was later hired as West Virginia State College's (WVSC) first Dean of Women in 1935.

Alida's career was likely extremely exciting and, perhaps, at times dangerous. The period from 1921 to 1933 encompassed an economic cycle that catapulted the nation to unprecedented heights of prosperity and then, in the Great Depression, plunged it into unparalleled and seemingly intractable misery (MacLaury 1988, para. 1).

This period also saw the rise of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) following the 1915 silent film *The Birth of a Nation*. The KKK embarked on a coordinated campaign of intimidation, violence, and murder under the banner of white supremacy. For example, on August 8, 1925, more than 50,000 members of the Ku Klux Klan paraded through Washington, D.C. This march attempted to encourage native-born white Americans to believe that bigotry, intimidation, harassment, and extralegal violence were all perfectly compatible with, if not central to, patriotic respectability (Rothman 2016, para. 3). As shared in the article *When Bigotry Paraded Through the Streets*, *Some walked in lines as wide as 20 abreast, while others created formations of the letter K or a Christian cross. A few rode on horseback. Many held American flags. Men and women alike, the marchers carried banners emblazoned with the names of their home states or local chapters, and their procession lasted for more than three hours down Pennsylvania Avenue, lined with spectators* (Rothman 2016, para. 1).

While the KKK paraded down the streets of the city, American University in Washington, D.C. was likely actively recruiting high school students as they first admitted undergraduates in 1925, by which time graduate students had shifted to a downtown campus on F Street, near the White House (American University n.d., para. 8).

During Dean Banks' career, significant innovations occurred in areas such as transportation and technology that likely impacted higher education. For example, John Logie Baird developed the first mechanical television in 1925 (Shiers 1975, 389). Another pioneer, Henry Ford is credited with inventing the moving assembly line in 1913. Ford's system brought down automobile costs, and by 1927, his company had produced more than 15 million Model Ts (Fircroft 2020, para. 12).

In addition to technological advancements, outside factors led to demographic shifts. Specifically, from 1910 to 1920, African American populations migrated in large numbers from the South to the North, with prominent figures like W.E.B. Du Bois leading what became known as the Great Migration. By 1920, some 300,000 African Americans from the South had moved north, and Harlem was one of the most popular destinations for these families (History.com Editors n.d., para. 5).

This reflection on 1925 will look at the AB degree, tuition fees, gender, diversity, Catholic institutions, a landmark Supreme Court decision and other legislation, the precursors to rankings, protests, and the educational benefits of World War I. Finally, I will highlight several milestones from 1925 and the sunsetting of Alida's career. This reflection is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, it is designed to highlight a few remarkable things that happened in and around 1925.

The A.B. Degree

In 1925, Alida was a sophomore in college earning an A.B. degree from Winston-Salem Teachers College in 1928. She later earned an M.A. degree from Columbia University in 1935.

A.B. is the abbreviation of "artium baccalaureus" (Through Education 2020, para. 4). It is a liberal arts degree, so it emphasizes the humanities, languages, and social sciences fields. A.B.s and B.A.s are the same degree, depending on whether one is abbreviating the customary Latin (artium baccalaureus) or the current English name for the degree (Bachelor of Arts). In addition to these degrees, Alida spent two years at Fisk University.

In 1925, several universities awarded A.B. degrees. For example, at Harvard College, the undergraduate college of Harvard University, the A.B. degree was offered as a part of the traditional four-year undergraduate program.

Dartmouth College adopted a new curriculum in 1925 where they would grant the A.B. degree only. See an excerpt below from this announcement:

The Faculty recommends to the Trustees that, beginning with the class entering in 1925, the College shall grant the A.B. degree only. At the end of the senior year, as a prerequisite to the degree, each student shall be required to pass a comprehensive examination in his major subject. Men who pass the comprehensive examination with high credit shall be awarded their degrees "with distinction" in the major subject. Men who fail to pass the comprehensive examination, shall, upon payment of a suitable fee, be given a second opportunity after the lapse of at least one semester. Further opportunities to take this examination shall be given only by a special vote of the Committee on Educational Policy (Dartmouth College 1925, para. 8).

Dean Banks would have likely entered the workforce with a degree that was highly valued; although as a Black professional, she would have been in the minority as it relates to degree attainment.

College Enrollment 1917–1927

In 1917, there were 2,132 Black students enrolled at HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). At this point in time, HBCUs, Oberlin, and Talladega, reflected the limited options for Black students seeking higher education. Like Alida, prior to the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, most Blacks in the United States attended an HBCU (Albritton 2012, 320).

In 1927, the year before Alida graduated from college, there were 13,580 Black students enrolled in college in the United States. These increasing numbers meant greater demands for social justice. 1917–1927 represents a period of Black student protest that ultimately reshaped the college experience of the early 20th century (Kynard n.d.). One of the most well-known protests was the 1925 protest at Fisk College.

Fisk: 1925 Protest

After a spate of racial incidents in Nashville, including the wrongful conviction of Oswald Durant, an honor student at Meharry Medical College (adjacent to Fisk), on February 4, 1925, students at Fisk University launched a strike against the administrative policies of the school's president, Fayette Avery McKenzie (Lamon 1974, 225). This strike lasted two months and led directly to McKenzie's resignation on April 16, 1925. Fisk students sought recognition and respect as college students and adults instead of accepting increased white paternalism in the form of curricular and extracurricular restrictions.

Measures taken to ensure student conformity to the southern standard of "well-behaved" Blacks included suppression of the student paper (the *Fisk Herald*); death-dealing restrictions on student council; refusal to allow the creation of a student athletic association; abolition of the baseball and track teams; tight rules governing activities of the YMCA and other student-run organizations on campus; censorship of all student orations and debates; and "reluctance to allow a student to represent [Fisk] students in [the] International student conference in 1924" (Lamon 1974, 232).

Student dress had to be conservative, with women wearing dark hose, black hats, and matching uniforms. Finally, McKenzie allowed a censored version of *The Crisis,* the official publication of the NAACP created in 1910 by renowned historian, civil rights activist, sociologist, and NAACP co-founder W.E.B. Du Bois (NAACP n.d., para 1), to be available in the library. Ultimately, McKenzie wanted to keep organizations on a noncontroversial basis and to a number over which faculty and administration control could be carefully exercised (Lamon 1974).

In the end, the students were victorious. In February 1926, Thomas Elsa Jones was named the new president at Fisk. Jones, a white Quaker with a Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia University, brought a more relaxed and Negro-community-oriented administration to the school. While there were undoubtedly initial feelings of disappointment that Jones was not a Negro, he quickly won the support and friendship of Nashville Blacks (Lamon 1974). While the "southern standard" was being challenged by students at Fisk, students everywhere were working to secure funds for college.

Cost

Like many students, Alida did not receive any financial aid in the traditional sense, but instead, she likely received support from her family. Tuition varied by region and institution type. For example, in 1925, tuition at the University of Pennsylvania was $275, which included the General Fee (University of Pennsylvania n.d., para. 6). Tuition was $325 for the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. Room and board fees were $380 (University of Pennsylvania n.d., para. 6).

At the public institution NC State, tuition was $60 for in-state students and $80 for out-of-state students (NC State University n.d., para. 1). At the University of Michigan, in-state tuition was $85 (University of Michigan n.d., 149). The estimated cost of attendance for the first year was $715 for an in-state student (University of Michigan n.d., 149).

Unfortunately, there were no significant educational college benefits for World War I servicemen comparable to the GI Bill that was enacted after World War II. Veterans in 1925 likely had the same out-of-pocket costs as other students.

WWI Higher Educational Benefits

In 1918, the Federal Board of Vocational Education established a rehabilitation division for disabled World War I veterans to provide training for new occupations (Veterans Education Success n.d., para. 4). By 1922, more than 156,000 disabled World War I veterans had entered 445 trades or professions. The 1944 GI Bill had a significant impact on higher education, with more than 2.2 million veterans enrolling in college or university by 1950 (National Archives n.d., para 8). This represented a major spike in college attendance compared to the 1920s, when only around 2 percent of young people attended college. In addition, the GI Bill impacted gender diversity on college campuses.

Gender

Half of all American college students in 1925 were in publicly-controlled institutions of higher education, including 55 percent of women (Goldin, *et al.* 2006, 135). A great deal of women during this period attended teacher-training colleges, and many of these schools had two-year programs.

In 1925, for example, 30 percent of the female enrollments were at teacher-training schools, compared to only 8 percent of the male enrollments (Goldin, *et al.* 2006, 135)

As Goldin, Katz, and Kuziemko shared in "The Homecoming of American College Women: The Reversal of the College Gender Gap,"

> *More difficult to understand is why women, whose later labor force participation rates when married were low, went to college at rates almost equal to those of men. One answer is that a lot of the women who graduated in these early classes never married and did enter the labor force. Those who did marry were far more likely to marry a college-educated man. Thus, the economic return to college was garnered, separately, through the labor and the marriage markets. The college gender gap began to widen in favor of men during the 1930s (starting with the birth cohorts of the 1910s) when unemployment left many with little else to do and a college degree could greatly enhance employability. In fact, the number of women in teacher's colleges declined substantially from 1929 to 1935, while the number of men increased.* (Goldin, Katz, and Kuziemko 2006, 135).

Women comprised 44 percent of total college enrollments in 1925. With total enrollments of around one million, this means approximately 440,000 women were enrolled in college that year (Snyder 1993).

Diversity in 1925

Alida likely did not have many international classmates while a student at either Winston-Salem Teachers College or Columbia. For context, in 1925, there were approximately 8,000 international students enrolled in colleges and universities across the United States (Synder 1993). This was the result of restrictive immigration laws, which began in earnest in 1917 as a reaction to the immigration boom that occurred from the 1870s until the middle of 1910. During this period, 23.5 million people immigrated to the United States, mostly from Europe, though some came from Asia and from Latin America (Garsd 2024, para. 3).

Literacy Testing: President Coolidge Signs the Johnson-Reed Act

In 1917, the U.S. Congress enacted the first widely restrictive immigration law: the Johnson-Reed Act. The uncertainty generated over national security during World War I made it possible for Congress to pass this legislation, and it included several important provisions that paved the way for the 1924 Act (Office of the Historian n.d., para. 2).

This Act implemented a literacy test that required immigrants over sixteen years old to demonstrate basic reading comprehension in any language (Office of the Historian, n.d., para. 2).

The 1924 Immigration Act also included a provision excluding from entry any alien who by virtue of race or nationality was ineligible for citizenship. Existing nationality laws dating from 1790 and 1870 excluded people of Asian lineage from naturalizing. As a result, the 1924 Act meant that even Asians not previously prevented from immigrating—the Japanese in particular—would no longer be admitted to the United States (Office of the Historian n.d., para. 6).

In all of its parts, the most basic purpose of the 1924 Immigration Act was to preserve the ideal of U.S. homogeneity (Daily History n.d., para. 2).

The Immigration Act of 1924 likely had a negative impact on the diversity of student bodies in U.S. colleges in the years immediately following its passage. If you'd grabbed a copy of *The New York Times* back in the spring of 1924, you would have read this headline—"America of The Melting Pot Comes To End" (Garsd 2025, para. 2).

The Catholic Mandate

Since Alida was Baptist, the Catholic Mandate in place in the 1920s did not impact her college decision; however, it likely meant that she did not have many classmates who were Catholic. In the 1920s, Catholic authorities in Philadelphia strongly discouraged and then forbade Catholic youth from attending non-Catholic colleges and universities (Contosta, n.d., para. 9).

In 1927, Cardinal Dennis Dougherty (1865–1951) wrote, "If a parish school be necessary in the lower grades, it is still more necessary in the higher; because it is in the higher grades that history, literature, and the experimental sciences are taught in connection with which theories are advanced in non-Catholic universities, colleges, and high schools…that are dangerous to Religion" (Contosta n.d., para. 9).

Dougherty's successor, Cardinal John O'Hara, made the ban official. Throughout their episcopates, Catholic high schools and academies routinely refused to send students' transcripts to non-Catholic institutions of higher learning. This mandate was a boon to Catholic colleges like Villanova, Saint Joseph's, and La Salle in Philadelphia. It also led to the founding of three Catholic women's colleges in the 1920s—Immaculata, Rosemont, and Chestnut Hill—to meet the need for single-sex Catholic higher education for women (Contosta n.d., para. 9).

1925 Landmark Ruling

Before becoming the Dean of Women at West Virginia State College, Alida worked in secondary education. In 1931, Alida was the director of home economics at the Elkhorn District High School in Elkhorn, West Virginia (Perry 1975). Her time in this role followed the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision regarding parochial schools. In the 1925 case, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down an Oregon law that required all children to attend public schools. In an era of widespread animus against Catholics, Oregon sought to shutter parochial schools and force parents to send their children to public schools. The Court struck down this law as unreasonably interfering with the liberty of a parent to raise a child in the manner in which the parent sees fit (Frederickson and Wurman n.d., para. 1). The decision has been cited as precedent in over 100 Supreme Court cases and is considered a landmark ruling on parental rights in education.

Important Early Work: Rankings of Graduate Programs

Miami University in Oxford, Ohio played a key role in the marketing of graduate program rankings by publishing the influential 1925 study titled "A Study of the Graduate Schools of America" authored by Raymond Mollyneaux Hughes. The publication is often mentioned as being the first ranking of institutions. The 32-page book provided an overview and analysis of graduate education programs across the United States in the mid-1920s.

In 1911, Hughes was named President of Miami University, a position he held until 1927. During his presidency, he oversaw the publication of the 1925 graduate school study. According to Bogue and Saunders (1992), Hughes obtained a list of raters from faculty at his own institution, including 36 institutions in 20 academic disciplines. The instructions and the scale available to the raters were similar to the instructions that USNWR currently gives to its survey respondents. Raters were to assign each discipline for each institution on the list a number from one to five, with five being the most prestigious. Hughes would eventually take the position of chair of the American Council on Education and chair of ACE's Committee on Graduate Instruction (Sweitzer 2008, 10).

While the 1925 Hughes study was groundbreaking for its time in highlighting the quality of doctoral education, it was limited in scope and methodology compared to the comprehensive national studies that emerged in the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond.

Other Milestones Across the Country: Growth and Selectivity

Growing numbers of students resulted in the establishment of more colleges, most of which had open enrollment (Gorman 2021). See a few examples below:

- *North Carolina:* In 1925, the General Assembly of North Carolina recognized the school's curriculum above high school, changed its name to Winston-Salem Teachers College, and empowered it under the authority of the State Board of Education to confer appropriate degrees. Winston-Salem Teachers College thus became the first Black institution in the nation to grant degrees for teaching the elementary grades (Winston- Salem State University n.d., para. 2).
- *Florida:* The University of Miami was chartered in 1925 by a group of citizens who felt an institution of higher learning was needed for the development of their young and growing community (University of Miami n.d., para. 1). Supporters of the institution believed that the community offered unique opportunities to develop inter-American studies, further creative work in the arts and letters, and conduct teaching and research programs in tropical studies (University of Miami n.d., para. 1).
- St. Katharine established Xavier University of Louisiana in 1925. It is today the U.S.'s only Catholic HBCU founded before the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Finney 2023, para. 4)
- The merger that resulted in the creation of Bethune-Cookman University began in 1923 and was finalized in 1925 (Belle 2023, p. 2). Dr. Bethune went on to become a national and international figure with a long list of notable accomplishments, including counseling U.S. presidents and playing a role in the founding of the United Nations. In 1935, she founded the National Council of Negro Women, which would become a highly influential organization with a clear civil rights agenda (Bethune-Cookman University n.d., para.6).

Open enrollment meant that less-prepared students began attending college, threatening colleges' ability to cater to the elites who had been their traditional customers (Gorman 2021, para. 8). In 1919, Columbia implemented selective admissions. It capped its class size, required personal data on application forms, and denied admission without explanation. This, along with the use of standardized tests like the SAT in 1926, gradually created academically stronger student bodies (Gorman 2021, para. 8).

What the Eye Doesn't See, the Heart Can't Wish For

Alida retired from Howard University in June 1954, one month after the landmark U.S. Supreme Court civil rights case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Her 25 years in higher education were remarkable and paved the way for women in student affairs to be at the decision-making table in areas such as enrollment management.

She retired just as doors were opening for Black students and administrators in ways she probably couldn't have imagined. She likely didn't imagine that her great-great-niece would follow in her footsteps, serving as vice president for enrollment management at two regional universities and later an associate vice provost for student success and retention at one of the nation's most prestigious universities.

In 1935, higher education professionals were significantly underpaid. As Dean of Women at West Virginia State College, Alida's salary was $1,700 for a twelve-month contract. Adjusted for inflation, this amount is equivalent to $33,045 in 2024. In stark contrast, the median salary for a dean of students today is $105,000 (Kline 2019).

Reflecting on the year 1925 has been a rewarding exercise, and I hope the information shared encourages further contemplation on our progress in higher education. Dean of Women was the first administrative position offered to females in coeducational institutions (Parker 2015, p. 7). The responsibilities of these deans from the years 1890 to 1930 were multifaceted. They were to oversee the relatively new minority population of women, which involved insulating the men from the women and, at the same time, protecting and guiding the women (Parker 2015).

From the late 1800s through 1945, the year World War II ended, the Deans of Women established foundations of practice for students and administration, developed professional associations, conducted research, improved college environments, and developed a body of literature in journals, reports, and books (Parker 2015, 8).

The courage, tenacity, and resilience of Alice Palmer, the nation's first Dean of Women at the University of Chicago in 1892, and of my aunt Alida, serve as both my inspiration and guiding principles for my administrative identity and practice. Onward and congratulations to AACRAO on this milestone achievement of 100 years of *C&U*.

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About the Author

Kimberley Buster-Williams, Ed.D., has three decades of experience in higher education and currently serves as the Associate Vice Provost for Student Success and Retention at the George Washington University (GW). In addition, she serves as the assistant director for AACRAO's Strategic Enrollment Management Endorsement Program (SEM-EP) .

Dr. Williams is a scholar practitioner and has a proven track record of consistent enrollment success and is widely viewed as one of the top enrollment professionals in the country. Her background includes extensive experience in building targeted student outreach, readiness, and support programs that have assisted her in enhancing student diversity, community engagement, and retention rates at several institutions.

Dr. Williams is the author of the 2021 book *History of American Higher Education A to Z: A Primer for Enrollment Managers* and recently completed her Ed.D. from Regent University (VA). Her dissertation research examined employment engagement and succession planning in the context of retaining enrollment middle managers in the American "Big Quit," "Great Reshuffle, and/or "Great Resignation" era. In addition, she holds an Ed.S. degree in higher education administration, a master's degree in education administration, and a bachelor's degree in English, all from Old Dominion University. She also holds a postmaster's certificate in leadership from the University of Michigan's Center for the Education of Women.

CU100

A collection of Centennial reflections, insights, and visions

Revisiting 1925: The Evolution of Higher Education Issues and Innovations

James Paterson

It was an exciting, pivotal year—the year a television broadcast was first made and New York became the world's largest city; Mount Rushmore was conceived and the Great Gatsby was published, reflecting the attitudes and lifestyles of many Americans as the country flashed through the Roaring Twenties.

Meanwhile, meeting in bright spring weather at the University of Colorado, college officials from throughout the country tasked with the evolving process for recruiting, admitting, and registering the growing number of college students were meeting. They recorded and published the information presented in their wide-ranging discussions, held since the group was formed about a dozen years prior.

The bulky, brown-covered *Bulletin of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars* took shape, with about 360 pages recording banter from the meeting and organizational reports, discussions about critical issues and research on various topics, many of which are surprisingly familiar today.

The group discussed new ways to collect and speed the application of data, for instance, which also is a big issue today as registrars face growing megabytes of information along with the new challenges that artificial intelligence brings to their work and the way prospective students present themselves.

They had now familiar discussions about the "value of higher education," along with college costs, joint operating agreements, issues with fraternities, and faculty load levels. The members worried about the academic preparation of students arriving on campus, parents who were too involved in students' lives or expected too much from colleges, and whether states would contribute enough to their institutions, all topics in higher education today.

The use of test scores in admissions (including then-prominent "intelligence tests") was a topic reported in that first issue of the publication, along with using non-academic criteria in admissions, including "character, earnestness and leadership," which are still under discussion today. Some also promoted qualities such as "disposition, personal appearance, and manner," which included "attractiveness, bearing and personal appearance."

While many issues are familiar, there were differences from today, including the degree of sensitivity to political and social issues. Social justice and DEI were not on the agenda as attendees often simply referred to those enrolled in higher education as "our college men," and one session about international students included well-meaning comments that might not be considered politically correct today.

Among other things, the changes in the positions in admissions and registration and growing responsibility were an issue.

"I once thought that the duties of a registrar consisted of copying items from one piece of paper to another," Oliver Lester, dean of the graduate school at the University of Colorado told the group as the session opened. "With the growth of our colleges and universities in numbers and in the intricacy of their organizations, made necessary by the increasing scope of their work, the problems of the registrar have also grown both in complexity and importance."

Sound familiar?

Here are some areas where the topics in 1925 are relevant today—though the thinking about them often has changed, we hope, for the better.

Even Then, Data

One of the first topics in that issue of the Bulletin, the forerunner of today's *College and University* journal, concerned "machine methods applied to the compilation of collegiate statistics" where Charles Maruth, assistant registrar at the State University of Iowa offered new methods of gathering data about enrolled students.

He said registrars were typically asked to provide information for "many questionnaires and blanks concerning enrollment."

"Many of these blanks call for tabulations other than such officer has at his command without many tedious and laborious hours work and they usually come at a time when the entire staff of his office is extremely busy with other matters because of registration. It is little wonder then that some of these blanks and questionnaires find their way readily into the wastebasket."

He went on to begin a discussion of two machines that could help by punching a card for each student, sorting the cards and tabulating the information. He highlighted the benefits and suggested the machinery is like having a "genii at our command" and would "allow for planning and providing good information to superiors."

"For example," he said, "a request asking for the number of foreign students registered in the university can be answered with only an hour's time spent in gathering the information from approximately 8,000 cards."

The challenges, he and several members in the ensuing discussion noted, are also common today. What is the cost of the new technology—and can it be shared by other departments or other institutions? How is a determination made about what data is needed, who collects it, and how is it disseminated and used?

But it was clear even then that skillful handling of data was critical.

David Burge, vice president for enrollment management at George Mason University in Fairfax, VA, who has helped design and lead courses in data use in admissions, said registrars and admissions professionals today recognize data is critical to their work, but in much more sophisticated and subtle ways than a century ago.

"The use of data today is important because it validates—and at times disputes—assumptions," he said. "The collection and timely analysis of aggregated data allows professionals to see the trends that transcend any anecdotes or personal stories. Taking the long view across the experiences of multiple students across enrollment and registration can distill what is noise from what is truly a systemic issue in need of a systemic solution."

He said our transformation to a digital society has enabled the rise of large data sets and better tools to understand and use them and distribute the information—unlike in 1925 when very fundamental unfiltered information was gathered from 8,000 punch cards, for example, and distributed to just a handful of people, and only if everything went well.

"No longer is this function buried in the hands of a very few, it is distributed across all manner of jobs in higher education, Burge said. "There is not a function in higher education where data literacy is not critical to the successful completion of institutional objectives."

Amy Crutchfield, a senior partner at the higher education consulting firm WittKieffer, noted that the chief enrollment management officers that her firm surveyed in 2022 believe the skill they need most is the ability to be "data informed" and "strategic" (WittKieffer 2022, 6), not something they saw coming at that first meeting, where managing lines for students at registration was a bigger concern.

"Everyone is making decisions based on data, and if you are not, you are behind the times," she said. "In today's higher education environment, with finite budgets and intense competition for students, leaders need to be able to convey. While today's higher education landscape is different from the 1920s, that era was also a time of change in society, and I suspect having a deeper understanding of the market and environment were valued then just like today."

"Colleges have to build a complete data culture," Burge said. "That means that *everyone* has to participate in collecting, storing and using data—and understanding the implications of it."

But he worries about admissions personnel who strive to collect and use data and make decisions based on it without understanding that admissions work requires personal interaction and judgement. It is a tool to help them make decisions along with other information and should not be too heavily relied upon solely to guide the action.

"We need to be data informed," he said, "not data driven."

How About Value?

In 1920, tuition at Stanford was $120, and at the University of Pennsylvania it was $270, rising to $400 by 1929. In today's dollars, experts said, tuition would be less than $3,000 a year at those schools (Hanson 2024). Today, Stanford, with tuition at nearly $60,000, costs more than $250 a day. Also, college graduates were rare (only about 12 percent of young people were attending college) and so graduates were increasingly sought after and degrees worth more.

Yet, even in comments in that first issue of the *Bulletin*, professionals in the field were concerned about the public seeing the value of higher education.

Speaking to those assembled in Boulder, University of Colorado President Dr. George Norlin expressed concern about critics of higher education, but noted that he had seen a dramatic change in attitudes since World War I about six years earlier.

"Before the war, there was a great deal of doubt as to the value of higher education, and particularly as to the utility of higher education," he said.

He said during the war, with Woodrow Wilson as president and "college men at the head of the many departments of our government it was discovered that modern war demanded the mobilization of learned men, and that the college man had a great advantage over the non-college man in positions of responsibility" College became "indispensable" and it created "a great influx" of students.

"The slogan of the high school seniors is 'go to college.' It is the custom nowadays for all who are able to go to college, and personally I believe that it is a very good custom," Norlin said.

He also complained that state legislatures often didn't share that attitude and were unwilling to provide enough funding, a common refrain today.

Two experts today said that throughout history attitudes about higher education and its value have shifted but there has been that familiar mix of questions about its value and evidence that it improves the lives and economic status of graduates.

"The value of college has often been a subject of debate because higher education has always been considered an investment," said Sophie Nguyen, senior policy manager for education policy at the think tank New America, who has researched college value.[1] "Students invest money and time, hoping for a better outcome, whether it's greater employment opportunity, greater wages, a better skill set or greater knowledge, though the payoff[2] takes time," she said in an interview.

A conclusion to some of her research on the topic mimics to some degree what Norlin said 100 years ago.

"Despite their various dissatisfactions, Americans overwhelmingly still want to send their children to some form of education and training after high school…" she said in a report, suggesting that despite media reports, the public has not turned against higher education. "People may be less confident in higher education than they used to be, more questioning of its value, and more annoyed by its many faults. But their belief in college as a bedrock public institution, and their desire for their children to become college-educated, remain" (Carey and Nguyen 2024).

Martin Van Der Werf, director of education policy and partnerships at the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce, which does some of the leading research on college value, said higher education may have seen the bump up in its reputation that Norlin describes in the 1920s, but higher education became "common goal" much more widely beginning in the 1960s. Then attitudes shifted again.

"There was this period of time from about 1990 to 2010 that was the golden era for college. Enrollments were skyrocketing, and there was no brake on prices, but it didn't seem to matter. Price equated to quality. It then pretty much became expected of everyone around the early 1980s.

He said that in 1980 about 12 million people went to college in the fall and that number grew to about

[1] *See* <newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/varying-degrees-2023/>.
[2] *See* <bls.gov/emp/chart-unemployment-earnings-education.htm>.

20 million 2000, which was "probably the peak for enrollment and positive attitudes about its value."

Then, he said, the great recession hit and suddenly graduates were not finding jobs and we became much more concerned about the return on investment, a phrase now often being applied to college degrees. CEW offers an interactive tool[3] that measures the return on investment of colleges.

"Young people began asking "What I am going to get out of it in the end and the anecdotes about students with huge debts and no jobs went viral," he said. Value, as it did in 1925 despite the much lower price tag, related directly to costs, he said, though now another factor has been added—"crushing student debt." `

Are They Prepared?

Edward J. Grant of Columbia University during the Boulder meeting provided a committee report suggesting that in 1925, students coming to college needed to be better prepared and screened.

Kimberley B. Williams, associate vice provost for student success at the George Washington University, said she believes the idea of college readiness has evolved and now is focused on several dramatically different topics beyond "intelligence" and others considered in 1925.

"In the early 20th century, college was predominantly an elite pursuit, and readiness expectations were narrower," she said. "As access to higher education expanded to a more diverse population, ensuring readiness became more complex, involving not only academic skills but also social and emotional factors.

She said more broadly today college readiness includes consideration of diverse factors such as college rankings that emphasize graduation rates, or equity gaps, exaggerated by the pandemic because it "disproportionately impacted marginalized communities."

She noted that in 1870, 20 percent of U.S. adults were illiterate, but 80 percent of Black Americans were. The Black illiteracy rate was still 44 percent by 1940 and only grew to be similar to the rate for whites in about 1979, around 1 percent. Similar disparities were seen in other populations, such as Native Americans, all making preparation for college more challenging and complex.

"We're also aware today that social and emotional readiness may present an even greater challenge. Many students enter college having experienced adverse childhood experiences," she said, noting that K–12 schools are addressing the issue more often and colleges are trying to meet the need with improved and expanded services.

She noted that artificial intelligence also is beginning to have an effect, in several ways.

"Are students arriving at college appearing 'ready' due to AI tools? Or are these tools providing critical support to students who lack access to traditional academic coaching? Institutions must navigate these questions carefully as AI's role in education continues to evolve."

Testing and Other Admissions Criteria

Grant's report in 1925 called for a central Collegiate Personnel Bureau with branches throughout the country that "would gather data for each student...as to a student's environment, accomplishment in school, social and economic activities, and native ability based on an intelligence test." Over two days in June, students would be tested and principals would be required to submit a report on the student's accomplishment in high school subjects.

It may have been the precursor to the SAT and ACT, but the idea of the Collegiate Personnel Bureau never seemed to fully take shape.

The Bulletin also reported on a discussion led by Caroline Greene of Mount Holyoke College, who said the college had been giving "intelligence tests to our students since September 1919, the year we began to accept students entirely by examination." She said they had gotten some "interesting results," which showed the correlation between testing and academic success.

Of course, testing is still widely-debated today, particularly as institutions grapple with the test optional issue, a change that some experts believe has led

[3] *See* <cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/roi2022/>.

schools to consider a range of options to assess students and develop their own approach that suits them best.

Robert J. Sternberg, a psychology professor at Cornell University and honorary professor of psychology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, has been an advocate for broader changes to the testing protocol than just test-optional policies.

"We have proposed tests that measure creative, practical, and wisdom-based skills as well as knowledge-based and analytical ones, and have shown that they worked really well," he said, noting that the ideas are explained in his book *College Admissions for the 21st Century,*[4] which was published in 2010, but he believes includes key concepts still relevant today.

He believes our views of testing, even as far back as 1925, have been wrongheaded, and he is frustrated by officials in higher education being willing to consider alternatives.

"For much of the 20th and now 21st centuries," he has written, "standardized test scores have constituted half of the foundation of admissions, with high school grade point average serving as the other half," noting that, like the intelligence tests in 1925, our traditional admissions tests are too narrow in their assessment of students.

"The most important abilities in life are practical intelligence or common sense, creativity, and wisdom, and current tests make no serious attempt to measure any of them."

He and his colleagues believe that "more than the levels of abilities one has is how those abilities are deployed" and that "attitudes toward the deployment of intelligence matter at least as much as the levels of the abilities,"

"We often view intelligence and assorted talents as, somehow, 'in the head.' We act as though they reside within the person. That assumption is false. Intelligence and other abilities and talents are instead an interaction between persons, tasks, and environmental contexts. Perhaps we tend to look at intelligence too much like a bank account: We try to measure "how much" intelligence people have in their heads.

Less Traditional Qualities

Often discussions about higher education admissions revolve around not just testing and GPA, but qualities in applicants that not only will lead them to succeed but will benefit the campus community—and the Bulletin in 1925 covered several discussions at the meeting that related to the qualities the officials attending were seeking.

On one hand, Lorena Church from Rockford College[5] noted in her report on "Methods of Securing Accurate Estimates of Personality and Scholarship" that a "student who can barely meet high school requirements is not necessarily desirable material."

"Our college cannot afford to take poor material; it is simply a dead loss to us if we do. On the hole, I have found that choosing only those in the highest third, or from the middle third, when there are compensating factors, is the best plan," she said. But her discussion included consideration of several factors that the college might and might not consider, all of which, she said, are hard to determine.

"Not only is there the scholarship problem, but also the problem of personality and character. Recently I went over, with a group of members of the faculty, the qualities that students should have in order to be admitted to college and which we ought to include in our questionnaire blank. We ruled out leadership and self-reliance two rather fundamental qualities."

She added, however, that the college should require students to have intellectual interest, industry, and honesty and truthfulness, but also noted that such qualities are hard to assess.

James Littlejohn from Clemson Agricultural College, however, more enthusiastically endorsed determining non-academic qualities, detailing them and how his team developed a rating system and elaborate process they expect high school officials to use to rank students. He identified these characteristics:

- *Character*—Sense of honor, reliability, dependability
- *Native Ability*—Mental calibre, mental alertness, capability, judgment

[4] *See* <amazon.com/College-Admissions-Century-Robert-Sternberg/dp/0674048237>.

[5] An institution, located in Rockford IL, that has since been renamed to Rockford University (in 2013).

- *Energy*—Industry, enterprise, initiative
- *Earnestness*—Seriousness of purpose, perseverance, zeal
- *Disposition*—Courteous, tactful, respectful
- Manner—Attractiveness, bearing, good impression
- *Personal*—Appearance (neatness, care of person, and dress)
- *Leadership*—Executive ability, ability to command respect and cooperation

Many of them are among the qualities admissions professionals wish they could know about a prospect today. They also worry about how to assess students for these qualities and who will undertake such assessments.

"Research over the last 40 plus years has shown that personal attributes are significant predictors in retention and why students succeed," said Michele Sandlin, an AACRAO senior consultant and co-author of the book *Holistic Admissions: Predicting the Likelihood for Student Success.*[6] She noted that along with grade point average, "personal attributes predict a student's ability to be successful at their institution."

"It is imperative that institutions establish more precise instruments and measures to identify those students who are likely to thrive at our institutions, she argued, along with her co-author, William Sedlacek, professor emeritus of education at the University of Maryland.

But the two suggested that assessments can in fact be developed for these personal qualities and described them in the book. They also argued for admissions professionals to consider the qualities dismissed in presentation by Church in 1925 but embraced by Littlejohn—leadership and a positive but realistic self-concept.

In addition, they advocated for assessing qualities such as an understanding of racism, orientation toward long-term goals, a positive sense of community and non-traditional knowledge that the candidate has acquired (Sandlin and Sedlacek 2020).

[6] *See* <community.aacrao.org/s/store#/store/browse/detail/a1H3w00000xFr1hEAC>.

In his July 2023 article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Eric Hoover reported that the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) was developing a new Character Focus Initiative (CFI)[7] to "elevate the importance of nonacademic factors and personal attributes in admissions."

According to David Hawkins, NACAC's chief education and policy officer, "[w]e're only capturing what's on the surface when it comes to students' strengths and potential.... The question is: How do we capture these intangibles that fall outside the things we try to quantify on paper? We're trying to get beyond the relatively shallow ways in which we're looking at applicants" (Hoover 2023).

To further its CFI objectives, NACAC acquired and integrated the Character Collaborative—an organization that promoted the use of character qualities in admissions.[8] Members of the former Collaborative expressed that assessment of these qualities was challenging. Many championed the use of existing application materials over the development of new assessments to spot the characteristics they sought to identify. Among them, four sound similar to those described in 1925: civic character, ethical character, persistence character, and intellectual character.

Motivation, for example, is a quality that admissions professionals have looked for throughout time, and was concerning those meeting in 1925. Experts have suggested it, too, is difficult to assess and is perhaps best determined by grade point average, participation in other activities, letters of recommendation, and essays.

Nathan Kuncel, a distinguished professor of industrial and organizational psychology and a McKnight Presidential Fellow at the University of Minnesota, specializes in research about how we predict success in academics and the workplace, believes that attitudes shift concerning non-traditional admissions criteria for a few reasons.

"The striking evidence that character, measured well, is really important paired with evidence that old

[7] *See* <nacacnet.org/character-focus-initiative/>.

[8] The Character Collaborative, created in 2016, comprised of 74 member organizations at the time of its acquisition in 2023 (NACAC n.d.).

methods of assessing character don't measure it has certainly elevated interest. I think concerns about fairness are the second reason. Accurate assessment of the whole student is important for fairness."

He said motivation is another quality that is important, but that there are a number of different ways to describe those qualities: motivation, conscientiousness or grit.

"What we have found is that regardless of the name, those qualities are relatively stable over time with a person in their life, in academics, and in jobs. And they are as important as cognitive ability."

In summary, the educational landscape of 1925, as recorded in the inaugural *Bulletin of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars*, reveals striking parallels and notable differences with today's higher education system. Year after year, the beliefs, needs, and motivation of the students have changed, as has the economy, attitudes about higher education, technology systems for gathering and disbursing information—and the campus itself. But issues that registrars and admissions professionals faced 100 years ago and since are still relevant today.

Often fundamental concerns about recruiting students, assessing their "fit" for a campus, helping them navigate the admissions and enrollment process and settle into this critical period of their lives—they are the same. And the professionals who support these key steps have tackled each new challenge and adapted to the changes.

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Campus Viewpoint

Perspectives and practical experiences of higher education professionals

An Online Tool for Declaring Student Absences at the University of Toronto

Richard Levin and **Joseph Minichini**

In response to an outbreak of H1N1 flu in 2010, the University of Toronto introduced an online absence declaration (AD) tool. The AD tool allowed students to inform the university about missed academic work and to request academic consideration,[1] without providing supporting medical documentation. In addition to streamlining the declaration process, the tool removed the need for students to visit a doctor's office during the outbreak. Students were allowed an indefinite number of absences, each of which could be up to fourteen days plus the current day and up to two retroactive days, for a total of seventeen days per absence.

Three academic divisions adopted the tool in 2010: the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM), the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS), and the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering (FASE). After the outbreak subsided in 2011, only the University of Toronto Mississauga continued to use the AD tool. When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, use of the tool was expanded to include most academic divisions at the university. This occurred at the end of March 2020.

Absence declaration information submitted by students was available to administrative staff but students were still required to inform their instructors of their absence and make arrangements for academic consideration. Different academic divisions had different processes for managing the declarations and the granting of academic consideration.

In 2022, as the pandemic transitioned to endemic status, the university reviewed the use of the tool, with a view to making appropriate adjustments. A broad range of stakeholders across the university were consulted in the review, including senior academic admin-

[1] Academic consideration refers to measures taken to ameliorate the effects of missed assignments (*e.g.*, a deferred exam, make-up test, or reweighting of other marks).

istrators, the university registrar, divisional (school) registrars, and student life and wellness leaders.

A Closer Look at the Absence Declaration Tool

Benefits

Stakeholders identified the following main benefits of the AD tool.

- By removing the need for medical documentation, it sharply reduced administrative workload for health and wellness centres, freeing up critical health resources.
- It reduced health risks during a pandemic by limiting student visits to doctors' offices.
- It lessened the burden for students who were previously required to obtain a doctor's note and possibly incur associated fees.
- It promoted student agency and autonomy by respecting student decisions to declare an absence and assume responsibility for any associated consequences.

Table 1

Verifications of Illness (VOIs) Issued by University of Toronto Health and Wellness Centres

Campus	From	To	VOIs (n)
St. George	May 2018	Apr 2019	2,353
	May 2019	Apr 2020	2,056
	May 2020	Apr 2021	852
	May 2021	Mar 2022	782
Mississauga[1]	May 2018	Apr 2019	1,128
	May 2019	Apr 2020	1,205
	May 2020	Apr 2021	147
	May 2021	Mar 2022	131
Scarborough	Nov 2019	Apr 2020	622
	May 2020	Oct 2020	36
	Nov 2020	Apr 2021	70
	May 2021	Oct 2021	18
	Nov 2021	Apr 2022	0

[1] While the Mississauga campus used the Absence Declaration tool before the pandemic, it was normally in conjunction with VOIs.

Prior to the broad application of the AD tool, the university used a standard medical form for student absences, called the Verification of Illness (VOI). In confirming the benefits of the AD tool relative to requiring VOIs, some stakeholders pointed out that the value of many VOIs is questionable. Doctors frequently see students with whom they have had no previous contact, and many symptoms are not objectively verifiable. In cases where students are looking to support petitions, they may be seeking documentation for conditions that occurred some time ago. As a result, a VOI can have the appearance of validating an absence declaration with little substance behind it. Visits to physicians outside U of T centres may also require students to pay a fee.

Data from health and wellness centres on the three campuses show the significant decline in VOI forms issued on all three campuses beginning in Spring 2020 (Table 1). The reduction significantly increased the capacity of the university's health and wellness centres to serve students, and particularly to respond to growing demand for mental health services.

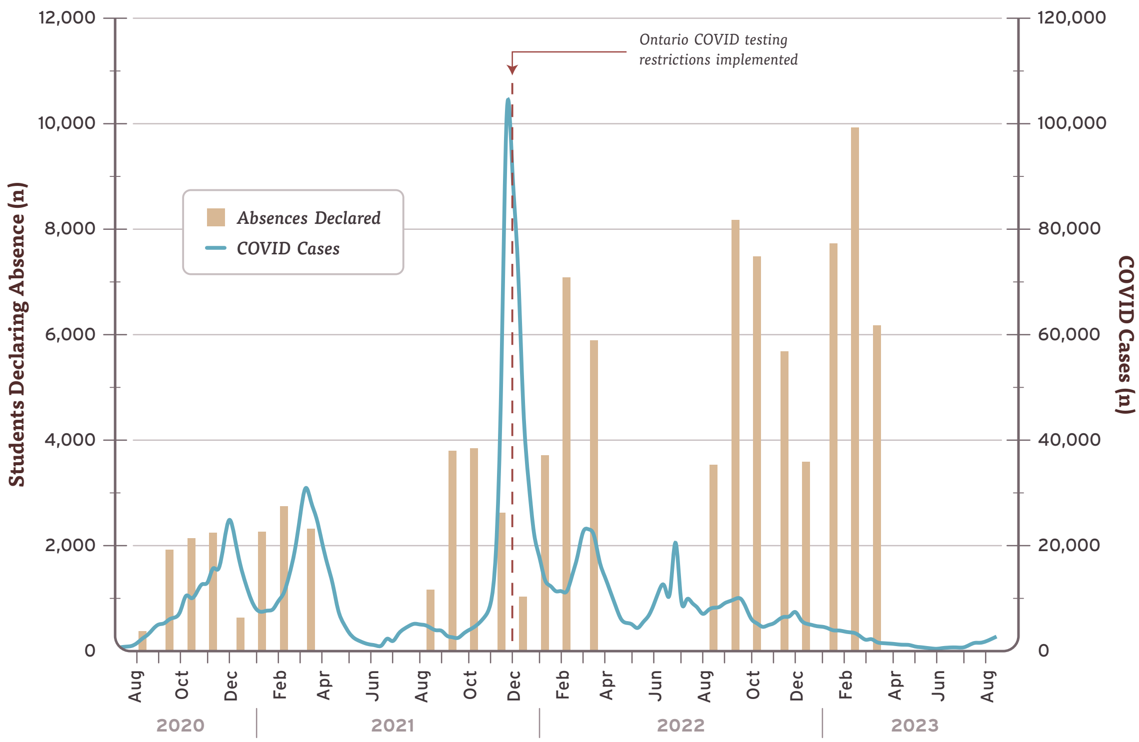
Issues and Concerns

A major factor in prompting the university's review of the online AD tool was the growing increase in declared absences, even as the pandemic receded.

Figure 1 (on page 75) shows the growing use of online absence declarations since the onset of the pandemic. While the COVID-19 case counts before and after December 2021 are not directly comparable

Figure 1

Number of Students Declaring an Absence Relative to the Number of Confirmed Positive Cases of COVID-19, 2020–2023



Note: Absence declaration data for summer months are not included in the chart.
COVID-19 case counts from Ontario Respiratory Virus Tool, Public Health Ontario

because of restrictions in the availability of testing introduced at that time, the trends in cases and absence declarations are clear.

Faculties and teaching staff voiced particular concern about the sharp rise in requests for exam deferrals, as shown in Figure 2 (on page 76).

The weight of managing absences fell predominantly to faculty, who had to determine how to evaluate students in the absence of marks from assignments and tests. This often led to a requirement for make-up assignments, but sometimes just increased the weight of the final exam, which presented additional pedagogical and student wellness concerns.

Further exacerbating this problem was a growing tendency for students, who had been granted a deferred exam, to re-defer or miss their deferred exam (*see* Figure 2, on page 76).

A number of other issues were raised during the review, including the need for greater clarity in communications and information about use of the AD tool, improved functionality (*e.g.*, workflow that directly informed an instructor or staff person about an absence), and better reporting.

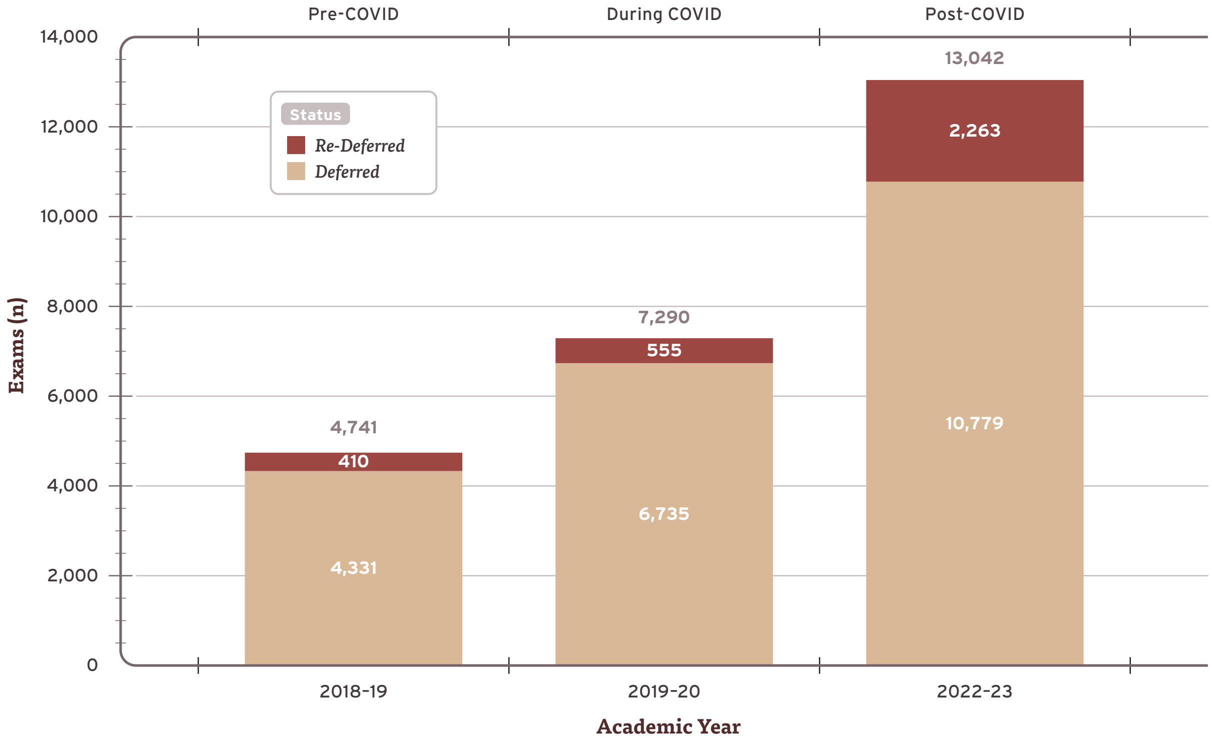
Solutions

The review identified four factors to consider in making modifications to the AD tool:

- the recognition that many absences are simple and straightforward, *e.g.*, short-term acute illnesses, do not necessarily require

Figure 2

Exam Deferrals and Re-Deferrals: Before, During and After the Pandemic (Arts and Science Divisions)



Note: Arts and science divisions include the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC), the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM), and the Faculty of Arts and Science on the St. George campus (A&S). As academic divisions define and report deferrals differently, these numbers are approximations.

documentation, and can be managed efficiently by students and instructors;

- the need to preserve academic integrity by discouraging absence requests that may be for reasons other than illness or other extenuating circumstances;
- the need to maintain capacity at health and wellness centres by limiting student demand for medical documentation; and
- the opportunity to support student success by distinguishing routine and minor absences from those that could have a more significant impact on academic success and might require advising.

Potential solutions to the identified concerns fell into two categories: technical modifications to the tool itself, and changes to policies defining the use of the tool. Solutions were constrained by a short timeline (implementation for Fall 2023), limited technical resources available to modify the AD tool functionality, and different regulations and processes in place in different academic divisions. Waiving the requirement for documentation to support an absence had also been very popular with student groups, who lobbied to maintain the new status quo.

Stakeholder discussions recognized that modifications to the tool would be challenged by the complexity of the student evaluation context. For example, there was discussion about whether to shut down the tool during the exam period to prevent its use for deferred

exam requests. However, due dates for some non-exam assignments were sometimes extended into the exam period, which made this solution impracticable. In the end, such usage limitations were prescribed by policy rather than enforced by technology.

There was also discussion about whether to require students to use the AD tool for all absences, including those requiring documentation. That idea was rejected because of concerns related to secure storage and distribution of sensitive documentation, as well as potential confusion about the use of the tool.

As a result of the review, the following changes were made:

- Student use of the AD tool was limited to once per term, and the maximum length of an absence was reduced from seventeen days to seven days per absence, including any retroactive days. After some discussion, it was decided that students could choose whether or not to use the tool for any particular absence in a term or provide documentation and save the tool for a potential second absence. Beyond these limits, divisional procedures would apply. This most often meant a return to the use of documentation, including VOIs.
- The tool was enhanced to allow students to enter the email addresses of the instructors and/or staff who needed to be notified of the absence, based on the course syllabus. Although automated workflow would have been preferable, it was not possible to implement this within the time available.

Future Considerations

Effects of the revisions to the AD tool will be monitored over time, and further changes may need to be considered. It remains to be seen whether the usage restrictions will be sufficient to significantly reduce absences and missed work. Also important in considering future adjustments will be the effect on demand for VOIs from health practitioners.

The AD review required balancing of many factors: student wellness, university health care capacity, time limitations, differing views and contexts in the academic divisions, and technical considerations. Whether the limitations introduced following the review are successful in curtailing and/or reversing the growth of student absence declarations is an empirical question that will need ongoing evaluation.

About the Authors

Richard Levin has served as the University Registrar in four Canadian universities, most recently at the University of Toronto where he was also a Senior Strategist in the Office of the Vice-Provost Students. He retired in 2024. Richard has a keen interest in evidence-based decision-making. He has served on the executive committees of the Ontario University Registrars' Association (OURA) and the Association of Registrars of Universities & Colleges in Canada (ARUCC) and is a recipient of the University of Toronto Influential Leader award. Levin is an Assistant Consultant with AACRAO Consulting.

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Campus Viewpoint

Perspectives and practical experiences of higher education professionals

Clearly Defining the Leadership Line by Removing Reticence with HBCU Registrars

Harrison P. Johnson

Organizational structures at many institutions of higher learning tend to mirror one another closely. With a primary focus of ensuring student success, many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have the registrar's office functioning within the enrollment management structure instead of a direct connection to the office of academic affairs. While there is an understanding that posits faculty governance is always under the purview of academic affairs, the administrative processes and procedures tend to become secondary to institutional progression. It cannot go without mentioning that the registrar's office is interconnected with almost all offices on a college or university campus. However, there are many times that the work of the registrar is minimally viewed as processing and responding to transcript, enrollment, and registration requests. The urgency and relevance of this topic is underscored by the results from an August 2023 *AACRAO 60-Second Survey*. The survey found that regarding institutional governance and decision-making, relative to the role of the registrar, the inclusion was highly regarded in registration and academic policy (Kilgore 2023). The scope of this article will review the importance of a continuous organizational connection between the registrar and chief academic officer as well as the influence of faculty on process, procedure, and compliance at HBCUs.

The following aims to offer practical approaches for examining the degree of complexity associated with organizational structures that formally prohibit the registrar's office from receiving support through reporting lines from the office of academic affairs. It also explores the significance of providing support to individuals in leadership roles in enrollment management, with the aim of connecting knowledge and information. Parmer (2024) affirmed that the role of an enrollment manager is difficult, as they are responsible for all aspects of the student lifecycle from admission to graduation. The approaches suggested are specifically focused on the HBCU environment and strive to offer practical strategies for immediate integration and implementation. Registrars in the academy are faced with overcoming many challenges day-by-day, but HBCU registrars may experience these issues more intensely, given the current reporting structure. The text highlights the need to ensure rules of engagement are in line with the best promises for practice.

Academic or Administrative Policy?

Registrars in the HBCU environment are challenged each day to create policies and procedures that align with their accreditors and professional organizations while ensuring they cater to the best interest of the students in which they serve once implemented. Often, performance is juxtaposed between an exceptional truth and an over-promise when it relates to the provision of service. This includes those deliverable items that are germane to the scope of work, like the academic transcript or diploma, once a student has completed their degree requirements. Much of the mystery to the level of service is undergirded by the determination of whether a policy is administrative or academic. The when, how, who, and what are guided by administrative policy creation, whereas the academic polices are those that frame criteria and standards for academic functions at an institution. HBCU registrars may find themselves at a crossroad of familiarity, educating up line, and level-setting when their organization's structure is designed with direct reporting to an enrollment manager and not an academic faculty member.

Communication, Balance, and Transparency

Throughout many segments of the semester, there are critical moments in which an enrollment manager engages the registrar. At the start of the term, most prioritization revolves around enrollment confirmation, which is dependent upon faculty submission at attendance-taking institutions. Many HBCUs are tuition-dependent, so the amount of pressure placed on the registrar during this time may be insurmountable when compared to other parts of term. There is a strong shift of where the burden will fall when faculty do not submit timely attendance confirmations. An additional consideration should be the exploration of deviations with the onboarding of adjunct faculty. Due to enrollment managers not having faculty governance, the registrar would need direct support from the chief academic officer or appointee in academic affairs at the beginning of a term. There should be transparency regarding who is delaying the reporting of attendance confirmation with direct communication between college/school deans, academic chairs, and program coordinators—who would be charged with providing direct support to this administrative academic function. In some instances, this is an email to the entire academic body with all instructors who are abutting the deadline for enrollment confirmation and have not completed the tasks. While faculty have an admittedly arduous lift at the start of term with new students, the enrollment confirmation is equally critical to many functions of the institution. Sharing who is outstanding creates a balance of accountability by engaging segmented academic leadership for support to the impacted faculty and courses.

Similarly, subsequent grading periods pose an issue when an enrollment manager's focus on preparing to build a new incoming class of students while working to review the latest class's academic performance comes into question. Midterm and final grading periods are critical times, and the registrar's office is expected to perform the processing of faculty-dependent submissions. During both peak periods, there are delays in the flow of information. HBCU faculty, in particular, carry an additional commitment of ensuring the success of the most underserved and underprepared students in the classroom and within campus culture (Holland 2016). Some faculty may not even understand the mission of the HBCU in which they work and are habitually late with rendering their grade submissions. Similar to attendance tracking and reporting for support, the registrar should share the information up and out to academic leadership who can provisionally support or sanction the pattern of delinquency of grade submissions with faculty in question. As an aside, there are then times in which these faculty members overextend themselves and are challenged with meeting their own deadlines to accommodate their students.

Curriculum processing was also one of the five highest rated areas respondents to the *60-Second Survey* highlighted for governance and decision-making (Kilgore 2023). Enrollment managers, as Parmer (2024) cited, focus on the life cycle of the student through graduation. As such, they should have a keen interest in any encumbrances to degree completion. At HBCUs, it is critical for registrars to be active and proactive in their administrative capacity with supporting of the curriculum committees, both undergraduate and graduate if segmented. The registrar should ensure tracking mechanisms are in place to record those programs with substantial course substitutions, deviations from published catalog requirements, and those who are hard to clear at graduation. This information will be beneficial to the enrollment manager as well as the office of academic affairs, who can guide a conversation to a path forward through formal curricular modifications. This level of support and transparency assists both academic affairs and the enrollment manager with clarifying degree requirements that impact the student life cycle. The goal should be overall excellence with compliance of timely grade submission, regardless of individualized extensions of care.

Why it Matters

At the center of many HBCU missions is the goal of cultivating and preparing competent students to be professionals. Many HBCUs have the vision of graduating their students with the premise that they would be change agents who understand all levels of needs within society. This means that these graduates would have adequate training and functional competency skills to compete and transform the largest of concerns within society. The uniqueness of an HBCU education is the intentional level of attention and care given, provided with an aim of overcoming historical oppressions while creating the ultimate opportunity — guaranteed by research and educational soundness. This is only significant when instructors, staff, and administrators demonstrate behaviors that actively promote student achievement.

With the registrar at the center of this process, they can redirect and promote student success through transparency of areas of opportunity. Removing the mystery of who has and has not done what at the enrollment confirmation period at the start of term and the subsequent grade reporting periods allows for academic leadership to leverage this information to better shape and support faculty. It is also important to specify which programs have an area of opportunity with curriculum redevelopment.

Final Path Forward

When the HBCU registrar is dually empowered to fully operate in a compliance capacity with the enrollment manager and academic affairs office, there is a connection to student success instead of a barrier. Rev. Nontombi Naomi Tutu (2024) shared a proverb that in times of crisis, the wise build bridges, and those who are not as resourceful may build a wall. This can be noted as one of the most memorable moments at the 109th AACRAO Annual Meeting, as Rev. Tutu set the foundation of her speech upon motivating attendees to work collectively and not individually relative to shared institutional interests. Even though the registrar reporting to an enrollment manager rather than an academic affairs leader isn't a crisis, the accuracy and timely data processing is of high importance. Additionally, information sharing creates a bond across units within institutions of higher learning, and it is important that the registrar knows and understands the culture of where they work (Burgher, *et al.* 2013). It is possible to refute the anecdotal evidence that was gathered from the proverbial conversations that took place in the past regarding the performance of faculty members and the absence of governance from enrollment management by sharing live data throughout the institution. Recognizing that the role of the registrar is centric in administrative processes is critical to the progression of HBCUs and institutions alike.

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Harrison P. Johnson, Ph.D., is the University Registrar at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. He has spent the last ten years dedicating his work to integrating and transforming the registrar's office in functional areas of institutions of higher learning. His research interests lie in modernizing registrar practices and academic policies within the Historically Black College and University setting. He regularly serves as an instructor in AACRAO's Registrar 101 courses. He earned a B.S. and M.U.R.P. from Alabama A&M University, an M.S. from Southern Arkansas University, and a Ph.D. from Jackson State University.

Campus Viewpoint

Perspectives and practical experiences of higher education professionals

The Dream (or Reality) of Proven Practice

Heidi Hoskinson

Editor's Note: *The following is the third in a series of articles on best practices in the registrar's office. The first article provided an overview of the origin, evolution, and importance of best practices. The second discussed a withdrawal process improvement initiative, providing a case study of how best practices can be shared within and across institutions to impact students. This article explores proven practices and how they are shaped and reviewed.*

At their core, higher education institutions are a business enterprise. Students invest their resources in the educational experiences that a college or university provides. As similar business entities, institutions deploy a series of internal best practices that they believe efficiently and effectively deliver their product of higher education to students. Over time, these institutional best practices are created by similarly-trained professionals in various disciplines, take root, are shared between colleagues, and become industry standards in various operations of a higher education institution. As the higher education workforce shifts regularly, is a set of universal proven practices coming into existence for all institutions?

What is a proven practice?

Proven practice, synonymous with evidence-based practice, is defined by the Oxford Review (2024) as a systematic decision-making process that deploys methods, techniques, strategies, or interventions based upon the best evidence available. This approach seeks to remove subjectivity, personal belief or bias, and feelings out of action-oriented processes practiced by organizations. In higher education, we seek evidence for proven practices from multiple sources including peer-reviewed research, various testing methodologies, practitioner expertise and feedback from various publics, including students, faculty, alumni, and other stakeholders.

Proven practices rely on the ability of professionals to judge the validity, reliability, and veracity of a given result following the execution of a process. In practice, this requires registrars or admissions professionals to develop feedback mechanisms that gather data from process participants, assess the data, and make improvements to the process according to what they observed or learned. A proven practice results in the expected and, more importantly, the desired outcome time after time.

Examples of proven practices in the registrar's office may include scheduling matrices, student record maintenance, registration priorities, and degree audit.

Are there universal proven practices?

Given the number of similar (or same) policies and practices deployed across the thousands of higher education institutions operating today, it is easy to argue that a set of universal proven practices exists industry-wide and are consistently perpetuated by an increasing mobile professional higher education workforce. In our professions, the structures of the offices of the registrar and admissions operate within a similar set of policies and procedures, regardless of the place. Once imbued with operational knowledge, an admissions officer is equipped to seamlessly move from place to place with the assurance that all admissions offices operate under a similar set of universal practices. The same logic can be applied to registrars—because the fundamental job tasks are the same industry-wide, a universal set of practices must therefore exist.

The flaw in this 30,000-foot-view argument is just that, it falls apart when institutions are considered not as a collective whole, but based upon their individual or group identities. These institutional nuances influence proven practice, changing it in ways that are truly unique to our industry.

Proven Practices for the Kin

It is true that colleges share common characteristics. These similarities allow institutions of affinity to consider the deployment of comparable, or the same sets, of proven practices.

Examples

Similar Types of Institutions

A group of small, private liberal arts schools form a consortium in an effort to stretch human and fiscal resources. They collectively purchase a software system and employ a small group of shared IT professionals to design, implement, and manage the system. In order to gain efficiencies and make effective use of the system, the group of schools had to assimilate, adapting policies, processes, and practices into a shared set of standards. Over time and through the use of a continuous improvement assessment strategy that provided evidence for evaluation, that set of standards became a set of proven practices.

Different Types of Institutions

It is not uncommon for a variety of different kinds of institutions to be grouped together in a particular state under a state board or regent association structure. This grouping of institutions can include community colleges, regional institutions, Research 1 flagship campuses, technical schools, and/or professional training programs. This membership diversity can present some challenges to policy development and deployment. State associations are adept at considering those challenges, accommodating differences, and constructing a set of proven practices shared across the entirety of the system.

These examples point to the effectiveness of like-minded or geographically-tied institutions establishing and embellishing over time a shared suite of proven practices. An equally persuasive counterargument can be made that the one-practice-fits-all mindset ignores our industry's strongly held belief that operational practices should reflect the unique culture, mission, vision, values, and strategies of the institution where they are exercised.

Proven Practices for Unicorns

Like human beings, higher education institutions enjoy believing that they are individuals, each one distinctive, different, and special. And, to an extent, they are. Institutions strive to differentiate themselves from others, to create a culture or campus climate that makes students, faculty, or professional staff want to be a part of that community. The ways in which a campus operates are often key elements in the perpetuation and preservation of campus culture. Students may be inclined to stay in environments where processes are designed with their needs as foremost priorities. Faculty may thrive in communities where institutional practices focus on creating high-quality teaching and learning environments. Professional staff could thrive in climates that provide equal measures of structure and accountability, but have elements of professional judgement and autonomy embedded in practices calibrated for productive outcomes.

Thus, each institution is unique, with different visions of their role and purpose within the higher education landscape. With so many unicorns, the reality that a universal set of proven practices could exist is impractical. Why? Because the ideals that drive operational structure and decision-making vary wildly across institutions.

Colleges and universities pride themselves on their distinctive missions. As missions often dictate organizational direction and priorities, policy and operational processes are constructed to facilitate missional objectives. As missional pursuit impacts institutional planning, unique institutions lean into their uniqueness, rather than becoming malleable to universal practices, proven or otherwise.

Distinctive missional pursuits lead institutions to pursue individualized strategies across the academy. Enrollment goals can be wildly different across institutions with differing missions. Retention strategies vary significantly depending on mission, culture, climate, and student profile. Institutions stand up different types of operational services depending on the composition of the student body, the nature of the campus climate, and the needs of the community. There are missional pursuits that require the acquisition of technology solutions that are then implemented differently across different types of institutions. Technology platforms increasingly allow for institutional customizations, which reinforce the isolated development of best practices instead of embracing shared proven practices. Finally, institutions have a knack for getting in their own way when it comes to creating and maintaining proven practices, a point we will discuss in more detail shortly.

The Role of the Registrar to Create Proven Practices

The role of the registrar is often as unique as the institution when it comes to creating proven practices. Registrars can serve as leaders, keeping informed of emerging trends, illuminating relevant research, and data from external sources, and advocating on behalf of students based on their own institutional data mining. Their ability to collaborate with colleagues at other institutions via organizations like AACRAO allows registrars to be uniquely informed and provide evidence-based results from practitioners in the field at institutions that are similar to their own.

Registrars are also uniquely positioned to identify when a proven practice is no longer effective. Their command of operational policy and practice at their unique institution ensures that when process outcomes deviate from expectations, they notice, investigate, replicate the findings, and suggest process improvements. As expert practitioners, registrars not only lead the implementation of proven practice at their institutions, but can wield influence outside of their organizations as well.

An example: Many institutions have a proven practice regarding the release of official transcripts for students. Often, if a student has not met their financial obligation in full, the institution will not send an official transcript to any external party until such time as the balance is paid. Historically, this practice produced the desired result consistently. Students settled their outstanding bills when an official transcript was used as leverage.

More recently, additional research and outcomes assessment initiated by the U.S. Department of Education[1] acknowledged that this proven practice had been harming instead of supporting student success, and

[1] *See* <ed.gov/sites/ed/files/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2021/non-ge-final-rules-fact-sheet.pdf>.

hindering students from achieving degree completion goals envisioned by the department. Registrars played a role in contributing to the policy change by sharing institutional data, proposing policy language, and working in collaboration with their financial aid colleagues.

As a result, a proven practice has been adjusted and, under specific circumstances, students with balances due can request that official transcripts be released.

Not as Easy as It Looks

The proven practice example regarding transcript holds took years to become routine and still more years to change. Why are proven practices hard to practice and hard to change? There are a myriad of good and bad reasons, it turns out.

The adoption of proven practice is derailed by some of the same factors that provide the impetus for them. Changes in campus culture, climate, student demographics, institutional mission, and technology challenges can easily erect barriers to implementation at any time. Recall that institutions also have a knack for getting in their own way when trying something new. Inertia or the dreaded, 'we've always done it this way' moniker can end change before it begins. Campus politics, inter-departmental friction and leadership change can also create barriers that limit or eliminate the collaboration and cooperation efforts that are critical for processes to take hold and result in success.

Adaptation of proven practice is predicated on access to and analysis of empirical data and evidence-based findings. Research studies can and do answer process efficacy questions; however, not enough research is pursued in the areas of student success, enrollment management, registrar operations, and other proven process dependent areas. Increasing support of action research across the professions by graduate programs and professional associations like AACRAO will be increasingly important as proven practices continue to influence and proliferate across the higher education industry.

Historically, our professional identities have been cast as expert practitioners. This article posits an important adaptation in how registrars are viewed in the context of proven practice; that of a scholar-practitioner. Our superpowers in data mining, analytics, testing, and assessment prove that we can create, implement, and adapt proven process in the unique and evolving institutional environments where we work, lead, and succeed.

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Commentary

Ideas and opinions influencing student services

A Generation in Enrollment Management: Analyzing the Profession's Evolution

Kevin Windholz

Enrollment management has been my professional life for 23 years. That is a generation. Watching the profession has been much like seeing my kids grow up. My two sons are now twenty and seventeen. As I went through day-to-day life with them, I knew they were gradually changing. We were just too caught up in daily activities to give it much thought. Randomly, I'll stumble upon a photograph from years past. BAM! Suddenly I'm reminded the two young men in front of me were once little boys I saw grow right in front of my eyes. The same can be said of my time in enrollment management. I've lived it day-to-day, caught up on whatever the hot topic was at the specific moment. But, when I stop and picture this profession from 23 years ago, I realize now it is almost unrecognizable. In a little more than two decades, I have seen the audience, tactics, timelines, and the trade's main objective evolve into something very different.

Then: the talk was on the university experience.

Now: the talk is outcomes focused. I remember back to the early 2000s as an admissions counselor attending college fairs and high school and campus visits. Prospective undergraduate students and family questions centered on campus life, student organizations, the food at the cafeteria, and how to pick roommates. We covered the academic major of interest, but more like a checklist on whether the college offered it or not. Now, the questions I hear from undergraduate students and families more reflect that of graduate students. They have great detailed interest in the academic program, its internship opportunities, recent graduates, placement rates, and earning potential. It cannot be coincidence that now our health care and STEM programs that have the highest placements rates and eventual salaries carry most universities' undergraduate enrollments.

Then: there were more limited, general messaging covering the university.

Now: there are multiple messages in many formats covering the program. Because of the prospective student market desire just described and the additional forms of media out there, I have seen the marketing multiply in terms of messaging and quantities. A generation ago, digital ads were unheard of. We had those two great treasures that were printed every late July, the viewbook and the prospect card. I can still smell the fresh ink scent that was in my travel bag each September. The viewbook highlighted the entire university; you saw a dorm photo, a picture of someone eating pizza in the cafeteria, an action shot of the basketball team, alumni narratives, and every major listed on the back. The prospect card ruled the college fair. You were in competition with admissions reps at other schools, who you saw so frequently they became like family, to see who could walk away with the most completed cards. Then, the poor admissions operations person would look at you with exhaustion when you returned from the road and gave her your stack of cards to key into the system. Today, messaging and data collection is more abundant and focused. Digital advertising, text, and email campaigns are often academic-program specific, with several versions running simultaneously, highlighting the program of interest in just as must detail as the university advertisements. Every campaign gives someone not only the chance to inquire and be in your system within seconds, but even to apply in minutes if so desired.

Then: we were about the incoming freshmen.

Now: we are about all populations. The universities I worked at used to predict the next academic year from one primary factor, the headcount of the upcoming freshmen class. As vice presidents of enrollment management, we lived (and sometimes died) off that number. It was even that way when I started at Oklahoma City University (OCU) twelve years ago. If I submitted a budget for 500 incoming freshmen, all bets for the year ahead centered on making or exceeding this number. Since then, a shift has occurred. The planning process is much more holistic, with new freshmen (today, more often referred to as first-year) being just one piece of a very large puzzle. It takes multiple new student populations to make our incoming counts: freshmen, transfer, and graduate students; both in-person and online learners; and traditional- and non-traditional-aged individuals. Each requires a different form of recruitment with specific tactics for individualized academic programs. The impact of retaining current students from year to year also, rightfully, plays a more prominent role in the enrollment planning conversations at the table.

Then: August ruled the year.

Now: August is just one of twelve months. The entire year was once a repetitive cycle that led up to judgement week, the third week of August. The fall months focused on travel and inquiry and application collections. The time near the holidays marked file reviews and admissions decisions. The winter months were the financial aid packaging and negotiations season. The spring signified yield activity events and final communication touches. June and July were the pre-registration orientation sessions and when we started to dabble into the now-rising seniors. Then, it was August, and for many VPEMs this month dictated to us whether we would be given the privilege of leading another cycle. Today, the cycle is complex and continuous. Due to the incoming student availability expanding much beyond freshmen and the market demand for career-centered programs with many intakes, swift starts, and quick completions, there are multiple recruitment cycles that all run together simultaneously. Consequently, now at OCU the CFO and I put as much emphasis on enrollment headcount and revenue planning into the spring and summer semesters as we do the fall. Also, with the traditional population, the recruitment touchpoints are just as in-depth with high school sophomores as the rising seniors. Today you don't just want the student to visit campus in the summer before the senior year of high school. You want to be on their short list by that time. Sure, all this has increased the workload. But it is a healthy to-do list increase, signifying the university is keeping up with the 21st century.

Then: we raised prices.

Now: we sometimes lower the price. In 2001, I remember the standard talk to families, "I'm not sure what next year's price will be, but plan on a 2–5 percent increase from this year." In the opinion of this enrollment manager, the fact that this practice continued without much thought year after year created an affordability gap that affects our industry enrollments to this day. In recent years, there have been a few cases where universities have gone bold and reset their prices. More commonly, I am certain there have been many cases where universities have taken pockets of their programs and lowered those specific prices. This isn't special, but sometimes common cases where the enrollment and revenue from lower tuition may grow to a level exceeding that was produced with the higher tuition. I can think of close to a dozen times we have done that strategically with certain populations in my tenure at OCU. We perhaps have just been lucky, but I cannot think of an instance when it didn't increase the enrollment in the selected population. Just last year we revamped an academic health care program and my very-wise president (and I say that sincerely as I cannot repay the integrity and knowledge he has passed on to me) said if we are going to do this, we need to do it right. He said no matter how good the program is, and it is a great program, if it is priced too high the market will not gravitate toward it. So, we went live with a much-lower-than-institutional-norm tuition rate for it. After just one semester, the program had a wait list. This is the exact type of conversation and strategy that was not common 20 years ago.

Then: we had one vendor.

Now: we have multiple university partners. Two decades ago, an enrollment management division from my perspective usually had one or two outside companies that assisted with the process. One might have executed the sophomore/junior search campaign. Another may have helped with financial aid leveraging. The teams I worked with usually called them vendors. Two factors have come into play in the past two decades: our use of technology has increased, and for most of us, our labor and operational budgets have seen two-decade consistent decreases. Consequently, now we have companies that monitor digital advertising campaigns for us, host our required financial aid cost calculators, and provide the software making the bridge from our CRMs to our main campus SIS systems possible. There are even online program managers (OPMs) who execute our marketing for certain online programs, follow up with prospects, and conduct retention monitoring. Because these types of companies often fill the gaps we can't provide with our internal resources, they have turned from vendors into true university partners.

Then: our focus was on shaping the incoming class.

Now: our focus is on university survival. As mentioned before, the beginning and even middle of my time in the profession centered around bringing in that freshmen group in August. It did not stop with this being the central focus of future financial planning. There were much stronger goals on moving the needle for the incoming GPAs and ACTs. Recruitment tactics were designed to diversify the demographic make-up of the new students. The discount rate of these students was also fiscally watched like no other population on campus. Today, these elements are still important but just one piece of a large puzzle playing into university survival. Ten years ago, my answer was different. Now if people ask me the main objective of my job, it is clearly to generate more than 90 percent of the institutions' operational revenue. I can really compare this to TV soap operas my family grew up on. In the 1980s and 1990s their storylines could take any direction chosen, because the audience would stick with them no matter what, and the idea of cancellation was foreign. Now only four of those shows remain on the air. The same concept applies to higher education institutions. When I started in 2001, the idea that the college down the street would cease to operate did not exist. Over the past 20 years, some of our traditional audience has left us, and the demographics of those available to us have changed considerably. Some institutions have not proactively modified the model to keep up with this changing population. We are starting to see that catch up with the times. There is rarely a day I do not see an article in the *The Chronicle* or *Inside Higher Education* about either an institution closing completely, or on a plan to fill a large budget deficit.

Those articles were a rarity two decades ago. As a result, in the opinion of this long-time VPEM, enrollment management today is a complex operation, targeting multiple prospective populations, with a net revenue end goal. This is evident in our professional development conferences. Sessions used to be about gadgets to reach the eighteen-year-old. Today, more common are sessions about microcredentials needed for survival.

The profession is constantly changing because the world constantly changes. I believe technology and social media bring us more differing characteristics from generation to generation than we used to see. While I wasn't in the profession in 1984, I speculate the profession then differed from what it was in 2004. But I doubt the differences were as vast as between 2004 and 2024. For example, I am certain high school visits, college fairs, and prospects cards were the name of the game in both 1984 and 2004. That isn't the case today. In this commentary, I only covered a sampling of the profession's changes; the list is much longer. For example, I didn't even tackle international students. As our recruitment technology, social media, and artificial intelligence develop further, and, sadly, fewer institutions continue to exist, I look for 2044 to be even more vastly different from today.

About the Author

Kevin Windholz has been the Vice President for Enrollment Management at Oklahoma City University since 2012. Prior to that he held enrollment management roles at Washburn University and Saint Louis University. Since 2023 he has also served as an Independent Contractor Enrollment Consultant for enrollmentFUEL. He has been a regular presenter at the annual AACRAO SEM conferences and a workshop facilitator for Academic Impressions. His work has been published in AACRAO's *SEM Quarterly* and *Octane*. He earned a Bachelor of Arts from Fort Hays State University and a Master of Liberal Studies from Washburn University.

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