



# COLLEGE *and* UNIVERSITY

Volume 93 Issue Nº 3

Educating the Modern Higher Education Administration Professional

Variance and Inter-Rater  
Reliability in Holistic  
Admissions Review

Small-Town Values:  
How Understanding the Values  
of Rural Students Can Influence  
Recruitment Strategies

Authentic Engagement:  
Deepening Students' Experience In  
Short-Term Study Abroad Programs

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Proximity: The Slow Game  
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What Does Retention  
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Anything? Stop Using the  
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Ask the Registrar!

Transfers: It's All  
about Teamwork

### Book Reviews

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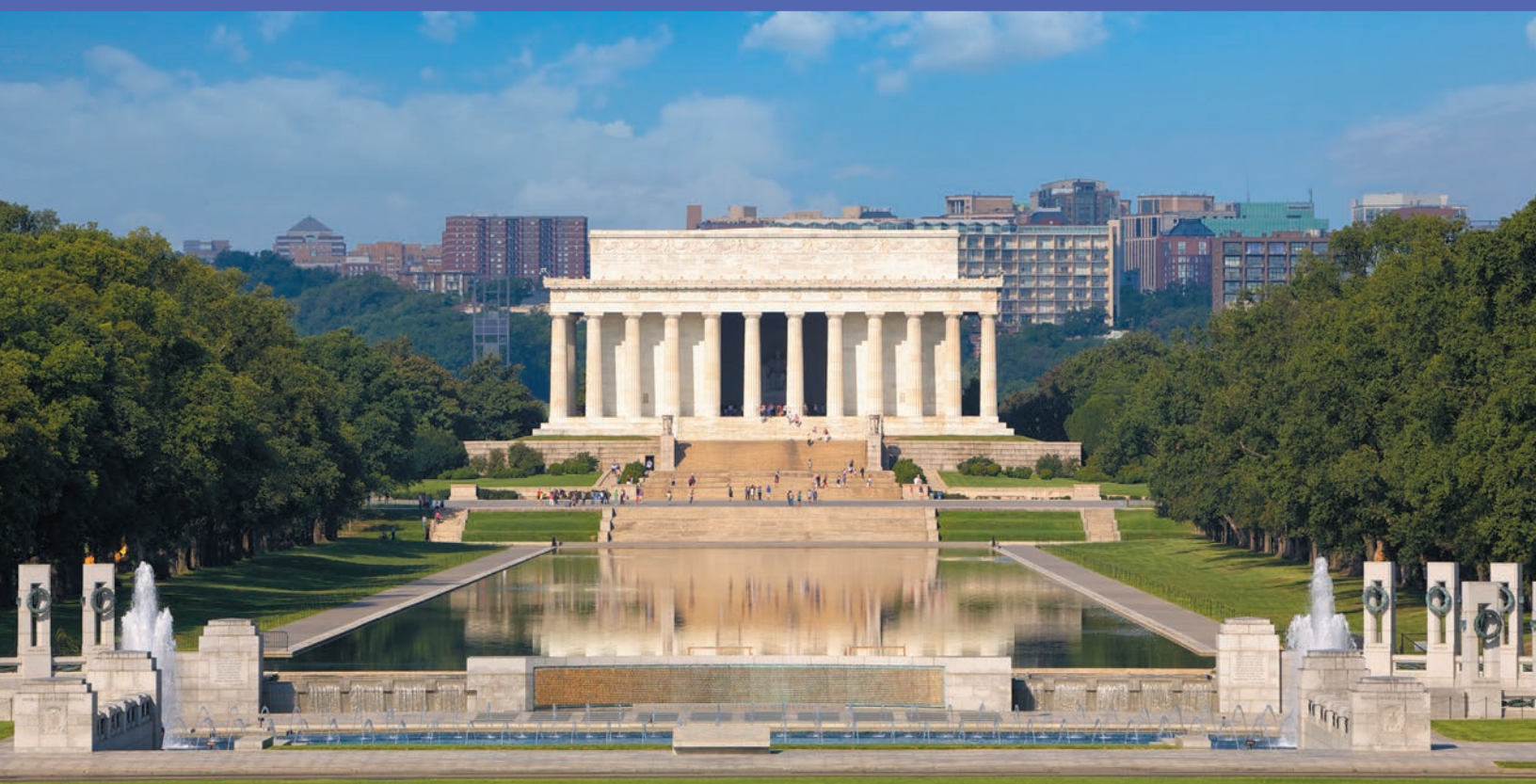
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Shareholder Value and  
Demographics and the  
Demand for Higher Education

Paying the Price: College  
Costs, Financial Aid,  
and the Betrayal of the  
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Are You Smart Enough?  
How Colleges' Obsession  
with Smartness  
Shortchanges Students

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# Editor's Note

*Jeff von Munkwitz-Smith, Ph.D.*  
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I note with sadness the passing of Dr. Clifford Adelman on May 3rd. Cliff was a scholar of higher education, an advocate for students, a creative and provocative thinker, and an engaging debater. One might not always have agreed with him—though most often one did—but he was always thought-provoking and insightful. He served for many years as a senior associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy and previously as a senior research analyst for the U.S. Department of Education. He will be missed.

This edition of C&U includes three feature articles. In “Variance and Inter-rater Reliability in Holistic Admissions Review,” Blaire Moody Rideout reports on the findings of an analysis of 15,000 reader reviews of undergraduate admissions applications.

In “Authentic Engagement: Deepening the Experience in Short-term Study Abroad Programs,” Rodney Parks, Jesse Parrish, and Claudia Rodriguez report on the analysis of a short-term intercultural study abroad experience and make recommendations for enhancing those experiences.

In “Small Town Values: How Understanding the Values of Rural Students can Influence Recruitment Strategies,” Ashley Stone poses two research questions: “(1) How do recent high school graduates who grow up in a rural context and intend to leave their communities to pursue higher education form their values system? [and] (2) What values are common among recent high

school graduates who choose to leave their rural communities to pursue higher education?”

There are two commentaries, “Proximity: The Slow Game of Relationship Building” by Joshua Reinhold and “What Does Retention Rate Have to Do With Anything? Stop Using the Phrase ‘Safety School’” by Heidi Simon.

There are also two Campus Viewpoint articles, “Want to Expand Global Education Programs? Ask the Registrar!” by Rodney Parks, Jesse Parrish, and Alexander Taylor and “Transfers: It’s All About Teamwork” by Katie Schwienteck.

This issue also contains a book review by Stephen J. Handel of *Class Warfare: Class, Race, and College Admissions in Top-Tier Secondary Schools* by Heather Jenkins, Kristin Cipollone, and Lois Weis as well as one by Kimberley Buster Williams of *Economics 101: The Caterpillar Way and Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*. It also contains two reviews by Matthew Fifolt, of *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream* by Sara Goldrick-Raab, and *Are You Smart Enough? How Colleges’ Obsession with Smartness Shortchanges Students* by Alexander Astin.

Dr. Adelman was an advocate for, and practitioner of, evidence-based decision making. I hope you will consider submitting articles with your own examples.

Enjoy your summer!



# Variance and Inter-Rater Reliability in Holistic Admissions Review

This study examined a holistic admissions review process at one institution to determine whether variance occurred and, if so, possible explanations for it. The study analyzed reader reviews for approximately 15,000 individual undergraduate admission reviews over three years. The primary method was focused on the variance and inter-rater reliability of the

application reviews. Findings revealed that subjective measures of performance review, and in this case holistic admissions review, may not be susceptible to high levels of variability with 97 percent of reader reviews showing agreement for this study. Overall, just 3 percent of the subjective application reviews showed variability. Implications and recommendations for future research and professional practice are provided.

**H**igher education professionals are becoming more dynamic in how they assess college admission applications. In 2015, the American Council on Education (ACE) surveyed undergraduate admission and enrollment management leaders at 338 four-year institutions to understand holistic admissions review (Espinosa, Gaertner and Orfield 2015). The survey revealed that 92 percent of selective institutions reported utilizing a holistic admissions review process (Espinosa, Gaertner and Orfield 2015). Instead of relying on the typical criteria of high school grade point average (GPA) and standardized test scores as the ultimate factors in admission decisions, enrollment management professionals seek a more holistic picture of each applicant—one that includes personal and social dimensions (Sandlin 2008, Spencer 2008). These can include socioeconomic status; education levels of parents, grandparents, and siblings; languages spoken at home; single-parent households; family responsibilities (e.g., taking care of siblings or a child); unique life experiences; intercultural experiences; extracurricular activity and leadership; and state poverty indicators (e.g., free and reduced-price lunch) (Epperson 2011, Spencer 2008). The use of a wide variety of success and demographic factors has been called “holistic admissions review.” Yet little research has been conducted

on the reliability of holistic admissions (which is inherently subjective) as an assessment or review tool.

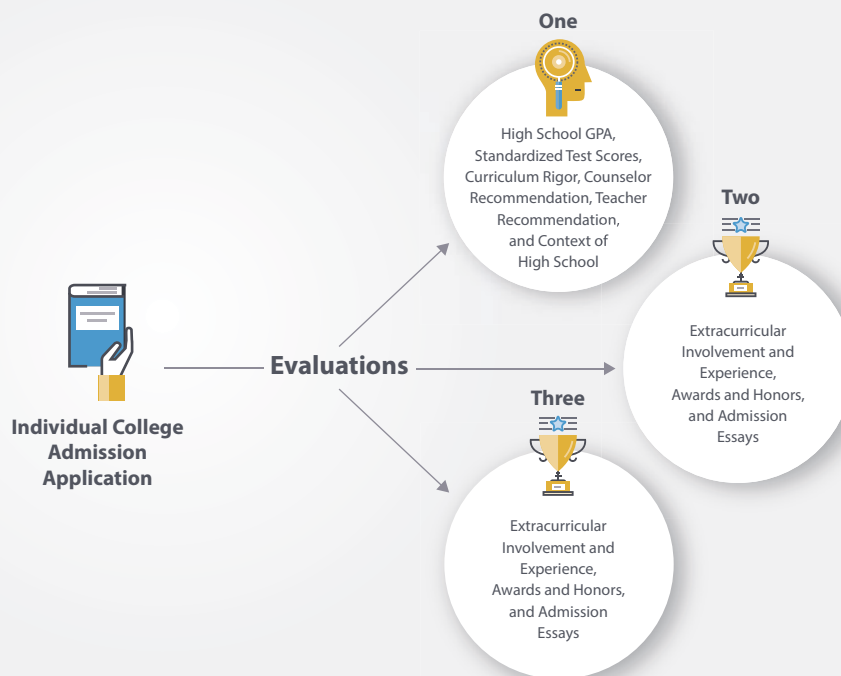
The purpose of this study was to examine a holistic admissions review process at one institution to better understand the process and criteria for review, as well as research potential variance among application readers within a holistic admissions review process. The final review codes for approximately 15,000 reviews of individual undergraduate admission applications were analyzed, with a focus on inter-rater reliability.

## Definitions and Key Terms

The concept of holistic admissions review can be credited to the *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003) and *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) court cases, in which the U.S. Supreme Court called for a “highly individualized, holistic review of each applicant’s file” (*Grutter v. Bollinger* 2003, 539 U.S. 306, 312). Subsequently, institutions of higher education began to adopt this approach: 72 percent of selective institutions increased their use of holistic application review after discontinuing their race-conscious admissions process (Espinosa *et al.* 2015). Researchers have used data from the 2015 ACE survey of selective admissions professionals to report the perceived effectiveness of holistic admissions review—notably, that 67 percent of institutions believed the process to have been effective for achieving their admissions and enrollment goals (Espinosa *et al.* 2015).

The courts may have given the admissions profession the legal parameters and reasoning for holistic admissions review, but it has no single definition; the practical

Figure 1.  
Application  
Evaluation  
Flow Chart



guidelines for implementing holistic review are unique to each institution. In some practical interpretations of a holistic admissions review process, not one variable or characteristic will outweigh another (Spencer 2008). In other interpretations, variables beyond cognitive areas of assessment are considered in addition to cognitive factors (*e.g.*, grade point average and test scores) (Sandlin 2008). In sum, the goal of holistic admissions review is to consider multiple factors when reviewing candidates' applications for admission and how they align with institutional goals and values to shape enrollment.

Researchers study inter-rater reliability to understand whether raters apply their assessment or data collection methods in a consistent way (Gwet 2008). According to Gwet (2008), "Inter-rater reliability quantifies the closeness of scores assigned by a pool of raters to the same study participants. The closer the scores, the higher the reliability of the data collection method" (29). For the current study, inter-rater reliability was used to assess the closeness of evaluations (residual variance) and consistency of evaluations (main rater effects) for readers in a holistic admissions review process. Inter-rater reliability is an important assessment tool to understand, especially in the context of a subjective evaluation tool such as holistic admissions review.

## Methodology and Dataset

The study was grounded in the philosophical paradigm of pragmatism and included a quantitative analysis of the variance within admission reader decisions. Research suggests that the majority of selective institutions in the United States utilize a holistic admissions review process (Espinosa, Gaertner and Orfield 2015). The sample site, chosen due to its selectivity, was an academic program within a large, highly selective, public research-intensive university in the Midwest. These were preexisting data obtained from a smaller nationally selective undergraduate academic program within the overall university.

The data reflected three years of application files totaling approximately 15,000 independent admission reviews conducted by 28 different application readers. Each applicant file included two independent reviews of the applicant's admission essays, awards and honors, and extracurricular experience, to include high school, community, or national organizations, community service, and work experience. The reviews were unstructured, as there was no systematic way in which each reader was required to review an application. (See Figure 1.)





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Evaluation one was not analyzed because it did not have a duplicate review (as did evaluations two and three). Evaluation one took into consideration the more objective components of the application—those that measured cognitive outcomes—*e.g.*, the applicant’s high school GPA, transcript, and standardized test scores. Only evaluations two and three were analyzed. Evaluations two and three had an identical review structure and considered the application’s subjective components, which measured behaviors and experiences, *e.g.*, an applicant’s extracurricular experiences, awards and honors, and admission essays. Because evaluations two and three were independent reviews repeated by different readers, variance and inter-rater reliability were assessed. These three areas—admission essays, awards and honors, and extracurricular experience—were the subjective evaluative criteria studied by the researcher.

The variance threshold utilized in the study was the current variance threshold utilized by the institution studied. The practice followed that when two reader evaluations of one application were off by more than one whole point, this range of variance was considered to be significant and problematic. The whole point range difference signaled an admission staff member to evaluate the reader reviews according to the rubric. The 1.0 threshold of variance was applied to the thirteen possible numeric codes in the dataset, which included various decimal points. There was some sensitivity to a standard deviation calculation, but the threshold for variance was not based on a true standard deviation calculation because there was no mean score within admission reviews. The concern was not for a deviation from the entire group of application reviews but for a deviation within the two reviews per application that were to align with the qualitative categories and codes of the admissions rubric.

## Limitations

It is important to acknowledge what information was not made available. Due to university policy restrictions, legal restrictions, and proprietary protections, the official description of the admission review rubric and rating system was not available. In addition, the actual admission application was not available, to include the essay questions the readers reviewed and the format for how extracurricular activities and awards were submit-

ted within the application by each applicant. Furthermore, information on reader background characteristics and experiences, including the training and supervision they received as application readers, was not available. The study was based strictly on pre-existing data from the university database, including the reader review code and written evaluation for each application.

## Findings of Variability

The total overall agreement of reader review codes in the dataset, utilizing the variance threshold of more than one whole point, was 97 percent. This represented 6,900 applicant files that had reader review codes that met this threshold of agreement that was used in practice by the institution being studied. There were 208 applications (3 percent of applications within the dataset) that had review codes that showed significant variance or disagreement.

The demographics and yearly trends of the applications for which reader review codes agreed or disagreed are presented in Table 1 (on page 7). (The characteristics that showed differences between the two groups of variability and no variability are highlighted.) The year 2014 showed the most reader review variability—49 percent of the 208 applications being reviewed. However, this could also be due to the fact that the 2014 application volume was greater than in either 2013 or 2015. When considering applicants’ gender and comparing the variability and no variability groups, females accounted for 35 percent of the population with no variability in reader review codes and 41 percent of the population with variability in reader review codes—a six percentage-point difference. Similarly, the male demographic showed a seven percentage-point change, from 66 percent of the population with no variability in reader review codes to 59 percent of the population with variability in reader review codes. Thus, females had greater representation in the variability group than in the no variability group. This trend was also evident with regard to applicants’ race, with Asian/Pacific Islander applicants having a higher representation in the variability group of reader review codes over the no variability group of reader review codes (28 percent and 23 percent, respectively). White applicants experienced a seven percentage-point difference, from 56 percent of the no variability group to 49 percent of the variability group for all reader review codes analyzed.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Applicants with Variability and No Variability\*

Characteristic	Variability <sup>1</sup>		No Variability <sup>2</sup>	
	n	% <sup>3</sup>	n	% <sup>3</sup>
<b>Year</b>				
2013	48	23	1,730	25
<b>2014</b>	101	<b>49</b>	2,775	<b>40</b>
2015	59	28	2,395	35
<b>Gender<sup>3</sup></b>				
<b>Female</b>	85	<b>41</b>	2,448	<b>35</b>
<b>Male</b>	123	<b>59</b>	4,452	<b>66</b>
<b>Race</b>				
<b>Asian/Pacific Islander</b>	59	<b>28</b>	1,619	<b>23</b>
Black	10	5	184	3
Hispanic	11	5	422	6
Native American	1	<1	8	<1
<b>White (Non-Hispanic)</b>	101	<b>49</b>	3,888	<b>56</b>
Two or More	7	3	211	3
Not Indicated	19	9	568	8
<b>Parental Education</b>				
Elementary	2	<1	24	<1
Less Than High School	0	0	27	<1
High School Diploma	11	5	177	3
Some College	0	0	71	1
Associate Degree	6	3	67	1
Bachelor's Degree	54	26	1,794	26
Master's Degree	77	37	2,535	37
<b>Professional Doctorate</b>	34	<b>16</b>	1,504	<b>22</b>
Doctorate	17	8	511	7
Not indicated	7	3	190	3
<b>Residency</b>				
In State	56	27	1,780	26
<b>Out of State</b>	121	<b>58</b>	4,688	<b>68</b>
International	31	<b>15</b>	432	<b>6</b>
<b>Socioeconomic Status (Annually)</b>				
<\$25K	7	3	134	2
\$25–50K	10	5	236	3
\$50–75K	10	5	275	4
\$75–100K	12	6	398	6
\$100–150K	26	13	839	12
\$150–200K	25	12	700	10
<b>&gt;\$200K</b>	61	<b>29</b>	2,518	<b>36</b>
Not Indicated	57	27	1,800	26

<sup>1</sup> n=208

<sup>2</sup> n=6,900

<sup>3</sup> To stay consistent with the way in which the university reported demographics, the term "gender" is utilized to describe sex even though female and male are not gender terms and exclude representation of some transgender applicants.

\* Percentage totals may not add to 100 due to rounding. Characteristics with significant differences between groups of variability and no variability are highlighted.

For the characteristic of parental education, the only meaningful difference in variability of reader review codes was for applicants whose parents had a professional doctorate: This group represented 22 percent of the population in the no variability group and 16 percent of the population in the variability group for all reader review codes analyzed. A similar difference was evident in the demographic characteristic of socioeconomic status, with 36 percent of reader review codes in the no variability group being represented by applicants who had an annual household income greater than \$200,000 and 29 percent of reader review codes in the variability group. However, one of the most significant differences in demographic characteristics for reader review codes in the variability and no variability group was in the residency category: For out-of-state applications, percentages represented 68 percent of the population in the no variability group and 58 percent of the population in the variability group. International applicants showed the most significant difference overall: There were disproportionately more international applicants in the variance group (15 percent) than in

the no variance group (6 percent) for all reader review codes analyzed.

For the 208 applications that comprised the variability group of reader review codes, the subsection review codes for each application were also examined; these included extracurricular activity and awards, essay one, essay two, and essay three. The essay three subsection review codes had the highest percentage of variance—55 percent—with 115 of the 208 applications showing disagreement. The next highest subsection review codes were for essay two (31 percent) and essay one (27 percent). Reader review codes for extracurricular activity and awards had the lowest occurrence of disagreement, at 19 percent, or 39 of 208 cases. (See Table 2, on page 9, for the demographic characteristics of applicants with reader review code subsection variability.)

For the subsection reader review codes of extracurricular activity and awards, the year with the greatest variability was 2013, comprising 49 percent of applications. For all three years of the dataset, the gender group with the higher extracurricular and award reader review code variability was female, at 51 percent—ap-

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Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Applicants with Subsection Variability\*

Characteristic	Extracurricular and Awards <sup>1</sup>		Essay 1 <sup>2</sup>		Essay 2 <sup>3</sup>		Essay 3 <sup>4</sup>	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Year</b>								
2013	19	49	13	23	18	28	17	15
2014	14	36	26	46	31	48	61	53
2015	6	15	17	30	16	25	37	32
<b>Gender<sup>5</sup></b>								
Female	20	51	21	38	28	43	39	34
Male	19	49	35	63	37	57	76	66
<b>Race</b>								
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	13	21	38	22	34	33	29
Black	3	8	2	4	2	3	6	5
Hispanic	0	0	4	7	1	2	6	5
Native American	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
White (Non-Hispanic)	25	64	21	38	29	45	55	48
Two or More	1	3	1	2	3	5	5	4
Not Indicated	5	13	7	13	8	12	9	8
<b>Parental Education</b>								
Elementary	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	2
Less Than High School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
High School Diploma	1	3	3	5	6	9	6	5
Some College	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Associate Degree	0	0	2	4	2	3	4	3
Bachelor's Degree	14	36	14	25	20	31	27	23
Master's Degree	11	28	24	43	19	29	42	37
Professional Doctorate	10	26	8	14	11	17	22	19
Doctorate	1	3	5	9	5	8	10	9
Not Indicated	2	5	0	0	1	2	2	2
<b>Residency</b>								
In State	9	23	10	18	13	20	31	27
Out of State	26	67	37	66	40	62	68	59
International	4	10	9	16	12	18	16	14
<b>Socioeconomic Status (Annually)</b>								
<\$25K	1	3	1	2	1	2	5	4
\$25–50K	2	5	0	0	5	8	7	6
\$50–75K	3	8	1	2	1	2	3	3
\$75–100K	0	0	4	7	5	8	8	7
\$100–150K	2	5	2	4	6	9	15	13
\$150–200K	5	13	8	14	10	15	15	13
>\$200K	12	31	18	32	19	29	30	26
Not Indicated	14	36	26	46	18	28	32	28

<sup>1</sup> n = 39

<sup>2</sup> n = 56

<sup>3</sup> n = 65

<sup>4</sup> n = 115

<sup>5</sup> To stay consistent with the way in which the university reported demographics, the term "gender" is utilized to describe sex even though female and male are not gender terms and exclude representation of some transgender applicants.

\* Percentage totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

proximately 15 percentage points greater than for the demographics of the entire dataset. The racial differences for extracurricular and award reader review code variability revealed greater variability for black and white applicants and less for Asian/Pacific Islanders compared to the overall dataset. For the extracurricular activity and awards subsection reader review codes, the demographics percentages for parental education, residency, and socioeconomic status were similar to those for the overall dataset.

The essay subsection reader review codes showed widely varying patterns of variability. Compared to the overall dataset, there was no variability by gender in reader review codes for essays one and three. However, essay two reader review codes showed that those for female applicants had a higher proportion of variability, at 43 percent. Essay two reader review codes also revealed a higher variability—of 9 percent—for applicants whose parental education category was a high school diploma and a lower variability—by eight percentage points, at 29 percent—for the master’s degree category. Unlike the racial demographics within the extracurricular activity and awards subsection review codes, all three essay reviews showed greater variability for Asian/Pacific Islander applicants and lesser variability for white applicants compared to the overall dataset. International applicants also had double or more of their percentage population for all three essay reader review codes compared to the overall dataset. International students accounted for 6 percent of the population with no variability in reader review codes and 15 percent of the population with variability in reader review codes, with variability percentages of 16 percent for essay one, 18 percent for essay two, and 14 percent for essay three.

This pattern of differing percentages for the essay subsection reader review code variability and overall dataset demographics was also present in the category of socioeconomic status. Applicants whose annual family income was in the \$25,000 to \$50,000 category had zero variability in essay one reader review codes but 8 percent variability for essay two reader review codes and 6 percent for essay three reader review codes—greater than the 3 percent in the overall dataset of the no variability group for reader review codes. Likewise, the category of annual family income of \$200,000 or more had lower variability in essay three reader review codes. The

greatest difference was for applicants in the socio-economic status “not indicated” category: Data revealed that 46 percent of this population represented the variability in essay one reader review codes—20 percentage points greater than the “not indicated” percentage in the overall dataset. The year 2014 had the greatest variability in reader review codes for all three essays.

## Inter-Rater Reliability

To understand the inter-rater reliability of the reader reviews, the residual variance or closeness of review codes was evaluated. Of the 7,108 applications analyzed, 1,639 applications, or 23 percent of the dataset, were given exactly the same final review code by both readers. Eighty-one percent of applications in the dataset (5,799 of the 7,108 applications) had final review codes within 0.5 of each other. For the 208 applications that had final review codes that varied, 42 applications (20 percent) had final review codes that were 1.5 or more points than the other. Only four applications of the 208 had an even greater threshold (2.0 or greater).

The variability within the evaluations of each rater—main rater effects—was also studied. To answer the question of whether any particular reader’s scores consistently varied from the others’, individual reader variance was calculated for reader review codes. The overall 208 final review codes that varied and each individual subsection review code totaled 966 times when variance occurred. (*See* Table 3, on page 11, for the total occurrences of variance, represented for each reader in column n.) The data revealed that of the 28 readers, six had variance percentages of 10 percent or greater. Thus, consistency of reader review codes was present for 79 percent of the reader population.

Review of the data of the six readers who had the greatest variance in their review codes revealed differing trends. (*See* Table 4, on page 12, for the subsection review codes for each of these six readers.) Only one reader demonstrated high variance (20 percent or more) in all subsection review codes. One reader demonstrated low variance (less than 10 percent) in all subsection review codes. The greatest percentage of variance—45 percent—was for essay one by reader number 19. The subsection with the greatest amount of variance was essay three, with three readers showing variance percentages greater than 20 percent.

**Table 3. Reader Variability\***

Reader	n	Total Apps.	%
1	11	181	6
2	93	908	10
3	10	231	4
4	103	1,660	6
5	54	368	15
6	117	1,193	10
7	18	192	9
8	16	499	3
9	32	262	12
10	20	493	4
11	3	187	2
12	10	296	3
13	9	198	5
14	18	235	8
15	22	255	9
16	9	239	4
17	3	314	1
18	10	289	3
19	140	882	16
20	22	1,302	2
21	21	273	8
22	35	695	5
23	58	518	11
24	54	1,383	4
25	10	285	4
26	28	360	8
27	31	401	8
28	9	114	8

\* Percentages are calculated according to the total number of applications completed by each reader and thus do not sum to 100.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study—notably, that 97 percent of application reader reviews showed agreement—suggest that subjective measures of performance review—in this case, holistic admissions review—may not be susceptible to high levels of variability. Of the 7,108 applications analyzed, 5,799 (81 percent) had final review codes within 0.5 points of each other. Accounting for main rater effects within the 208 applications that had varying codes, 79 percent of the reader population demonstrated consistency in their reviews. Only six of the 28 readers had

variance percentages greater than 10 percent when compared to the mean of the reader group as a whole.

The findings revealed notable differences in variability percentages for all demographic categories studied. Overall, females represented 36 percent of the applicant pool being studied but 41 percent of the population with variability. In addition, females had the highest variability percentage (51 percent) within the extracurricular experience, awards, and honors subsection review—almost 15 percentage points more than for the overall female demographics of the entire dataset. Thus, when comparing variability and no variability groups, females had a higher percent increase.

With regard to race, the Asian/Pacific Islander group had a higher representation in the variability group (28 percent) than in the no variability group (23 percent). Of the 208 applications with variance, 59 were submitted by students who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander; within this group, 22 applicants (37 percent) were non-resident international students. Therefore, an applicant’s non-resident or international student status also contributed to variability. This was even more apparent when residency alone was considered. International students showed the greatest difference overall with regard to residency, with 6 percent in the no variability group and 15 percent in the variability group.

For the subsection review, reader reviews of essays showed more variance than reader reviews of extracurricular activities. The subsection with the greatest amount of variance was essay three, with regard to which 55 percent (115) of the 208 applications had reader disagreement. For the extracurricular experience, awards, and honors section, only 19 percent (39) of the 208 applications showed reader disagreement. With regard to reader scores for essay three, applicants whose annual parental income was in the \$25,000 to \$50,000 range had almost triple the amount of variability—8 percent for essay two—and almost double the amount of variability in essay three—6 percent—compared to the overall dataset (3 percent). But there was zero variability for this group in scores for essay one. This finding was interesting considering that essay three was applicants’ descriptions of their intended majors of choice and future academic goals. Furthermore, applicants whose annual parental income was greater than \$200,000 had lower variability in scores of essay three—26 percent versus 36 percent of the population with no variability.

Table 4. Subsection Frequency for Readers with the Greatest Variability in Scores

Reader	Final <sup>1</sup>		Extracurricular and Awards <sup>2</sup>		Essay 1 <sup>3</sup>		Essay 2 <sup>4</sup>		Essay 3 <sup>5</sup>	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
2	40	19	3	8	10	18	11	17	29	25
5	21	10	12	31	2	4	7	11	12	10
6	51	25	10	26	16	29	16	25	24	21
9	12	6	1	3	4	7	5	8	10	9
19	54	26	3	8	25	45	22	34	36	31
23	26	13	6	15	6	11	3	5	17	15

<sup>1</sup> n=208; <sup>2</sup> n=39; <sup>3</sup> n=56; <sup>4</sup> n=65; <sup>5</sup> n=115

## Implications

Future research should focus on the people reading admission applications. The findings of the current research suggest that overall variance was more prevalent in reader essay reviews and thus could be attributed to reader factors such as interpretation and possible bias. Research areas to consider could center on readers' years of experience, educational background, training, and job turnover. Furthermore, characteristics that readers assess of applicants—such as socioeconomic status, parental education, race, gender, and undergraduate or high school student experience—may also yield interesting results when applied to reader research individually and as a group. The practical aspects of reader assignments should also be considered. Thus, research questions could include: Were readers assigned applications on the basis of their ability as readers? Were readers assigned applications differently based on their experience with specific application content? Did some readers have a higher volume of work than others? If so, how was this work distributed? The answers to such research questions could be critical to understanding overall reader assessments.

With regard to implications for professional practice, current findings suggest that application readers need more consistent training and supervision that focuses on systematization and how to objectively review subjective application material so as to align with a consistent, calibrated rubric. This training could involve examination of one's personal bias and experiences related to subjective assessment. For this study, variance was most prevalent in the essay portions of the reader subsection reviews; the varying review content revealed

that each reader had a different opinion or even value judgment(s) of certain themes, which contributed to reader variance. Thus, training regarding reader bias (conscious or subconscious) and reflection on readers' own backgrounds should be addressed by any institution implementing a holistic review process. Bias and reflection training may focus on readers' acknowledgment of their background, with emphasis on personal characteristics or experiences that are either similar or dissimilar from those of applicants they review. Readers should be trained to acknowledge applications for which they have an affinity as well as those that challenge them from either a personal viewpoint or value stance. Hiring readers with diverse backgrounds will ensure that readers can provide a diverse perspective and alternative viewpoint relative to a diverse pool of applicants. A diversity of readers that reflects that of the applicant pool may ensure that experiences are represented appropriately and decrease the likelihood of bias against populations with which a reader is unfamiliar.

Supervision of reading staff is also important. It should include consistent checkpoints so that one reader's scores do not vary significantly from others'. To guarantee that inter-rater reliability is high and that readers do not make decisions according to personal bias, supervisors should provide a framework such that readers with dramatically different backgrounds and viewpoints nevertheless come to similar conclusions in their reviews of the same application. In this study, the need for supervision became apparent when readers reviewed differently the applications of individuals who disclosed personal illnesses or negative traits. This has practical implications for reader supervision as it re-



lates not only to inter-rater reliability but also to federal guidelines with which universities must comply (e.g., the Americans with Disabilities Act for applicants who disclose certain disabilities or health conditions). Supervisors of application readers should review content and recommendations weekly during busy review periods and should also hold regular meetings and training sessions throughout the review cycle in order to identify outliers and ensure consistency of reviews.

Finally, offices that conduct holistic admission review should require more systematic and structured reviews by application readers so as to decrease variance in reviewer content, which drives final admission decisions. For the current study, reviews were unstructured, leading to variance for application reviews that were missing information or differing in description and length.

This variance was especially apparent when one reader “missed” a piece of information that the other reader deemed to be of crucial importance. Similarly, when reviews of extracurricular experience differed, it was due to the way in which readers evaluated and described the experience in terms of longevity and commitment (which seem to be more objective measures). Providing readers with a structure to guide their review may decrease variance resulting from the length or description of the reader’s rationale. In addition, providing a systematic way in which to read and review both a section of the application and the overall application may result in less variance. These simple changes to the way in which admissions professionals implement and conduct a holistic admissions review process could greatly increase the reliability of reader reviews and lessen variability.

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### About the Author

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# Small-Town Values: How Understanding the Values of Rural Students Can Influence Recruitment Strategies

This exploratory case study examined how college-bound seniors from a rural community formed their personal system of values and how those values informed choices concerning higher education. Furthermore, this article considers implications for outreach and recruitments strategies in rural communities as well as support once rural students arrive on campus.

**D**espite having the second-highest high school graduation rates among the different locales recognized by the National Center for Educational Statistics ([NCES] 2013), students from rural communities enroll in higher education at substantially lower rates than do their urban and suburban counterparts (NCES 2015). Still, the number of rural students matriculating at colleges and universities is increasing, and stakeholders in higher education are beginning to see the potential for this unique population to meet increasing enrollment goals (Greater Texas Foundation 2015, NCES 2015, Chen *et al.* 2014). At the same time, little research focuses on rural students in higher education to guide future efforts to recruit and retain them.

Understanding the values of rural students who leave their communities to pursue postsecondary degrees, how those values are formed, and how they inform students' higher education choices could serve as a launching point for implementing more effective outreach efforts in rural areas. The current exploratory multiple-case study sought to fill this gap in the literature by posing the following research questions: (1) How do recent high school graduates who grow up in a rural context and intend to leave their communities to pursue higher education form their values system? (2) What values are common among recent high school

graduates who choose to leave their rural communities to pursue higher education?

## Literature Review

Although little research focuses on students from rural communities who enter higher education, there is a body of literature that examines the educational aspirations of rural K–12 students as well as broader work on values within rural communities. In fact, research reveals that values often espoused in rural communities may play a role in the lagging number of rural students who matriculate in higher education. This is particularly true regarding the value placed on education.

Many people in rural communities have a strong commitment to the people and physical space of their local community (Atkin 2000, 2003; Bryan and Simmons 2009; Hektner 1995; Wright 2012). This may help explain why some people in rural communities believe that education has limited value unless it contributes directly to skills that are useful within the local economy (Atkin 2000, 2003; Hektner 1995; Morris 2012). Higher education can also be seen as contributing to out-migration from rural communities (Atkin 2000, 2003; Carr and Kefalas 2009; Petrin, Schafft and Meece 2014), making the choice to leave in order to pursue a degree difficult for rural students.

Literature that examines the aspirations of students from rural communities often focuses on the internal conflict many feel between commitment to their community and concerns about the community's economic viability (Demi, McLaughlin and Snyder 2009; Hektner

1995; Hlinka, Mobelini and Giltner 2015; Howley, Harmon and Leopold 1996; Wright, 2012). While students may feel close ties to their hometowns (Atkin 2003; Bryan and Simmons 2009; Hektner 1995; Wright 2012), they can also experience concerns that their communities will not be able to support their career aspirations (Demi, McLaughlin and Snyder 2009; Hektner 1995; Hlinka 2015; Howley *et al.*, 1996). These tensions can arise as early as seventh grade (Demi, McLaughlin and Snyder 2009).

Rural economies are often based on resources such as agriculture, mining, or timber and feature jobs that value manual labor over academic pursuits and that can cause community members to value education only when it contributes to specific skills (Brown *et al.* 2009; Donehower, Hogg and Schell 2011; Morris 2012). Yet the exploitation of resources in rural communities and the challenges from corporate agribusiness, coupled with issues of out-migration, continue to threaten such economies (Carr and Kefalas 2009; Donehower, Hogg and Schell 2011). Job opportunities that are available to students directly out of high school typically offer little room for financial advancement and are often at high risk for downsizing (Carr and Kefalas 2009). These tensions are the context within which rural students are forming their values and making choices concerning higher education.

## Critical Paradigm

Because of the limited research on rural students in higher education, this was an exploratory multiple-case study and therefore was not grounded in a specific theoretical framework. Nevertheless, it was rooted in a critical paradigm that informed both the data collection and analysis. A critical paradigm seeks to understand the social norms that impact people's lives (Hays and Singh 2012) and focuses on the experiences of marginalized people (Mertens 2010). Atkin (2003) argues that rural people "liv[e] within a society dominated by an urban majority, in consequence suffering elements of social exclusion often associated with other minority groups" (507). The urban-centric nature of society is evident even in the coding system of NCES (n.d.), which defines locations on the basis of their proximity to urbanized areas and urban clusters.

Theories that emerge from a critical paradigm seek to initiate and advance social and potentially politi-

cal changes that will improve the lives of participants (Hays and Singh 2012). Donehower, Hogg, and Schell (2011) discuss the "need to reclaim the rural against the tide of urban bias and policies that favor densely populated areas over lesser-populated ones" and "an ongoing challenge for representing the needs, concerns, and perspectives of rural people and communities" (4). This work seeks to share the stories of rural students and findings from this research in the hope of creating better support systems for these students both within their home communities and the institutions of higher education at which they are matriculating.

## Methodology

The current research utilized an exploratory case study design without a presupposed theoretical proposition (Yin 2014) to understand the values of college-bound seniors and how they formed their values system. A multiple case structure was utilized, with each individual participant representing an individual case (Hays and Singh 2012). Criterion sampling was used to select the participants (Yin 2014). Criteria for participation in the study included:

- ◆ being a recent high school graduate not yet matriculated at a four-year institution for a full semester (some students were completing courses during a shortened summer semester during their participation in the study).
- ◆ coming from a rural community,
- ◆ admitted to a four-year institution,
- ◆ intending to enroll full time at the institution, and
- ◆ intending to move away from the community upon matriculation.

Rural communities were defined according to two criteria:

- ◆ students had to self-identify their community as rural; and
- ◆ the community had to fall within the "rural" or "town" categories identified by NCES (n.d.). While the NCES coding system helped delimit the sample, beginning the process by allowing students to self-identify as rural meant the selection criteria were not based solely on an urban-centric identification system.

For the purpose of this study, the concept of values was drawn from the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*: “conceptions of the desirable, influencing selective behavior” (Sills 1968, 283). Sills (1968) distinguishes between that which is desired and that which is desirable, highlighting the importance of the social context in which values are formed. This concept is reinforced by Darity (2008), who discusses values as “a part of systems of social power, providing the ideological frame that shapes public discourse about how the social world is operating and how it should operate” (582). This conception of values was chosen for two reasons: First, it ties the concept directly to a person’s behavior. If a person truly espouses a specific value, then that value will be manifested in the person’s behavior in some way. Second, because this study specifically examines how students form their values within a rural context, the emphasis on social context is particularly appropriate.

## Data Collection

Multiple forms of evidence were gathered for each participant, including documentation, interviews, physical artifacts, and archival records. In order to better understand the context in which the students formed their values, data were also collected on the communities in which the participants lived. All students participated in two semi-structured interviews, the first focusing on what values the students identify as most important, how they came to espouse those values, and how those values manifest themselves in the students’ lives. The second interview focused on students’ past exposure to ideologies and values different from their own and excitement or concern about encountering diverse ideas and values through their college experience. Because one important aspect of the definition of values used in this study was that the value has real implications for the person’s life, students also provided documents and physical artifacts that demonstrated the ways in which their values were manifested in their daily lives. Participants brought artifacts to the interviews and submitted essays they wrote in high school and for college and scholarship applications. One participant submitted her valedictory address. Students also shared how their values were demonstrated through their posts on social media. Utilizing multiple forms of data contributed to the holistic nature of the study as well as its authenticity (Hays and Singh 2012).

## Data Analysis

Because this was an exploratory study, a “ground-up” approach, which draws from tenets of grounded theory, was used to analyze the data, and rival explanations were explored for each emerging theme to enhance credibility (Yin 2014). In addition, because of the multiple case structure, each participant’s data were analyzed as an individual case, and then a cross-case synthesis was completed. Initially, an open coding process was used to analyze each case individually, and then axial coding was used to determine whether relationships existed between the codes in the individual cases (Hays and Singh 2012). Once these two processes were completed, a cross-case analysis compared themes across all cases so common and divergent themes among the participants could be identified. Reflexive journaling throughout the process and the use of qualitative analysis software added to the trustworthiness of the study.

## Findings

Each of the seven participants came from a different rural community and represented a distinct case within the study. Diverse students and rural communities were represented. (See the table below for demographic information concerning the participants and their communities.) This diversity was critical to the study because it helped to counteract narratives that portray rural spaces as monolithic and to locate experiences common to students across a variety of rural contexts.

While students all had unique stories to share and came from an array of different rural communities, common themes emerged: family, faith, and career. The students deeply valued their family and their faith, but family and religion were also sources of other values they espoused.

For most students, the values of family and faith were closely linked, with each reinforcing the other. Also, although students valued education as an end in itself, they also saw it as a pathway to careers they were passionate about pursuing. While these values may be common among other students pursuing postsecondary degrees, it is important to examine the unique ways in which they shaped the decisions these rural students made about entering higher education and how they might help

Table 1. Participant and Community Attributes

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Population	Town Demographics	County Political Leanings
Carmen	Woman	Latina	1,800	Predominantly White	Republican
Zachary	Man	White	5,500	Heterogeneous	Republican
Carolina	Woman	Latina	7,200	Predominantly Latinx	Democratic
Hannah	Woman	White	3,600	Predominantly White	Republican
Arthur	Man	White	6,100	Predominantly White	Republican
Claire	Woman	White	2,500	Heterogeneous	Republican
Elise	Woman	Latina	5,400	Predominantly Latinx	Democratic

stakeholders identify more effective recruitment and retention strategies for students from rural communities.

### Family

Family served as participants' primary source of values. When asked who influenced the values the students espoused, some students mentioned friends and teachers; however all participants shared stories of at least one family member who played a powerful role in shaping their values. Moreover, while students noted a variety of family members who helped shape their values, matriarchs were especially influential. For example, Elise attributed her desire to see and experience the world to her mother. She explained:

*My mom got married young and had me young. She told me, "I'm happy and I wouldn't trade it for the world, but I wish I would have gone to college." She wants me to see the world and do all of the things she couldn't do, so that's definitely the reason why I want to go to college.*

While Elise admitted that she was not very close to her extended family, she and her mother shared a special bond that directly influenced her choice to leave her rural community and pursue a college degree.

Hannah attributed her choice to pursue a major that would combine her love for the outdoors and teaching to her mother and grandmother. She explained that her mother was a teacher, and this shaped her view of education; her father and grandmother cultivated her love for the outdoors. She shared:

*My grandma—she has the most beautiful garden. When I was little, I was always the one who wanted*

*to water the flowers and go play outside. She always encouraged me to do that.*

Hannah learned to value nature from her grandmother and was seeking a career that would provide her the opportunity to teach future generations about plants and other wildlife.

Carolina and Zachary both shared extensively about their grandmothers' impact on their lives. Zachary told the story of losing his grandmother to cancer and how he sought to make her proud by serving and making a difference in their community. He wrote:

*The mindset of living up to my grandmother's expectations has led me to be a better person and more helpful in the community. I honestly believe I am on the right track being the best person I can be thanks to my grandmother.*

He watched his grandmother serve others in their community for years and felt it was important for him to carry on her legacy by continuing that service.

Carolina spoke of the many trials her grandmother had to overcome in order to provide and care for her family after immigrating to the United States. It is easy to see how her grandmother's legacy will continue through Carolina as she pursues her degree in order to provide for her family. Carolina's story highlights how family was the predominant source of many students' values; often, students' deep value of family influenced their decision to pursue higher education. For example, Carolina also realized that her choice to go to college set a good example for her younger siblings. She said:

*Because I'm the oldest, [my siblings] look up to me: "Carolina's doing this," "Carolina's doing that," "Well, I can do it too!" I didn't realize I was being a huge influence to my younger siblings.*

Carolina also saw a college degree as a way to gain financial stability and give back to her family. Overall, students saw higher education as a way to set an example, make their families proud, and continue the legacy of hard work set by their parents and grandparents.

## Faith

Most of the students spoke explicitly about their faith—specifically, Christianity—as a source of their values. This manifested in different ways for different students. All students were asked to bring in artifacts that represented their values; Carolina and Arthur's artifacts were direct representations of how their faith informed their values. Carolina brought to the first interview a decorative cross her aunt had given her. She said that the cross hangs on the wall in her residence hall, and when she looks at it she thinks of her family and remembers to

pray. Carolina spoke about her faith as a relationship that moved her closer to God and deepened her connection to her family:

*One thing that I value most is family. Being away from them—hours away, and miles and miles away—whenever I feel that way, I just pray, and I feel closer to them, because I know they're praying, too.*

Her faith helps her continue to feel connected to her family despite the physical distance between them.

Arthur chose his Bible as the artifact that most represented his values. He explained:

*My parents are both really religious, so they instilled in me those values. Once I got to a certain age they were like, "You're on your own. You need to develop these values and learn for yourself why they are important." Using my Bible and reading has been a way of learning those values.*

For Arthur, the Bible is a guide for what he should and should not do; he spoke about the evidence of this value as an absence of "partying" in his social life.

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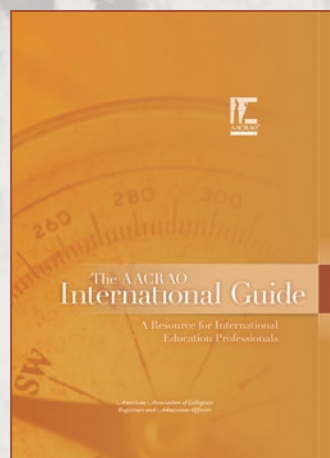
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For these students, the role of Christianity in shaping their values was an extension of their parents' influence; however, they also spoke about their process of taking ownership of their faith as they have grown up and as they are moving out on their own. Zachary, for example, talked about how his parents made him go to church when he was younger; he shared that in junior high, "I realized that that's who I was, and that's where I wanted to be—at church. I wanted to be a Christian." In fact, this impacted Zachary's choice of where to go to college. He intentionally chose a university that he believed did not have a pervasive Christian culture because he hoped he would be able to find people with more authentic beliefs, not simply people who claimed to be Christian because that was what was expected on campus. As he transitioned to college, Zachary took the initiative to get involved in a Christian organization on campus. Carolina, Arthur, and Zachary spoke about how Christianity shaped their values and influenced their transition to higher education in different ways. For Carolina her faith offered her comfort as she moved away from her family; for Arthur it offered guidance for choices in his social life; and for Zachary it directly impacted where he chose to enroll.

## Career

When asked to name their values, none of the participants said "career." Yet this theme emerged repeatedly as students talked about their choices regarding higher education and their futures. Although some students spoke about financial issues—for example, concerns about funding their current academic endeavors and their hope to provide a comfortable life for themselves and their families in the future—they seemed more focused on pursuing a fulfilling career rather than simply finding a lucrative job.

The careers students referenced were often clear expressions of the values they had already articulated. For example, Zachary's enthusiasm for sports and deep commitment to serving his community led him to say that it would "be a dream to go back to my hometown and be a coach." Carmen wanted to become a pediatric nurse—a natural extension of her love for children and her inclination to take care of others.

Students were deliberate about their career choices. Carmen, who had been salutatorian of her class, had friends who questioned why she did not want to go to medical school and become a surgeon or "something

higher in the medical field." She shared that it was not that she believed she would be unsuccessful pursuing something "higher," but that she did not believe she would be as happy. She explained:

*If you're a surgeon, you just care about the health of the patient, or health in general. You don't necessarily need to know the family, need to know their insights, insecurities of the child, or the patient in general. I feel like nurses get more involved, and I'm one of those people who wants to care for somebody, help them with their families, help them with their struggles, and ease their pain or ease their mind.*

Carmen was clear about the unique role that nurses play in the medical field, and her values informed her choice of that specific profession.

All of the participants in this study were bright and would likely be strong candidates for jobs in their communities that could offer financial stability. However, they were motivated to leave their home communities to enroll in higher education because doing so would enable them to pursue careers they believed would be fulfilling.

## Discussion

Students perceived education as a valuable tool for growth and an important step in their pursuit of careers they believed would not just provide a comfortable living but would also allow them to live out their values. This value is not exclusive to rural students, but it is important to highlight its role in rural students' choices to leave their communities to pursue higher education. Certainly it presents a view that contrasts with existing literature that focuses on rural students who view traditional educational pursuits as less valuable if they do not contribute directly to skills that could be useful within the economies of their hometowns (Atkin 2000, 2003; Hektner 1995; Morris 2012). The fact that these students valued education beyond obtaining such skills could be one of the reasons they were willing to leave their communities to pursue a college degree.

Research has revealed concerns about the economic viability of rural communities as a driving factor for students leaving to pursue work or education (Demi, McLaughlin and Snyder 2009; Hektner 1995; Hlinka 2015; Howley, Harmon and Leopold 1996). However, findings from the current study indicate that rural stu-



dents' departure for college is not simply economically motivated. While students were clear that they were seeking financial stability for their futures, the real driving force behind their pursuit of a degree was their desire to enter a career they would find fulfilling. Examining the students' values revealed how their career choices were guided by those things in life they care most deeply about, not simply how much money they might make pursuing a given career. It is important to acknowledge this aspect of economic viability that rural students are considering.

Although previous literature has highlighted the strong attachment of rural students to their communities (Atkin 2003; Bryan and Simmons 2009; Hektner 1995; Wright 2012), only one student in the current study, Zachary, acknowledged a strong desire to return home after graduation. Even as students leave their rural communities, they are not determined to return. These findings add to literature that examines the impact of higher education on out-migration in rural communities (Carr and Kefalas 2009; Petrin, Schafft and Meece 2014; Sherman and Sage 2011).

Those who are influencing rural students' choices concerning higher education are largely outside of their schools. Women in their families—mothers and grandmothers—not only helped students form their values but also inspired them to work hard and supported them as they transitioned to campus. Religion—initially connected to family—also played a distinct role in shaping the values of rural students and ultimately helping inform their choices about higher education.

## Implications

Family and religion served as the primary influences in the formation of values for the students in this study, with the matriarchs of their families playing particularly powerful roles. Stakeholders in higher education who are seeking to meet enrollment challenges through outreach to rural communities should be mindful of the role of women and churches in shaping community culture and values. To ensure that outreach efforts are effective, institutions may need to think beyond rural schools and consider how to include families and local churches in their recruitment strategies. This study's specific focus on values suggests that colleges and universities must carefully consider the unique challenges they may face related to partnerships with religious in-

stitutions that may espouse values that differ from or even conflict with their own. Where conflicting values make such partnerships inappropriate, it is still important for institutions to acknowledge and understand the role of religion in forming the values of these students and the influence it will have on students' choices concerning higher education.

Another important consideration when crafting outreach efforts for rural communities is these students' desire to live out their values through their future careers. Students may not be swayed by pitches for the lucrative jobs for which higher education could prepare them; instead, tapping into these students' values and passions and explaining how a college degree could help them pursue fulfilling lifelong careers may be more effective. These findings also may help higher education staff and administrators—including those in counseling and career services—better understand how to support rural students on campus.

## Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the regional context of this study. All of the communities represented in the study are in Texas. The significant role Christianity played in shaping the values of students could also be considered a regional influence. Scholars must acknowledge that rural students are not monolithic. Future research should build on this study by examining the influences on and values of rural students from other geographic regions.

## Conclusion

While rural student enrollments in U.S. postsecondary education continue to lag behind those of their urban and suburban counterparts, data show that the percentage of rural students entering higher education is increasing (NCES 2015). With an average high school graduation rate of 80 percent (NCES 2013), students in rural communities represent a huge opportunity for colleges and universities to meet enrollment challenges. Some stakeholders in higher education have already begun to explore this opportunity; however, the need remains for researchers to examine the experiences of rural students entering higher education as part of an effort to help guide related recruitment and outreach efforts. Understanding the context in which rural stu-

dents begin to make decisions about higher education and the values that drive those choices can help admission officers and other stakeholders create more

effective strategies for recruiting these students and supporting them once they arrive on campus.

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### About the Author

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**Ashley Stone** is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education Administration at The George Washington University. Her research examines the experiences of students who enter higher education from rural communities as well as highlighting racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity that exists across rural spaces. Prior to her transition into a faculty role, Stone worked for nearly a decade in student affairs, primarily in new student orientation and student support.

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Advancing Global Higher Education

# Authentic Engagement: Deepening Students' Experience In Short-Term Study Abroad Programs

Global learning experiences, frequently denoted as “study abroad,” are attractive mainstays of many conventional undergraduate institutions. These experiences push students out of their comfort zones, afford them an authentic environment in which to practice a foreign language, and lend context to concepts learned in the classroom. Unfortunately, global learning experiences, as they are typically offered, are the most expensive and time consuming of Kuh’s (2008) ten high-impact practices. Student participants must finance their travel and accommodations in addition to the cost of the program, and the opportunity cost is often an entire semester. However, some institutions are beginning to offer short-term global engagement experiences, either during an institutional holiday or embedded within a traditional semester-long course on campus. When planned with intention and managed with an open mind, faculty and facilitators can provide students who participate in short-term study abroad experiences with as much depth and significance of experience as their semester-long study abroad counterparts gain.

**O**f the more than 20 million students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions, a little more than 1.5 percent (313,415 students) studied abroad for credit during the 2014–15 academic year, an increase of 2.9 percent over the previous year (304,467 students) (NAFSA 2017). Global education experiences are a pivotal part of the curriculum at many public and private institutions across the United States. Study abroad and other international experiential programs provide students with opportunities to engage with other cultures and gain valuable experience interacting with the world beyond the college campus. Universities and businesses partner at a distance to provide students with proper venues for acquiring this meaningful experience. Global education offers students endless possibilities for learning about the world and reflecting on what it means to be a global citizen.

To accommodate a greater number and variety of interested students, many institutions have begun to offer short-term travel-embedded programs. These variations on the traditional study abroad concept incorporate a travel component within a semester-long on-campus course. While the length of the trip abroad

is more manageable than an immersive semester-long experience, students often have difficulty immersing themselves fully in the local culture because there is very little time to shed inhibitions and embrace the process of intercultural acquaintance. Therefore, it is important for study abroad directors and instructors to develop strategies to help students maximize the impact of their brief experiences.

Global education typically emphasizes learning about the history and traditions of a different culture, but short-term programs are uniquely challenged to achieve this objective. How can abbreviated programs add depth to the cultural experience and improve the longevity and applicability of students' learning? Some programs require students to write reflections on cultural differences, relative perspectives, and the personal significance of the experience (Batey and Lupi 2012); other programs adopt an experiential learning approach and incorporate a homestay or service-learning component (Delpach 2013). Various effective strategies exist, each aligning to some degree with institutional objectives designed to maximize experiential impact in a shortened timeframe.

The current study followed a group of students who participated in a ten-day study abroad program. The students attended a private, medium-sized, primarily white institution whose core mission involves creating global citizens who are prepared to contribute professionally to a world of diverse cultures and complex in-

tercultural challenges. Each year, hundreds of students at the institution participate in short- and long-term global education programs ranging in duration from ten days to a full year. In the 2015–16 school year, 1,959 (approximately one-third) of the nearly 6,000 undergraduate students who were enrolled at the institution participated in a study abroad experience (NAFSA 2017).

Despite this above average rate of student participation in study abroad, institutional leaders have yet to develop reliable and replicable methods for enhancing cultural immersion and maximizing both the immediate and sustained impacts of study abroad experiences. This research seeks to identify strategies that students, faculty, and staff can utilize to enrich cultural engagement in short-term global education programs. These strategies are described specifically through the lens of the embedded travel course “Wilderness and Adventure Therapy.”

The international component of this course takes place on the Inca Trail of Peru. Incan culture proliferated along the continent of South America for 1,400 years and thrived on the peaceful assimilation of an enormous indigenous population. The arrival of the Spanish in 1532 heralded the end of perhaps the largest empire of its time and the onset of an age of impressive artistic and technological innovation.

Contemporary Peru is still heavily influenced by its history. Known as the heart of the monumental Inca Empire, Peru today has a population of approximately 30 million that includes diverse indigenous cultures (Country Reports 2016). Many of Peru’s cities, traditions, and customs, as well as its food, music, language, and religion, embody a blend of Andean and Occidental cultures. Its arts and crafts, festivals, and captivating culture attract tourists from all over the world. The Institute of International Education’s (IIE) Open Doors 2015 reported that an estimated 3,481 U.S. college students studied in Peru in the 2014–15 academic year (IIE 2015).

In November 2016, a group of students traveled to Peru to complete the final component of the Wilderness and Adventure Therapy course. The course sought to introduce students to therapeutic adventure and wilderness experiences and to outdoor therapies used to rehabilitate individuals with illnesses and disabilities. The course also focused on how outdoor experiences can support physical and mental health by reducing stress and promoting personal meaning.

Completing the Inca Trail over Thanksgiving break was the final course requirement. Throughout their time on the Inca Trail, students reflected on their learning as they utilized various course components on the way to the final destination: Machu Picchu, the Lost City of the Incas. Along the Inca Trail, students interacted daily with porters, indigenous people employed by the tour company to carry the gear (tents, food, etc.) for the duration of their time on the trail.

Fall 2016 was the second time the course was offered. Students’ experiences on the two trips were drastically different. When the first group of students completed the Inca Trail in 2015, their interaction with the porters was minimal and predominantly functional. Following this trip, the course instructors sought to identify ways to encourage the development of stronger, more mutually enriching relationships. They wanted the students and porters to interact more meaningfully with one another so they might become one cohesive group rather than just passengers and porters.

This research explores the outcome of that effort. The study aims to show that students who participate in short-term study abroad programs—while at a disadvantage in terms of cultural immersion compared to those on long-term programs—nevertheless can gain a deeper cultural understanding and build authentic relationships with indigenous people. The researchers also explore the cultural perspectives of the porters through unstructured interviews examining their lived experiences and perceptions of the students who took the course.

## Methodology

The sample population comprised 20 students who participated in the Wilderness and Adventure Therapy course and 30 porters who accompanied the students and administrators along the Inca Trail. All participants were at least eighteen years of age. The Wilderness and Adventure Therapy course meets throughout the semester and culminates in a seven-day study abroad program in Peru; students spend four days and three nights hiking the Inca Trail. The trek is roughly 35 kilometers long and allows students to explore the ancient trail from the town of Ollantaytambo to the ruins of Macchu Picchu.

The group (20 students, their two instructors, and one administrator) was accompanied by a team of porters who carried supplies, food, and other necessities.

The porters were also responsible for a variety of other tasks, including cooking, cleaning, carrying equipment, setting up tents, and more. The porters all worked for the same company but represented different parts of the country and thus were able to share diverse perspectives grounded in their varying cultural experiences.

Student research assistants asked the porters questions about their jobs, culture, customs, and everyday lives. Attempting to overcome cultural barriers and establish authentic relationships, the students and porters engaged in two separate nights of discussion. On the first night, interview questions sought to deepen students' cultural understanding in the short period of time covered by an embedded travel program—a task made more difficult by the fact that only two of the students spoke Spanish. On the second night, the porters shared personal stories, described their customs, and asked students questions about their culture and customs.

Interviews were conducted in a safe, comfortable, and neutral environment near the campsites. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the intentions of the researchers prior to each interview and were given the opportunity to ask questions at any point during the process. Two Spanish-speaking students and the main trail guide, who was fluent in Spanish, English, and Quechua, mediated communication between the porters and students.

In addition to the interviews with the porters along the Inca Trail, students were asked to share their experience with the porters in their final reflection. Their responses were coded for themes to reveal how students gained deeper understandings of the culture and built authentic relationships. (Spanish quotations have been translated to English, and participants' names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.)

## Peru's History and Culture

Peru, also known as the Land of the Sun, is replete with rich history, art, and culture. It is a diverse country characterized by many races, cultures, religions, and traditions. Pre-Incan culture was present for 1,400 years on both the highlands and coast. The first known Peruvian civilization was established around 900 B.C., and several other Peruvian civilizations followed (Oxford Reference 2013).

In 1532 the Spanish conquered Peru, bringing a new language, religion, and culture. Today, Spain's 300-

year colonization is still evident in Peru's culture—particularly in its religion. Among its many traditions and customs, Peru has more than 3,000 festivals every year—most dedicated to patron saints. These festivals combine Christianity with magical religious beliefs of pre-Hispanic origin. The rich cuisine and beautiful music of Peru are the result of mixing Andean and Occidental traditions (Starn, Degregori and Kirk 2005).

Among the vast number of traditions in Peruvian culture are those related to eating, marriage, and mourning as well as magic rituals for therapeutic, purification, and other purposes. Peruvians hold great respect for the earth—*Mama Pacha* (Mother Earth)—and popular dances often celebrate her, religion, or everyday life. One example is the popular *hauilla* dance, in which steps are “light and fast to the point of frenzy,” as if the feet were smoothing out the soil after seed sowing (Baudin 1962, 213).

Peru is also ethnically diverse. Among the nation's population of nearly 31 million citizens, 45 percent are Amerindian or American Indian/indigenous peoples of the Americas, 37 percent are mixed Amerindian and white or Mestizo (mixed race), 15 percent are white, and 3 percent are black, Japanese, Chinese, or other (Country Reports 2016).

## Peruvian Porters

Peru's famed Inca Trail is a 42-kilometer stone path that passes through a variety of archaeological sites and reaches its end at the World Heritage Site of Machu Picchu (Cutler, Carmichael and Doherty 2014). Tourists wishing to hike the Inca Trail are often accompanied by a porter who carries their equipment (Bauer 2003). Porters in Peru are usually off-season farmers seeking a way to support their families and farms (Fracolli 2014). They leave their families to work tirelessly for days in exchange for little pay. During the typical four-day trek, porters hike from five to eleven miles per day.

Porters are employed by tour companies that often fail to properly care for their employees. Bauer explains that “porters' contact with often more sophisticated agencies and Western clients does not seem to translate into major benefits for them since their working conditions are known to be often very poor and their health problems considerable” (Bauer 2003, 94). On a typical day on the Inca Trail, porters wake up very early to cook breakfast, break camp, and clean up the campsite while

the tourists start on the trail. They then catch up with and hike ahead of the group in order to unpack equipment and help cook lunch at the next rest stop. Following lunch the porters pack up again and pass the group again in order to prepare dinner and set up tents for the tourists. Often, porters must wait until the tourists finish eating to eat whatever food is left. They sleep in the dining and kitchen tent; very few of them have sleeping bags or mats and sleep instead on blankets, which can be uncomfortable and cold.

Even though Peruvian porters are accustomed to the high altitude and mountainous topography of the Inca Trail, carrying the loads of two people (their own and that of a tourist) along with camping and cooking implements at an accelerated pace is grueling. Typically, the porters are poorly outfitted. Many wear flip-flops or are barefoot; they wrap their personal materials and group implements in a tarp instead of a backpack; and they often do not have hats or other accessories to shield them from the elements. These material disadvantages make their work even more difficult. Often, their exertion is undercompensated by an irregular and insufficient intake of food.

The Porter's Law in Peru, enacted in 2003, requires that each porter receive a minimum of 43 Peruvian soles—equivalent to approximately \$15 per day—for their work. The law also states that they may carry at most 20 kg (44 lbs.), including their own clothing and blankets. However, many companies circumvent these regulations by having tourists carry their own bags through checkpoints so as to reduce the measured weight of porters' loads (Zienchuk 2014).

Most porters honor and preserve their indigenous heritage and serve as tourists' primary connection to Peru's culture, customs, and traditions. Yet despite porters' importance to visitors and to the tourism industry itself, little research has been conducted on their physical and emotional health. In fact, research on porters anywhere in the world is scarce; the little research that exists is focused primarily on those in the Himalayas. This section explores what is known about porters around the world.

One challenge confronting porters worldwide is the low salary they receive for their work. Bauer (2003) investigated the working conditions of porters on the Inca Trail and sought to identify the problems they face. He interviewed 101 Inca Trail porters about their living circumstances, employment, and health. In addition to

conducting interviews, the researchers also collected data through observations and photo documentation. Bauer (2003) found that the average porter's salary was roughly \$5 to \$7 per day. Of all the porters interviewed, only one reported being able to live off that salary; most had other sources of income, such as seasonal agricultural work on local farms.

Porters receive a certain amount of money from the tour operator, but 69 of Bauer's (2003) participants reported that it was not nearly as much as it should be to be compensated for their work and to be able to live off that money. It is hard to imagine performing extreme physical labor for nine hours a day and earning only \$5, with very little food to go with it (Bauer 2003). And although many of the porters received fuel with which to cook for the tourists and themselves, only one of the 101 porters reported receiving a sufficient supply of fuel.

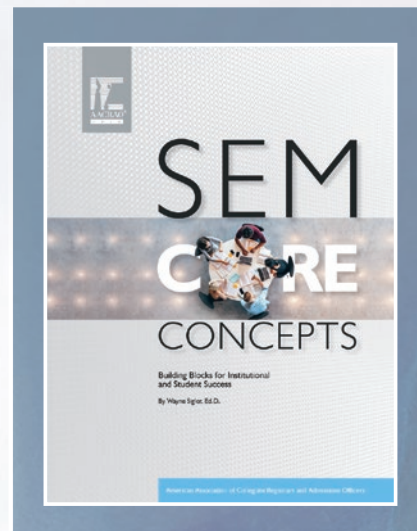
Porters are rarely supplied with adequate shelter, clothing, or other kinds of equipment that could aid them (Bauer 2003). This is a main reason that porters are so often affected by common colds, respiratory issues, and other weather-related illnesses (Bauer 2003). In addition, if any of the company's equipment supplied to tourists is lost or damaged on the trip, the porter is 100 percent liable and often must pay the company an extremely inflated price (Bauer 2003).

The work of a porter is inherently unpredictable and dangerous. Many porters take on these risks to support their family, pay for their education, or simply make a living. There is a clear and urgent need for significant improvement in the compensation and treatment of porters. Porters take many risks every day, and their hard work contributes to a large amount of the money that tourists contribute to the local and national economy. Countries and companies must take steps to better care for porters and improve both their pay and working conditions.

Cutler, Carmichael, and Doherty (2014) studied tourists' emotions as they hiked the Inca Trail over three days. Participants were asked to describe their positive and negative feelings at various points. On the first day of the journey and on the final day, participants most commonly expressed excitement. Nervousness was also felt most on the first day as participants began to grasp the difficulty of the journey and to assess their physical abilities. On the second day, tourists expressed feeling physical pain, fatigue, and exhaustion but also pride



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and accomplishment after reaching the high elevation of Dead Woman's Pass. Most participants also reported learning a great deal about their limits, abilities, and emotions (Cutler, Carmichael, and Doherty 2014). This research seemed a reasonable basis on which to anticipate the points in the journey at which students would be most vulnerable and in most need of support.

In "Inca of the Blood, Inca of the Soul: Embodiment, Emotion, and Racialization in the Peruvian Mystical Tourist Industry," Hill (2008) describes many of the emotions tourists report after visiting Peru. Often, they experience "first-world guilt" in response to the economic predicament of many Peruvians. As of July 2013, Peru had about eight million poor people, most of whom were of indigenous origin and living in rural areas where the poverty rate was greater than 50 percent. Among the poorest people in Peru are those in the Andean highlands, where most indigenous Quechua live below the poverty line (International Fund for Agricultural Development 2013).

Many tourists in Hill's (2008) study felt compelled either to buy food and souvenirs from local people or to give them money or other necessities to ease their guilt. Many reported new awareness of their own privilege and feelings of being very blessed and fortunate. Tourists in Hill's study also expressed a frequent desire to "slum it" or to reject common luxuries in favor of having a "rough" and therefore more authentic experience in Peru. Few of the tourists in this study identified their activities or the city of Cusco's tourism as exploitative (Hill 2008).

In addition, many tourists expressed disappointment "regarding the lack of meaningful cultural exchange or authenticity" (Hill 2008, 266) during their visit and specifically expressed a desire for more interaction with the Peruvian people. They wanted to engage in conversations with local citizens and mentioned that eye contact between tourists and local citizens was lacking on many occasions. Tourists also expressed a desire to "go off the map" and have a more genuine cultural experience in Peru (Hill 2008).

To create more meaningful and effective experiences for students, short-term study abroad programs could incorporate additional elements before and after the trip to prepare and debrief students. Delpech (2013) studied a group of U.S. nursing students who participated in a short-term study abroad program in Grenada. Faculty leading the trip established various

pre- and post-departure methods to more effectively immerse students in the culture. For example, for two months prior to departure, students and faculty participated in weekly classroom orientation sessions. Some sessions focused on preparing students for the study abroad experience and the culture of Grenada while others provided instruction about the nation's health care system.

During their visit to Grenada, students participated in many activities that helped them become more culturally competent. Waking up to a rooster crowing and showering without hot water became ordinary. When the students returned to the United States, they were required to attend debriefing sessions during which they discussed the impact of the program, assessed its outcomes, and completed evaluations. Delpech (2013) concluded that short-term study abroad programs with pre- and post-departure instructions are "an excellent strategy to employ to expand students' knowledge about different cultures" (170). Knowing how to incorporate elements like pre- and post-departure instructions into short-term study abroad experiences will create an environment that maximizes learning.

## Results

### Porter and Student Interactions

Following an institutional review board-approved protocol, the two-Spanish speaking students and all the other students facilitated interviews at the campsite with approximately 30 porters over the course of two nights. On the first night, porters were briefed on the research and were invited to ask any questions they had about the tour group, the institution, and the research. Then two Spanish-speaking students asked the porters questions about their professional experiences, their experiences and interactions with tourists on the trail, and the challenges they faced in their work. The time for questions on the first day was limited to approximately one hour. Two themes emerged from the porters' answers: financial motives and the language barrier.

The first question asked was "What motivates you to get up every day and assist visitors, to help them enjoy the country of Peru?" The common response was financial motivation. Every porter who answered referenced some type of financial aim, whether it was to provide for his family, pay for school, or support himself.

The second common theme emerged in response to the question “What are the most challenging aspects of interacting with tourists in terms of expectations (*i.e.*, what do porters think of tourists, and what are tourists’ expectations of porters)?” All porters who responded identified the language barrier as the most challenging aspect of their interaction with tourists. Despite their desire to communicate and connect with tourists—especially those who do not speak Spanish—they found it difficult to do so.

The porters acknowledged the ease with which they can communicate and connect with Spanish-speaking tourists. Referencing the Spanish-speaking students, Roberto noted, “One of the most challenging parts is language. We can’t communicate with others like we can with you because you speak Spanish and are bilingual. With the other passengers, we can’t.”

When asked how this barrier could be overcome, the porters emphasized the importance of having a guide who speaks both Spanish and English. Unlike porters, guides do not have the same responsibility for carrying equipment. Instead, the guide’s job is to lead tourists along the trail, translate between porters and tourists, and help with anything else necessary. Santiago said:

*We have a hard time, because of language, because we can’t interact with others. But there could be a solution because we have a guide [who] understands Spanish and [speaks] English so we can talk and act through the guide, and we can consult him if we want to do something with the passengers, like play. So the guide also talks to the passengers and tells them what we want to do. In that way I think we can make this better.*

Raul was the main guide on the Inca Trail; because he spoke English, Spanish, and Quechua, he was able to translate anything the porters said. Raul and the two Spanish-speaking students acted as translators for the porters and the other students.

After an hour of questions on the first night of interviews, students expressed an interest in hearing the porters’ stories about their cultures, customs, and traditions. During the last night on the Inca Trail, the porters and students sat in a circle and the porters were asked to share stories about their villages, traditions, families, and customs.

At the end of the second night, the porters asked the students about their traditional celebrations, such as Halloween and Thanksgiving. They also wanted to

know more about events like 9/11, U.S. exploration of Mars, and technological advances in the auto industry. The conversation on the second night lasted more than two and a half hours; porters and students alike were very engaged. At the end of their journey along the Inca Trail, students were asked to reflect on the cultural elements of Peru that were included in the capstone portion of the course as well as on their interactions with the porters.

## Themes

Three main themes emerged from the students’ reflections: inspiration/ humility, experiential learning, and language barriers. Many students expressed feeling humbled throughout the entire experience, whether as a result of feeling gratitude for their own lives after seeing the conditions in which many Peruvians lived or being inspired by the porters’ hard work on the trail.

Students often felt humbled and fortunate after seeing the conditions in which many of Peru’s citizens lived. Daniela recounted her experience of first laying eyes on Peru:

*When I stepped off that plane in Cusco, I was expecting a metropolitan city with flashes of Incan historical landmarks here and there—I was thinking a Latin Atlanta of some sort. What I saw was buildings no higher than five stories; unfinished homes that looked to have been there for years; dogs roaming the streets; outdated cars, clothing, appliances, everything. I immediately felt rude and shy for being so naive to think everyone lived like me. I had an overwhelming sense of needing to buy any and everything at the local markets, thinking of these people depending on my foreign money and naiveté.*

Although many students expressed feeling fortunate, many also expressed feelings inspired by the porters and the work they did. Jeff and others noted that seeing the porters pass by them carrying heavy loads encouraged them to keep going:

*I was humbled and impressed by their physical abilities and perseverance. During some parts of the hike I would purposefully watch the porter in front of me and try to echo each and every one of his steps. While I would be going a lot slower than [he was], I would imagine what it would feel like to be in his shoes. I*

could not do it at all. I knew how fortunate and lucky I was to be able to be where I am today. [I recognized] the sacrifices that people in my life made to get me to where I am, to be able to do what I do, and I could not think of a way I could fully thank them.

Patrick noted:

*The work ethic of the porters really humbled me. Each day on the trail, they would briskly walk by us as we struggled up the mountain. The porters often offered words of encouragement or a smile, which always helped me keep moving. They carried more than we did and moved even [more quickly]. After the porters arrived at the next stop, they wouldn't sit down and rest like we did but instead kept working to set up tents, make food, and make sure that we were all comfortable.*

*Their mental fortitude and physical strength were stupefying. Each porter seemed to have a positive attitude and extreme care for our well-being. I was humbled because even when they carried more than [we did], made our food, and hiked faster to each destination, the porters cheered for us and were genuinely excited for us to complete the trail. I was enlightened about the meager means that they rely on and how happy they were along the way.*

Mike commented:

*At times, I remember feeling like the weight on my shoulders was a burden or that I was too exhausted to carry on. But suddenly I would hear the word "Porter!" and my mindset would quickly change as I saw the strong, motivated, incredible human being run by me carrying my campsite on his back. Having the opportunity to really learn about these hardworking men put my experience on the trail into perspective. These porters work tirelessly to support themselves, family, and loved ones, and many times the people they are working for don't take the time to get to know them.*

Sofia observed:

*Watching them carry our loads up the sides of mountains gave me a sense of inspiration. During most of my time on the trail, I struggled physically and mentally. I had several moments where I contemplated giving up or turning around, simply resting in the process. Seemingly coincidentally, porters would pass*

*me in these moments of extreme doubt. As they pushed through their own physical pain, carrying more weight than I was, the motivation of these efforts pushed me to continue. The pain I experienced I knew would only be temporary, and the mentality I was fostering needed to change. I give thanks to the porters and their tireless efforts as a visible force allowing me to continue and finish the Inca Trail, ultimately allowing me to accomplish a long-time dream of mine.*

Another common theme the students emphasized repeatedly was the value of experiential learning and of the connections they made with the porters and the culture. *Experiential learning* is a process by which new knowledge is created via a transformative experience; learning is achieved by the intentional combination of engagement, reflection, and application (Kolb 2015). Students reported that this component of the course, which enabled them to travel to another country, interact one-on-one with the porters, and experience the culture of the country, allowed them to genuinely learn about the culture and better understand the porters.

The students compared experiential learning to learning from books and concluded that this type of learning is much more valuable and memorable. Patrick said:

*There is a distinct difference between book learning and experiential learning. The school builds many of its programs for the benefit of experiential learning, and this trip was no exception. While I learn quite well from books, I could not have learned about the porters from writing, I would not have had the chill of the wind, the translation process, or the face-to-face experience that made the stories the porters told so much more memorable. I also believe that we talk about cultural heritage stories like they aren't current or relevant when we learn in a typical classroom setting. However, since the porters told us their stories, which were immediately translated so we could understand, one cannot deny or overlook that the personal accounts are very real and relevant.*

The students also emphasized how experiential learning allowed them to form much deeper connections with the porters. Laura said:

*Learning this from them personally, instead of through books or documentaries, helped to put it more in their*



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*perspective and make it feel more real overall. Talking to them personally also helped to build bridges and form connections between us as a group and them. Instead of the dynamic becoming one about them working for us and helping us move through our individual experience, it made it more of a collective experience. We had a chance to listen and ask questions, and then they had a chance to do the same. We were one large group together instead of multiple separate ones, which I found to be incredibly moving and an experience that I will not forget anytime soon.*

*Overall, I think that it is becoming increasingly important to learn more about the cultural beliefs of other countries. This is the only way to form stronger bonds and to form better levels of understanding between different groups of people.*

Some students noted that although they had little interaction with the porters at the beginning of the trip, they nevertheless formed connections with them. Andrea said:

*From the beginning, I was astounded by the quality of the food and their hard work to meet our every need. However, the first time they served us, we hadn't even learned their names. I would have hoped that from our very first interaction, we would have known the people we were going to spend the next four days with. Yet despite not meeting them early that day, they worked tirelessly to feed us and prepare our campsites.*

*As the trail went on, the porters continuously went above and beyond the call of duty in their jobs. Despite their long and hard days, they were still willing to sit down with us at the end of the day and tell us about their culture, traditions, and customs. Each one of them came from a different part of Peru; therefore, they all had very different backgrounds. Hearing each one of their stories allowed us to learn about their lives firsthand, which is truly one of the goals of engaged experiential learning. The types of stories we heard about religion, family, and traditions are shortened and dismissed by the textbooks we learn from on a daily basis. They're the ones that mean the most to the people of Peru but are not told unless it's by word of mouth. Hearing their stories inspired me to not only continue telling their stories to others and encouraging others to ask about their stories but also to tell stories of my own.*

Finally, the students acknowledged the importance of the porters and their interactions with them. They acknowledged that their experiences on the Inca Trail would not have been the same if not for the porters:

*Another large aspect of my time trekking the trail has much to do with the interactions with the local population, guides, and porters. Without this communication with the people of the Peruvian Andes, my learning exposure would have been greatly diminished due to a lack of understanding of other ways and styles of life.*

Like the porters, students identified the language barrier and the resulting difficulty of communicating with the porters as one of the biggest challenges they faced on the trail. Andrea stressed that “the language barrier was what prevented most visitors from having an engaging and enlightening relationship with the porters.” The students repeatedly stressed the value of having two Spanish-speaking students with them, making it easier for the students and porters to communicate. Sofia noted that although she was not able to speak directly to the porters, she nevertheless felt connected to them. She said, “Although Claudia did most of the interaction, questioning, and translating, I found a deep connection with them, especially being able to understand their Spanish.”

Allison echoed this sentiment, observing that interactions with the porters decreased her anxiety about the trail:

*Even though there was a language barrier, I still felt connected to the porters as they shared their stories. In the beginning it was awkward to interact with them due to the language barrier and [because] we did not know anything about each other. Once the stories and the laughter began, the entire atmosphere changed. The interview questions were really interesting as they lessened my anxiety about being on this trip. I felt relief while listening to their answers and stories.*

The students also noted that having other students translate allowed them to bridge the initial separation between the porters and themselves. Patrick said:

*I have had experiences abroad in which I did not know the appropriate level of interaction as well [and struggled] with the language barrier. Luckily for us, we had Claudia and Phil to break down the language barrier, which helped us know what sort of interaction the por-*

*ters were looking for from us. Even without Claudia and Phil translating, once we knew the porters were interested in playing games and spending time with us, we were able to have fun and relax with them at camp. Whether it was throwing the football or sharing our snacks, the porters were eager to participate in our activities. I felt as though our interactions with the porters got friendlier and friendlier after the first day. Every porter was encouraging on the trail and even joked around with us.*

It was clear that the porters were an essential part of the trip; however, the students did not feel that they could interact or connect fully with the porters until that first point of contact was made by the two Spanish-speaking students. After that first night of talking with the porters through the translators, the students felt able to interact with them even without the Spanish-speaking students. The first interaction initiated by students was essential to bridging the separation between students and porters.

## Discussion

The porters in this study emphasized the challenge presented by the language barrier when interacting with tourists; students expressed similar views in their final reflections. Porters and students alike stressed the importance of having a translator bridge the gap between the groups and create a pathway for more meaningful interaction. The initial communication from the translators led to the interactions on the second night in which the porters told the students their stories and asked the students questions about their country and culture. This type of cultural immersion is what many tourists have identified as lacking in their experience on the Inca Trail (Hill 2008).

Students credited these interactions with providing a deep experiential learning component to the trip that enabled them to learn more about Peruvian culture. However, the students in this study reported that they were only able to have this type of cultural experience with the porters because of the translators. Moreover, the limited timeframe of the short-term travel experience required early interaction as a prerequisite to depth of interaction. Had the students not had the opportunity to engage with the porters at the beginning of

the trail, it is far less likely that they would have developed a relationship thereafter.

The students also reported feeling inspired and humbled when interacting with the porters and seeing them work. Hill (2008) identified the emotion of “first-world guilt” as a common experience among tourists in response to their concern for the economic predicament of many Peruvians. Like Hill’s participants, the students in the current study also reported experiencing an overwhelming need to buy local merchandise in Peru and feeling humbled as they recognized their own social and economic privilege. Again, despite the short duration of the trip, the intimate exchange of stories and ideas with the porters and other locals activated students’ empathy, allowing them to fairly appraise and appreciate the modest people who had created the merchandise they were buying.

Finally, students participated in both a pre-departure course to help prepare them for the experiential learning component and a post-departure class that allowed them to reflect on their experience interacting with the natives of a foreign country. These bookend support structures not only help students make meaning of their experiences, but they also empower students to increase both the quality and quantity of those experiences regardless of the trip’s duration. More specifically, the pre-departure course physically prepares students for the challenges of the Inca Trail and mentally prepares them to show empathy, listen actively, and maintain an open mind toward the impending journey. They set and meet benchmark goals for physical conditioning and interpersonal engagement. They also rehearse techniques for maximizing the quality of their encounters, such as disconnecting from technology, participating in story circles, and meeting with trail guides via Skype.

The post-departure course is anchored to students’ on-trail journaling and video reflections. With the guidance of instructors and Global Education Center staff, students unpack their personal, interpersonal, and group experiences. Together, they address their perceptions, misconceptions, and biases and consider how each may have changed during the trip. This post-departure course is designed to translate these experiences into strategies for applying this new understanding once home, such as by suspending judgment and championing diverse perspectives in the work environment.

## Limitations

The results of this research should be considered together with its limitations. The study took place in a specific country; therefore, the dynamics between the indigenous people of Peru and the students cannot be generalized to the people of other countries. The student participants came from a small population attending a medium-sized private liberal arts university in the southeastern United States. Their amount or level of interaction with the porters cannot be generalized to all students studying abroad.

## Conclusion

A number of actions and strategies are recommended to foster more enriching cultural engagement during short-term global education programs. These suggestions are based on the experiential learning component of the course and on students' reflections following their return from Peru. The recommendations include providing translators, incorporating pre- and post-departure components, and enhancing cultural immersion.

The first and most vital recommendation is to provide a translator to facilitate interaction between students and the people of the country they visit. A guide or other translator may provide this service; however, having a student within the group who can translate may prove more helpful for the students and the people with whom they communicate. The students are able to converse more comfortably with a fellow student as translator, and the inhabitants of the country can establish a sense of trust with one of the students.

The second recommendation is to incorporate pre- and post-departure components into the global education program. The pre-departure component helps students prepare for the experience and helps facilitators understand what students are looking forward to and expecting from the experience; it also helps students address any anxieties or fears they may have as instructors tailor some aspects of the experience to what students want.

The post-departure component provides students with an opportunity to reflect on their experience and offer feedback on what was beneficial and what could be improved. They can also reflect on how the experience impacted them and what, if anything, they wish they had done differently. Additionally, it offers facilita-

tors of the program input on which experiences were most valuable for students and which program components might be strengthened.

The final recommendation is to build time into global education experiences to allow for authentic, unscripted interaction. Although the entire program should be framed by cultural engagement, the students in this study identified several pivotal moments that epitomized cultural immersion. Among these was taking a night to sit down with the porters and listen to stories about their traditions and cultures. This experience required almost no planning, but it has been remembered and cherished by each of the students. The porters' stories had a deep impact on the students, who stressed the importance of hearing the stories directly from the members of the indigenous population rather than reading them in a book.

By definition, authentic experiences can rarely be planned. However, faculty and local guides can collaborate to lead students to areas or circumstances in which authentic experiences are more likely to occur. For example, knowledge of a town's economic conventions may inform a plan for students to explore a market on a busy day, observing (and possibly participating in) the exchange of goods and services. Likewise, familiarity with local religious traditions could facilitate students' observation of or even attendance at a religious ceremony or ritual. Students stressed that these types of experiences were the most important means of immersing themselves in the culture, allowing them to experience it firsthand instead of learning about it indirectly.

Although students who complete short-term study abroad programs are at a comparative disadvantage in terms of opportunities for cultural engagement, they can still build authentic relationships with the people of a foreign culture. By immersing themselves in the local way of life and intentionally challenging their preconceptions, students develop greater comfort in interacting with people who are different from themselves, not only during their global education program but also when they return home. Importantly, this immersion not only helps students gain a deeper cultural understanding, but it may also improve the perceptions of U.S. visitors by those in other countries.

When designed with intention, global education programs become a bridge between cultures, improving intercultural competence and instilling greater humility among students and those they visit. Administra-





## Strategic Enrollment Management Endorsement Program

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- Individual must be employed (full or part time) by an "accredited" post-secondary institution.
- Provide a one page vita or resume reflecting career experience, professional accomplishments and education.
- Hold a minimum of an earned baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution.

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tors and faculty members who manage these programs must continue to seek strategies that allow students to more fully engage with the cultures of the world. When a short-term program becomes as enriching as its semes-

ter-long counterparts, more students gain access, and more perspectives coalesce, engendering among all participants a genuine appreciation for human difference.

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## Proximity: The Slow Game of Relationship Building

By Joshua Reinhold

*Dear Office of the Registrar:*

*I am having some continued trouble with the campus information system recognizing me as a faculty member. I assure you I am receiving a paycheck, and I need to show up and teach today—so I'm pretty sure I'm employed to teach here—but the wheels of impenetrable bureaucracy do not seem to allow for a human person to correct the error. I'm pretty sure that somewhere, somehow, there has to be a physical human being who can go into the system and change some os into Is so the system will reflect the reality, rather than insisting that the reality is incorrect because the system says otherwise.*

This quote, from a recent real-world example, illustrates the curious tone that often characterizes e-mails sent by faculty to the registrar's office. In many instances, these communications seem to come out of nowhere, unprovoked and without context, yet marked by frustration, antagonism, and subtle sarcasm, as if the registrar's office were the source of their authors' consternation. As for registrar's office staff, grumbling about faculty and communal eye-rolling are common at many a professional conference. There appears to be a gap in diplomatic relations between faculty and registrar's office staff—an inherent disconnect that members of each group tend toward naturally. This begs further questions: Why? What is the reason for this lapse in collegiality? What are its root causes? And most important, what can be done to overcome it?

A healthy relationship between registrar's office staff and faculty is essential to the cohesion and effectiveness of an institution; an ailing relationship can be detrimental. Both groups stand at the center of campus life, faculty fulfilling the academic and teaching mission of the university, and registrar's office staff performing the administrative and logistical functions necessary for running the institution. The two are interdependent. When they are out of step, any number of challenges arise, from minor annoyances to more catastrophic conflicts: classes may be scheduled in inappropriate rooms, registration and grading deadlines may be missed, the implementation of new majors and programs may be delayed, and faculty may feel as though the "administrative wing" is encroaching on their pedagogical freedom and curricular autonomy. In the end, it is students who are often most affected, caught somewhere in the middle as they attempt to satisfy requirements on both sides.

At the heart of the disharmony between the office of the registrar and faculty lies a misreading of the character and intentions of one group by the other—a reliance on preconceived notions of who they are and what they are about. Like all stereotypes, these biases may be rooted in half-truths filled in with a mixture of exaggerations, personal experiences, and hearsay, which then color the overall picture. As this essay's introductory quote makes clear, the registrar's office represents all the red tape, bureaucratic bloat, and byzantine policies and procedures of the university that distract from the faculty's primary focus: teaching and research. Often,

the registrar's office is not even the campus department responsible for resolving a faculty member's particular grievance, yet it is singled out as the first office with which to engage. This may be because the registrar's office is a self-contained unit—the registrar's office (like the DMV)—and thus easy to identify compared to the number of administrative staff members dispersed throughout departments across the institution. It is simpler to engage with an entity than to track down individual staff according to their responsibilities and decisions.

On the other hand, registrar's office staff often perceive faculty as the prima donnas of the university, the sometimes-demanding, terribly talented, and awe-inspiring members of the campus community who are masters of their fields but inept at practical, logistical, and administrative matters. A constant source of exasperation for registrar's office staff is the impression that faculty chafe against policies they initiated and approved through their own governance structure. (There is an old joke that registrar's offices exist to remind faculty of the rules they created for themselves.)

From the perspective of registrar's office staff, one possible response to faculty opposition is a display of power, a digging-in of the heels, returning antagonism with antagonism, holding to the letter of a policy or process because it is "right." (May the stronger side win in this battle of wills!) Another approach might be deference to the faculty in all academic and even administrative matters, under the assumption that staff are employed to carry out decisions made by faculty. If there is some guideline to override or new plan to implement, even if poorly conceived, staff will follow suit, simply because it originates with the faculty. But neither of these is a satisfactory solution. The one option will only exacerbate the disunity and confirm the preconceptions each group has of the other, and the other fails to uphold the structure, the accountability, the interaction between academic and administrative functions that is necessary for the university to successfully discharge its mission.

The approach offering the most productive way forward can be summed up in one word: proximity. Anyone who has spent time in a registrar's office or among faculty knows that the caricatures presented here are not true to life. Many registrar's office staff care deeply about the academic mission and want to support creativity, innovation, and discovery in every way possible. Similarly, many faculty members are consummate ad-

ministrators and acknowledge the crucial intersection of policy and pedagogy. But these realities are not properly understood until faculty and registrar's office staff spend time with one another and see one another in settings that highlight what each does best, so that both come to know the individual persons behind the work and build relationships of trust and mutual admiration. Ideally, this working side by side would be literal, with staff and faculty offices intermingled for the purpose of facilitating collaboration, allowing each group to gain awareness of the phone calls and hallway conversations of the other, and familiarizing each with the issues with which the other contends on a daily basis. Sadly, because practical considerations (to include sharing workspace with peers in one's field) usually take precedence, physical proximity is not typically possible as a permanent arrangement. More figurative ways of working in proximity need to be considered. Fortunately, these can be virtually free of cost, unconstrained by resources such as staffing, budget, and space allocation. Because the challenge can be reduced to interpersonal relations, all that is needed is a strategy for more directly engaging faculty and registrar's office staff with each other in their work. Admittedly, some might find this "costly," but only in the sense that it may require a time of being uncomfortable—of adopting new practices and attitudes that reverse past prejudices.

For faculty, the single most effective step toward working in proximity with registrar's office staff is to involve them in important initiatives, proposals, and decisions and to include them on workgroups and committees, even if merely as an observer or non-voting member. Faculty will find they have added an insightful advisor to the conversation—after all, the registrar's office is the centrally situated administrative office on campus, and staff are experts at navigating the background logistical life of the university. They can help highlight the merits of a plan, draw attention to weaknesses, and anticipate potential problems well in advance, especially in regard to how students may be affected. The most fruitful relationship between the registrar's office and faculty develops when the two work side by side on large, enterprise-wide projects, such as the implementation of a new software system or general education program, where each brings its own expertise to the endeavor. Even in more everyday settings, faculty can make the effort to engage registrar's office staff—for example, through a quick phone call to



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talk over a curriculum question or an appointment with a staff member to discuss a student situation. These simple gestures go a long way toward fostering camaraderie. Registrar's office staff should be approached as partners given the benefit of the doubt rather than as adversaries, even as faculty embrace the institutional structure and are willing to learn it (even if they don't fully understand it).

For registrar's office staff, working in proximity to faculty may be simplified because they constitute a single unit and thus can reach outward with a common purpose more easily than faculty can. To be proactive in building relationships, registrar's office staff members can be more "forward" about their role value among faculty, inviting themselves to the table and making the case for their involvement (not in a pushy overbearing way, but more as friendly extroverts ready to jump in to the action). This requires registrar's office staff to abandon

their traditional image as hidden office clerks or policy referees and to become visible among faculty, emerging as administrative experts and leaders with vision. Faculty then will perceive the registrar's office as a facilitator that moves initiatives along rather than as an obstacle that must be surpassed—in other words, as an office of "yes, and also" rather than "no." Registrar's office staff would do well to hold continually in their minds the overriding goal of encouraging the university's academic mission and students' timely progress toward their degrees as an antidote to the upholding of rules for rules' sake that is so often the source of faculty frustration.

Building relationships among office of the registrar staff and faculty is a slow game that advances one by one through proximity. It takes time for word to spread and the culture to change from the inside out. Yet the partnership is so vital to the life of the university and to the success of students that it is worth the long-term effort.

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### *About the Author*

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**Joshua Reinhold** is Associate Registrar at the University of California Merced. He holds a B.A. in English from Biola University and a M.A. in Theology from the University of Dallas. He recently completed a two-year, campus-wide software implementation project as co-chair alongside faculty, an experience that served as primary inspiration for this commentary.

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## What Does Retention Rate Have to Do With Anything? Stop Using the Phrase “Safety School”

*By Heidi Simon*

As Mason sits among his first-year investment banker cohort in mid-town Manhattan, it's clear to him that he is different. Not only is he the only black staff member, the only first-generation college graduate, the only Great Plains states native, but he is also the only first-year banker who did not attend a selective east coast university. Mason would not have been admissible to his cohort's selective universities, yet he is outperforming them on every measure—from tangible outcomes such as dollars in the door and a handsome year-end bonus reflecting his contributions to intangibles such as work ethic, social adaptability, and initiative. His story is unique, but he is not alone.

Every year, high school counselors encourage prospective college students to apply to “reach” schools and “safety” schools. Often, the differentiating factor between them is selectivity—the ratio of admitted students to applicants. Universities have ranking incentives to entice applicants, only to deny a large portion of them in order to lower admit rates. In fact, some schools spend thousands of dollars to aggressively pursue certain applicants even though they know that these students will not be admitted. After all, lower admit rates mean higher rankings.

Not only do admit rates have an impact on rankings, but so do retention rates. Another simple formula reveals that the more selective a university is, the more academically prepared its admitted students are; one consequence is higher retention and graduation rates. But what does all of this have to do with a student's ac-

tual experience on campus and life after college? It is time to change the mindset of selectivity and instead put greater emphasis on outcomes. In other words, selectivity measures should not be the focus of the college search.

Of course it is important to retain and graduate students. After all, graduation is the primary intended outcome of attending college. Yes, a university can provide advising and wrap-around services so every student has the opportunity to persist and graduate. However, it is time for higher education to become more thoughtful and purposeful with regard to selectivity. What is the purpose of students' seeking admission to “reach” or “safety” schools, and how does this pertain to the individual student? How does this help the student body as a whole? Rather than asking, “What are your retention and graduation rates,” students should be encouraged to ask, “At what rates do students with my profile persist and graduate?” All schools should define how prospective students can be successful and the contributions they can make to enhance the university. A percentage of the student body at every non-selective university would have been admissible to more selective universities, but for any number of reasons—cost often being the primary one—these students chose to attend a less-selective school. These students persist and graduate at the same rates as their counterparts who attend selective universities. (Ask not what the university will do for you, but what you can do at the university.)

Intent and impact are often-competing concepts in all aspects of our lives. My *intent* in telling my son that

his room looks like a landfill is to encourage him to clean his room, but the *impact* is him rolling his eyes. Similarly, the *intent* in advising students to choose a “safety” school is to provide them a realistic option for admission, but the impact when students are only admitted to their back-up schools can be feelings of disappointment and failure, even when the deck was stacked against them through nothing of their own doing. The reality is that any “safety” school has numerous success stories of students thriving in the classroom, conducting life-changing research, and finding a community that supports them for the rest of their lives. What matters is what students do when they get to college. College search conversations should be centered on *fit*—academic, financial, and “feel”—rather than selectivity measures.

Mason embodies a duality of success: His access to college gave him the opportunities he has today, and perhaps equally important, students, faculty, and staff had the opportunity to learn from him. For the United States to excel will require more college graduates. Often, less selective universities—those whose mission is

to educate the masses and not just the selected few—have the capacity to educate more future scientists, educators, and leaders. Schools that offer this type of access should not be judged as lesser just because their retention and graduation rates don’t compare to those of a selective few.

Mason knows that he is different; he wonders if he will be good enough to compete with his peers who attended more selective schools. He realizes, though, that as he trusts his intuition, education, problem solving, and drive, he is finding not only that he is good enough, but that he is also excelling. Compared to his peers who graduated from selective schools, he is every bit as prepared for and as talented at the job itself and at work-related social engagements. He is leading the state school “newbies” to the flip cup championship over the selective schools. He is also realizing that while his first-year co-workers are paying off the student loans they took out to finance their much higher selective school tuition, he is already preparing to buy his first business. Now that is impact and an outcome that will change his life and those of generations to follow.

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### *About the Author*

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**Heidi Simon** has worked in recruitment at the University of Kansas since 2002. Prior to that, she worked in orientation and financial aid at KU. Simon received her bachelor’s degree in mathematics with an emphasis in secondary education at the University of Northern Colorado and taught both middle and high school math. She then went on to receive her master’s degree in higher education administration at the best place on earth, the University of Kansas in Lawrence, KS, USA.



## Want to Expand Global Education Programs? Ask the Registrar!

*By Rodney Parks, Jesse Parrish, and Alexander Taylor*

### Context

For years, higher education institutions have sought creative ways to expand co-curricular programs that align with high-impact practices. Undergraduate research, internship, service, and many others are increasingly embedded in institutional curricula. As long as the courses that feature these key experiences meet degree requirements, students are eager to engage. However, a persistent challenge to one experience in particular—global education—is justifying its attendant costs. The barrier to participation in global education is often prohibitive. Many programs involve travel to multiple locations and on-site excursions, and some even require special gear like hiking backpacks or extreme weather attire. Despite an institution’s best intentions, global education experiences are often reserved for those fortunate enough to be able to afford them.

Even among students who have the ability to pay for study abroad, some may discover that their baccalaureate plans simply cannot accommodate the experience. Institutions are refining their retention and completion strategies, and many are placing greater emphasis on—and sometimes even requiring—the creation of a four-year plan during every student’s first year of study. This planning exercise encourages students to think critically about their curricular choices and finite financial resources, with the result that some decide early on to eschew global education in favor of greater depth or breadth of study on campus. In an era of intense com-

petition and uncertain futures, savvy students are focusing on maximizing their post-graduate marketability by plotting multiple majors, minors, and degree types across their four years of undergraduate education. For many, a global education experience simply does not “fit in their schedule.”

Many institutions also limit the number of credit hours for which students can register during any given term. Institutions typically have an eighteen-credit-hour per semester rule that requires students to obtain special permission—and pay additional tuition—to overload. A brief review of the academic catalogs of four-year institutions across the southeast confirms the prevalence of such a policy: most charge a per-credit-hour rate for exceeding the posted maximum. To avoid incurring these additional costs, many students choose not to enroll in travel-embedded courses, even though they may be more accessible than “full-immersion” semesters abroad.

Considered in conjunction with students’ crowded four-year plans, an overstated focus on return on investment, and rigid curriculum designs that compel students to “check the boxes” of a degree audit, these unforgiving policies preclude serious consideration of global education. For many traditional undergraduates, there are too many barriers to participation, and the opportunity cost is too high. Yet there are ways around these constraints. Faculty can employ tactics to successfully recruit students to participate in enlightening experiences abroad; they just need to know whom to ask. Thankfully, the

university registrar has a wealth of expertise in course scheduling, registration patterns, and degree audit deficiencies. By sharing information about student preferences and predispositions with departmental partners, the registrar can simultaneously help faculty meet their enrollment goals and facilitate students' participation in enriching global education experiences.

A simple example of tactical recruitment is cross-listing. Faculty members often cross-list courses between closely related disciplines (*e.g.*, marketing and international business) and between course levels (*e.g.*, SOC 273/SOC 373). Even within course levels, faculty can vary the number of credits for which a student registers and create corresponding syllabuses for different levels of rigor or intensity. Historically, courses have been cross-listed to maintain actual seat efficiencies, but cross-listing can be employed to arguably greater effectiveness to market courses that take place partially or entirely abroad. Listing a course under two departments doubles its visibility, and listing a course at variable levels increases its attractiveness to students at different stages of their academic career.

Similarly, a global education course could be offered as a variable-credit-hour course (*e.g.*, one to four semester hours). As long as students meet the minimum number of direct-instruction minutes to earn the specified credit, variable-credit courses can perfectly complement dense four-year curriculum plans. Faculty may also consider independent study or research opportunities and cross-list such courses for students who must satisfy a specific graduation requirement. Learning management systems already have the capability to blend various courses into what appears to be a single course. Cross-listed courses can be challenging to track, but this student-centered approach enables more undergraduates to take advantage of the range of experiences institutions offer without compromising their academic goals.

## Institutional Case Study

During spring 2015, an Elon University faculty member designed a travel-embedded course that featured a trip to Iceland. His goal was to offer the course on campus with an embedded global education component that would



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enrich the learning outcomes attained in the classroom. The course had been taught for many years and was already part of an approved curriculum. The faculty member worked with Elon's Global Education Center to add the embedded Iceland component and began marketing the course to students. Sadly, the course failed to enroll the minimum required number of students.

Undeterred, the faculty member consulted with the university registrar regarding flexible alternatives that might allow the course to satisfy a broader range of degree requirements. The registrar created a series of reports to better understand the requirements that students in the department would need to satisfy and ultimately recommended offering the course at variable hours (two to four), at variable levels (GBL 273/373), and as an upper-level general research course for students who might need to fulfill an experiential learning requirement (a graduation requirement at Elon). The registrar also provided a report listing the names and email addresses of students in the department so the faculty member could recruit students directly and market the course on the basis of its flexibility.

The following fall, the faculty member successfully launched the travel-embedded course with fifteen

students; six had not previously engaged in a global education experience and cited the prohibitive cost of full-immersion programs and the rigidity of their four-year plans as the reasons. Seven students enrolled in the flexible scheduling option but did not need it to satisfy any graduation requirements; rather, they registered for the two-hour course so they could benefit from the travel experience without having to pay additional tuition. Given Elon's four-credit-hour system, taking this course for two credit hours enabled these students to enroll in the maximum load of eighteen hours.

Replicating the success of this model, Elon has launched other travel-embedded courses that feature a week-long journey abroad during the Thanksgiving holiday (fall term) or spring break (spring term). These short-term global education courses expand access to global education, reduce the financial barrier to participation, meet multiple degree requirements, and fit into students' purposeful four-year plans. This intentional collaboration between the registrar and academic departments has resulted in positive outcomes for all parties and likely will lead to higher overall participation rates and similar innovation relative to other high-impact practices.

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### *About the Authors*

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**Rodney L. Parks, Ph.D.**, is the Registrar, Director of Summer College, and Assistant to the Provost at Elon University, where he has served since 2013. Parks also serves as an Assistant Professor and member of the Human Service Studies Department. Parks earned his Ph.D. in counseling from the University of Georgia and has published numerous articles and book chapters on unique student populations and their challenges navigating higher education.

**Jesse Parrish** serves as Financial Manager in the Department of Architectural Science at Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario. Mr. Parrish previously served as Assistant Registrar at Elon University, where he worked with Dr. Rodney Parks to study vulnerable student populations, procedural innovation, and emerging transcript technologies. The two now continue their collaboration internationally, adding new perspective to their growing body of research.

**Alexander Taylor** is Assistant Registrar at Elon University, where he has served since 2017. Among his areas of responsibility are international tertiary credential evaluation, facilities management, and NCAA certification.

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## Transfers: It's All about Teamwork

By Katie A. Schwienteck

Transfer students have been studied for years. Thousands of hours and resources have been dedicated to learning their behaviors, understanding the patterns, and drawing conclusions about this unique population of students. These studies have determined that, indeed, they are unique and even unpredictable. Working with transfers can be difficult. The more we learn about transfer students, the better equipped the profession is to provide purposeful resources. This may sound overly simple, but transfer students like “simple.” Yet that is not always how institutions operate when it comes to transfer students.

One of the ways an institution can help transfer students is by developing a transfer team—a team with a core transfer-centered focus that meets the needs of the institution’s own unique type of transfer student. In fact, dedicating resources to transfer students is a best practice according to the *The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges* (Wyner, Deane, Jenkins and Fink 2016). The *Playbook* states that “dedicating institutional resources is one of the most powerful ways leaders can signal that transfer is a priority” (Wyner, Deane, Jenkins and Fink 2016). Research shows that it does not matter where on the organizational chart the positions or resources exist because transfer students do not care about organizational structure. Rather, what matters is the type of response a student gets and whether the student feels his or her needs are being addressed. Transfer students will take the path of least resistance to enrollment. One way to address their

needs is to establish a team comprising key individuals on campus who are experts in one or several transfer-related areas, including admission, financial aid, the registrar’s office, academic advising, and any other office that plays a role in recruiting, advising, evaluating, and retaining transfer students. This group of professionals should constitute the transfer team: a strong group that facilitates the academic success of transfer students.

### Where to Begin?

First and foremost, there are important components of developing and implementing a transfer team: statement of purpose, identification of key individuals, cross-training, perfecting the transition, maintaining a strong purpose, and showcasing the team to students and key constituents.

When developing a team, it’s important to establish a mission statement to affirm the team’s importance to the institution. This initial step defines the team’s purpose and facilitates purposeful decision making. It will also require careful review of data, including enrollment and retention trends and analyses. Draw lines between surges and declines, resources and programming, marketing materials and messaging. Next, prioritize review—or establishment—of an institutional transfer credit policy. Examine procedures for transfer credit evaluations. Once clear lines connect policies and trends and a case has been made for additional resources, it will be time to present this information to senior leadership.

The next step is to examine the offices with which transfer students interact. Make a list of important offices and the knowledgeable, hardworking personnel who will provide effective service. Ask questions such as who meets with transfer students, what questions are being asked, when is the evaluation completed, how is financial aid structured, and how involved are faculty? This process may reveal a need for additional staff and resources. If that is the case, present a strong argument to leadership about the value of transfer students on campus. Run reports, analyze the data, and provide a powerful case to add resources in the current year.

Following the initial evaluation, convene the key players for the purpose of reviewing the mission statement. All key personnel must have a shared understanding of the team's goals. This requires cross-training and professional development, which in turn requires time and resources. Set aside time to plan, meet as a team, discuss issues, learn best practices, set policies, and implement procedures. Though time consuming, the process is important.

Statements such as “that is not my area” or “that’s not this office” cannot be part of the narrative. The transfer team needs to be able to answer questions correctly and help students complete required tasks without referring them to other offices. Cross-training is key; it challenges the perception that services are offered in silos and that any issue beyond an individual department cannot be resolved. In reality, certain questions or circumstances will warrant hand-off to another office, and that is okay. A strong transfer team can effectively send the message that “we all work together.” Cross-training is essential to help create a seamless process. This is one of the most important components of a transfer team: showing that the process between offices or departments is smooth and clear.

Once the transfer team has established its purpose and is working well together, showcase it to students and the institution. Use the name “transfer team” with internal constituents (staff, administrators, faculty, and students) and with external constituents (educational partners, business partners, community part-

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ners). Hold educational sessions for key offices on and off campus to explain the team’s purpose and list its members. Advertise the team in any way possible—via the Web, social media, promotional materials, departmental meetings, campus-wide meetings, e-mails, and phone calls. Conduct information sessions as a team, and reference one another often to demonstrate that everyone works for the good of transfer students.

After a cycle has passed, it’s essential to review the transfer team to answer important questions such as what worked, what did not work, and how can procedures be improved? Report successes and areas of improvement to senior leadership to showcase the good work the campus is doing and the commitment to refining this area of enrollment.

Teamwork is essential: It promotes the team’s longevity and solidarity. The goal is to develop a team that stands the test of time and reaps the rewards of a strong transfer student community. The best way to maintain

a strong purpose for the team is to meet frequently. Meeting as a group helps address needs, answer questions, identify professional development opportunities, and review situations that constitute a learning experience for transfer team members. Communication is a foundational pillar of any group, and the transfer team is no exception. Sharpening the skills and services of the team enhances the potential for a healthy, vibrant transfer student community on campus.

## Conclusion

The goal of a transfer team is to work together to build a strong transfer pathway. Working with such a unique and diverse population in higher education can be a challenge. It can be equally rewarding to rise to the challenge. Doing so will require initiative, time, planning, and resources as well as a focused look at the priority the institution gives to transfer students. This is significant work.

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### About the Author

**Katie A. Schwienteck** is Associate Registrar for Transfer Articulation at York College of Pennsylvania and has more than twelve years’ experience in transfer-focused higher education. In her current position, Schwienteck works closely with transfer recruitment, credit articulation, strategic planning, articulation agreements and transfer student advising. Katie serves as Chair for AACRAO’s Transfer and Articulation Committee and has presented annually at AACRAO since 2014. Additionally, she has been quoted in *AACRAO Connect*, *The Successful Register* and *The Enrollment Manager* on various transfer related topics. Schwienteck earned her Master’s of Art in Communication from Notre Dame of Maryland University and her Bachelor’s of Science in Public Relations from Millersville University of Pennsylvania. She is also adjunct faculty in the field of Communications.

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## *Class Warfare: Class, Race, and College Admissions in Top-Tier Secondary Schools*

WEIS, L., K. CIPOLLONE, AND H. JENKINS. 2014. CHICAGO: THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS. 292 PP.

*Reviewed by Stephen J. Handel*

In *The Graduate* (1967), Benjamin Braddock, a recent but disaffected college graduate, is assured by a well-meaning member of his parents' generation that his economic future lay in "plastics." Spurred by the movie's popularity, the mere mention of plastics became for decades a derisive code word for the tired conventions of a society whose only salvation rested in fancy cars, bigger homes, and membership in the best country clubs.

Benjamin and plastics came to mind routinely while reading *Class Warfare: Class, Race, and College Admissions in Top-Tier Secondary Schools*. The book confronts the reader with a stark contention that America's most selective colleges and universities are the catalysts for—and perhaps contributors to—a widening breach between the privileged class and those below. It seems that U.S. society has come full circle, embracing a calculated madness for "plastics" in the form of college degrees and institutional prestige that is destined to create an entirely new generation of Benjie's: cold, disconnected, and seduced by surfaces that offer only immediate gratification.

*Class Warfare's* theme is that admission to selective colleges and universities has become the new economic battleground where affluent families engage in what the authors call "class work" to ensure that their children

are admitted to the best—and only the best—universities. The economic turmoil of the last decade has, according to the authors, undercut the confidence of most Americans, who feel especially vulnerable economically and out-of-touch politically. Although education has always been a strategy for Americans of all backgrounds to gain a toehold in the middle class, there is a growing belief that college may be the only societal institution that provides a near-certain (or so we are told) return on investment. What is more troubling, however, is that *Class Warfare* documents a belief, especially among upper-middle class families, that getting into only the most selective colleges and universities is the key to the kingdom—and that all those "other" schools are for also-rans.

The authors, sociologists by training, weave a compelling narrative from their ethnographic research conducted at three iconic high schools, one public and two private. Having interviewed students, parents, teachers, and counselors, the authors describe the individual and collective mores of these groups as they prepare students for admission to the highest echelons of U.S. education. The unspoken but implicitly agreed upon goal is to ensure that the next generation's privileged status is "locked in" by leveraging the college application and admissions process through the use of professional ex-

pertise, social networks, and inside information. College admission becomes the central battleground “for economic and social advantage, a fight that not all students and families are equally positioned to play and win” (13).

The culture of each high school is painstakingly detailed. The authors compare the attitudes of students from affluent families with those of students who come from less privileged circumstances and describe the ways in which members of different economic classes approach the college preparation process. The differences are stark: Affluent students perceive their access to rigorous coursework (such as AP and IB) as a function of their hard work and perseverance, and often are unaware of the degree to which their parents’ advocacy in middle and high school played a role in getting them on the “college track.” Students from low income backgrounds may have less access to such courses, in part because their parents are less well-schooled in orchestrating their sons’ and daughters’ academic trajectory. The authors also highlight the practices of teachers, counselors, and administrators, who, mostly unwittingly, support this new-age academic tracking by implementing policies that direct more affluent students into the most challenging courses.

For anyone involved in higher education admissions and recruitment, *Class Warfare* will ring familiar, if not for the authors’ description of the inequities in how high school students prepare for college, then certainly for the zealous way in which some parents try to ensure their children’s admission to the best schools. Attend any college night at your local upper-middle-class school, and the sense of urgency among parents is palpable. Through oblique references to their children’s sleepless nights studying advanced mathematics or multiple foreign languages, these parents advance a sense of expectation that even the best high schools can never quite meet. Thoreau surely never met a helicopter parent, but he would recognize the quiet desperation of parents pushing their sons and daughters to the academic heights.

Still, if the book’s observations draw steady nods of agreement, the empirical premise is as misplaced as it is compelling. In the opening chapter, the authors link their thesis to research revealing that admission to selective colleges and universities is likely to enrich graduates with lifelong economic benefits. Citing conclusions reached in such books as *Crossing the Finish*

*Line* (Bowen, Chingos and McPherson 2009), *Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education* (Bowen, Kurzweil and Tobin 2006), and *The Shape of the River* (Bowen and Bok 2000), the authors claim that this widely reported empirical link has intensified the desire for admission to America’s most elite colleges. But their conclusion is overbroad, in my view. While these books highlighted the admittedly important role of elite post-secondary institutions in the economic and cultural life of the nation, they do not specify that a mere handful of colleges can deliver the goods. Indeed, the authors of *The Shape of the River* and *Equity and Excellence in Higher Education* stress that it is the academically transformative elements of well-resourced four-year institutions—not the economic byproducts—that are to be prized, especially by students from underserved groups.

*Class Warfare* reveals America’s fascination with its elite, private colleges and universities, an attraction perfectly in synch with its love of celebrity. Elite colleges and universities have become institutional rock stars akin to their corporate cousins Apple and Google. All are twenty-first century dream factories, much like 1930s MGM, where talented and hard-working fodder can be molded and shaped for a future of riches and glory.

Of course, *Class Warfare* did not create our society’s current fascination with educational winners and losers; it only celebrates it. The real story—one the book only casually addresses—is that more Americans than ever attend college, and the vast majority of two- and four-year institutions have only modest entrance requirements or none at all. A college education is more available now than at any other time in this nation’s history, but the number of seats at the most competitive universities has remained relatively constant. This arithmetic has amplified the tempo of musical chairs at these institutions, fueling hysteria among entire families relative to doing whatever it takes to enthrone their children at these highly-selective campuses. But rather than highlight this behavior as the conspicuous nuttiness that it is, the authors of *Class Warfare* shroud their findings in an impressive net of sociological and ethnographic theory that, when reduced to its essence, says: Most parents want the best for their kids; the rich are just better at using money to get them there.

By its last chapter, *Class Warfare* drops any pretense of scholarly dispassion. Instead, it reads as an epistolary, condemning the efforts of families who maneuver their kids into the best colleges:

*Class warfare...charts the complexity and nature of "class work" in twenty-first century United States, offering powerful evidence with respect to the ways in which a particular slice of the broad-based middle class now works to consolidate upper-middle-class privilege for the next generation via access to particularly located postsecondary destinations...What we see in [this] ethnography is the clawing for position via postsecondary education patterns, and particularly the most highly valued postsecondary privates" (192, 206).*

The authors conflate parents' wish to do right by their children with complicity in suppressing the access of less affluent families. (The memorable title of one section—"Thinking, Plotting, Planning"—gives up the goods at the get-go.) Of course, the idea that rich parents have more resources—greater "social capital" in the lingo of sociology—to bring to bear in helping their sons and daughters achieve academically does not require a new theoretical framework by which to understand this worldview. Indeed, one wonders exactly what

problem *Class Warfare* is trying to address: Is it affluent families with a narrow view of the higher education universe who work doggedly to position their children for elite education? Is it the elite institutions themselves that defend diversity and equity in their mission statements but who may work quietly behind the scenes to keep their admissions selectivity absurdly low? Or is it our collective inability to create opportunities for qualified students throughout the United States to obtain a high-quality postsecondary education?

Putting aside *Class Warfare's* proselytizing, the authors' special triumph is in making it painfully clear that competition for a seat at one of America's premier colleges has bred a kind of social Darwinism among the affluent and those who support the superstructure of elite college going—a misguided worldview that celebrates the notion that only certain citadels of academe will be able to inoculate the nation's children against the vagaries of economic misfortune. But I discern no war in *Class Warfare*—only skirmishes among the patriotic and pathologically compulsive.

## *The Caterpillar Way: Lessons in Leadership, Growth and Shareholder Value and Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*

BOUCHARD, C.T., AND J.V. KOCH. 2013. NEW YORK: MCGRAW-HILL EDUCATION. 361 PP.  
GRAW, N. 2018. BALTIMORE, MD: JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS. 175 PP.

*By Kimberley Buster Williams*

A preview of *The Caterpillar Way: Lessons in Leadership, Growth and Shareholder Value* by Craig Bouchard and James V. Koch revealed earnings charts, data on China's share of world consumption of basic resources, and commodities and more. This non-higher education book would prove to be a great change of pace. Koch, president emeritus of ODU, is an expert in microeconomics with profound insight.

Two days after finishing *The Caterpillar Way*, Nathan Grawe's recent book, *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*, arrived. The books were different, but several chapters dovetailed so perfectly it was uncanny. This article presents compelling ideas from both books and demonstrates why *Demographics and the De-*

*mand for Higher Education* in particular is a must-read for higher education professionals.

### Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education: Right Sizing

The main premise of *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education* is that "because college-going probabilities are so heterogeneous, simple population forecasts alone are of limited value in predicting the demand for college" (31); another is that now might be the time for colleges and universities to think about right sizing. Grawe's introduction outlines the book's major themes:

- ◆ Chapters 1 and 2 document trends most relevant to higher education.
- ◆ Chapter 3 describes the Higher Education Demand index (HEDI).
- ◆ Chapters 4 through 6 explore anticipated shifts in the higher education landscape.
- ◆ Chapter 7 applies the HEDI.
- ◆ Chapter 8 utilizes HEDI to model how future demand might change if recruitment efforts and policy innovations were to halve current gaps.
- ◆ Chapter 9 and 10 present a “what if” analysis.
- ◆ The final chapter forecasts the 2030s and beyond the model’s forecast horizon.

Many in higher education are aware of the demographic challenges ahead. “WICHE” is in many enrollment managers’ lexicon (and has been for a while). Yet enrollment managers may *not* be aware that Caterpillar faced its own “disruptive change” challenge in the 1980s.

## Caterpillar’s Story

*The Caterpillar Way* is based on Caterpillar, Inc.’s loss in the early 1980s of one million dollars per day for three consecutive years. Today, “CAT” is the world’s most profitable manufacturer of construction and mining equipment and large engines. According to *The Caterpillar Way*, companies must occasionally make game-changing decisions. The book describes:

- ◆ CAT’s “change or die” approach to restructuring;
- ◆ The secret behind the company’s decades-long revenue explosion;
- ◆ How to use branding and product financing effectively;
- ◆ What true dedication and commitment to “Six Sigma” really entails; and
- ◆ The authors’ prediction of CAT’s stock price through 2020.

## Two Books, Ten Similar Chapters, Twenty-Two Interesting Take-Aways

- ◆ *The Caterpillar Way*: Caterpillar’s success can be measured using the Bouchard-Koch Scale Efficiency model (17).
- ◆ *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*: In an apparent response to the financial crisis, the nation’s overall fertility rate has plummeted by more than 12 percent since 2007. The Great Recession did not simply delay births but eliminated them (6).
- ◆ *The Caterpillar Way*: Management techniques such as TQM, Six Sigma, and engineering will never be anything more than fads unless they are accompanied by weekly review, objective measurement of results, and constant formal updates (47).
- ◆ *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*: The difference between population and higher education demand will vary substantially by location. The Higher Education Demand Index (HEDI) provides a better basis for planning (26).
- ◆ *The Caterpillar Way*: Great companies realize that if the only times they can succeed in international trade are when exchange rates are favorable, they’re probably not doing things right (63).
- ◆ *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*: To forecast higher education demand over the next fifteen to twenty years requires two pieces of information: (1) how many eighteen-year-olds will be in each location and year and (2) what fraction of those children are likely to attend a college or university of a given type (27).
- ◆ *The Caterpillar Way*: Because it is difficult to determine precisely what the Chinese government subsidizes and how, CAT tends to focus less on subsidies and more on trade restrictions and rules that prevent it from competing at any level of subsidies (75).
- ◆ *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*: In the half decade beginning in 2025, HEDI predicts that the cohort of eighteen-year-olds will decrease by more than 650,000 whereas the number of first-time college goers will decrease by nearly 450,000 (45).
- ◆ *The Caterpillar Way*: One of the fashionable ways to look at globalization issues today is to focus on which goods and services are tradeable in an international context. Tradeable goods and services are those for which the prevailing market price is determined globally (92).
- ◆ *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*: With the exception of 2025, in no year is the number of two-year college-going students expected to be more than 2 percent greater than it is now (59).
- ◆ *The Caterpillar Way*: Great companies know that the breadth and quality of their product line are crucial

to their prosperity (137). Contrast CAT's product strategy with that of Apple, which derives more than 70 percent of its revenues from only two products: iPhone and iPad. This has placed Apple in an exposed position (139).

- ◆ *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education:* The HEDI forecasts in no way signal the end of the four-year degree. Yet after 60 years of steady increases in demand, many institutions will experience significant challenges in the future (69).
- ◆ *The Caterpillar Way:* As they approach \$20 billion of revenue, many companies become their own worst enemies, developing cultures defined by laziness and arrogance. Here is how to avoid the arrogance trap: Cull the ranks of management and infuse fresh, talented managers who both extend and disrupt; then reward productive behavior (153).
- ◆ *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education:* For regional colleges and universities, increasing numbers of full-pay students may cushion the blow of decreasing overall demand. Still, modest changes in the predicted full-pay numbers are too small to offset the deep decreases forecast for demand as a whole (97).
- ◆ *The Caterpillar Way:* Great firms cherish flexibility. They do their best to avoid being held hostage by single-source input suppliers, labor union problems, unusual weather, difficult local politicians, or any other developments that reduce their range of choice (188).
- ◆ *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education:* Possible responses to HEDI data fall into three broad categories; (1) hard-nosed (budget management), (2) hopeful (increasing college attendance); and (3) nimble (strategic redeployment of recruitment resources) (98).
- ◆ *The Caterpillar Way:* In times of economic recession, many companies react in an unproductive way. CAT minimizes such inefficient conduct by making "trough planning" a regular and accepted part of its operating methodology (195).
- ◆ *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education:* With fewer than 40 percent of young people in the United States completing a four-year degree program, U.S. higher education lags far behind many of its counterparts in Europe, where half or more of all young people earn degrees. Analysts estimate the United States would need to increase degree pro-

duction by approximately 40 percent to meet future workforce needs (114).

- ◆ *The Caterpillar Way:* CAT's head economist, Don Johnson, focuses on the yield curve—the gap between the ten-year U.S. government bond rate and the federal funds rate—to predict the nation's macroeconomic turning points (226).
- ◆ *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education:* Results of the thought experiments (shared in chapter ten) underscore the limitations of policy. Perhaps the most important and sobering lesson from the counterfactual analysis that is presented is that demographic changes already in motion foreshadow race/ethnicity, family income, and parental education attendance gaps so great that even aggressive policy interventions are unlikely to eliminate them in the mid-term future (134).
- ◆ *The Caterpillar Way:* The two most important factors that will influence CAT's global success over the next few years are global mining capital expenditures and global construction spending. These two factors will ultimately tell the company's tale (229).
- ◆ *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education:* Because they are based on observed children in the 2011 American Community Survey, the HEDI forecasts are inherently limited to extend no further than 2029, when the youngest children in the survey will reach college-going age. Nothing can be ruled out for the years 2030 and beyond (135).

Both books contain extremely useful information. Each includes detailed graphs, charts, and a robust appendix. Grawe's book has 180 fewer pages than Bouchard and Koch's and thus allows for a fairly quick read. Enrollment managers, in particular, will appreciate the book's "region" and "institution-type" forecast graphs. Graphs in chapter eight include "status quo forecast," "alternative if income effects are halved," and "alternatives if race/ethnicity effects are halved" for both two- and four-year colleges (by region).

## Yin and Yang

It was not easy to identify 22 takeaways from these books. The task was made easier when it became apparent that these takeaways would likely be just enough to spur further exploration. (This exploration could include reading one or both books.) Grawe's concluding

sentence is interesting yet vague: “Armed with the right data and careful analysis, we can adapt to ensure that institutions of higher education continue to meet their individual and societal missions” (138). By contrast, Bouchard and Koch’s parting words are powerful and

direct: “Innovative leaders make game-changing decisions. They blaze their own trail. This is the Caterpillar Way.” Yin and yang are said to be the starting point for change. Considered together, so are these two fascinating books.

## *Paying the Price: College Costs, Financial Aid, and the Betrayal of the American Dream*

GOLDRICK-RAB, S. 2016. CHICAGO, IL: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS. 373 PP.

*Reviewed by Matthew Fifolt*

*Outdated policies that are not up to the task of funding a widely accessible, high-quality system of higher education have compromised the ability of hard-working people from all family backgrounds to complete their degrees and left millions in debt, without a degree, and worse off than when they began (Goldrick-Rab 2016, 9).*

*Paying the Price* describes the federal financial aid system in the United States: its origins as a mechanism for increasing access to higher education across socioeconomic lines as well as the ways in which it has failed to keep pace with the rising costs of colleges and universities in the United States. Through survey data and student interviews, Goldrick-Rab examines the shortcomings of the system and proposes alternative solutions.

### Historical Significance

The author states, “The creation of the financial aid system [in the United States] followed more than a century of investment in public higher education, beginning with the Morrill Act of 1862... [Furthermore] American states poured enormous resources into building public systems of higher education” (14). Over time, however, the increase in demand for higher education, decrease in state support, stagnant wage growth of families, and rising college costs has created a system in which a college education is out of reach for many working- and middle-class students.

Consistent with findings of multiple authors, Goldrick-Rab observes that a college education is no longer seen as a choice or a luxury (Best and Best 2014; Ferr-

ara 2015; Mettler 2014). Rather, it is viewed as “the only available next step and, indeed, the only hope” (19). At the same time, however, access to and completion of a college education remain significantly less for students on the bottom rung of the economic ladder than for their better-resourced peers. Goldrick-Rab notes, “In American higher education, a vicious cycle of exclusion and adaptation in which resources are unequally distributed in ways that preserve privilege helps to ensure that people from lower-class backgrounds stay behind” (20).

### Background of the Study

In 2008, the Morgridge family established the Wisconsin Scholars Grant (WSG) to help ensure accessibility and affordability of higher education for students who demonstrated financial need and were eligible to receive a Pell Grant. Of the 3,000 students who met these criteria, 1,200 were randomly selected to receive the WSG in addition to their Pell award. According to the author, this represented a unique opportunity to closely examine the potential effects of financial aid on students’ performance in college.

In addition to extensive surveying and document review of WSG and non-WSG awardees, Goldrick-Rab and her colleagues conducted 50 qualitative interviews with students over a six-year period through the Wisconsin Scholars Longitudinal Study (WSLS). Furthermore, *Paying the Price* shares case studies of students who represent different ethnic, racial, and family backgrounds as well as rural and urban communities and whose experiences were representative of the 3,000 students in the WSLS.

According to the author, these students shared two other common characteristics with the larger sample: (1) they all received some financial assistance in the form of a Pell Grant, and (2) they all tried to attend and succeed in college under financial pressure (32). Goldrick-Rab contends, “Listening to them will help readers understand why a well-intentioned approach to financing college isn’t working as planned, how it harms instead of helps, and how we can do better moving forward” (38).

## Federal Financial Aid

The Pell Grant program was designed to ensure that individuals from low-income families could afford to attend college without putting themselves or their families in economic jeopardy (91). However, rising college and living costs have reduced Pell Grants’ purchasing power and compelled students to work and take out more loans.

Furthermore, the current federal financial aid program is fraught with problems. For example, financial aid awards are created based on the total expected family contribution, which is a calculation of family income. However, Goldrick-Rab observes, “If a student’s family cannot or will not pay the entire expected family contribution, the student must come up with the money, usually by taking out loans” (46).

Moreover, because the federal needs analysis only considers a single prior year of income from tax returns and does not account for a family’s overall financial obligations, an increase in a parent’s salary or employment status may actually decrease a student’s eligibility for financial aid. Financial awards also do not factor in opportunity costs (the wages students could be earning if they were not in school). Frequently, these earnings are of considerable importance to low-income families. Simply stated, either financial aid may not provide money in the ways that students need or it is too little, too late (65).

Consistent with findings by Bok (2013), Goldrick-Rab notes that students from low-income families are more susceptible to leaving college without degrees but with student debt obligations. She observes that without degrees, these students can only obtain low-paying jobs, so that paying off even modest amounts of loans puts them in compromising financial positions. This, she says, is the real student debt crisis (93).

## Lessons in Scarcity

Goldrick-Rab reports that midway through their first semester in college, 78 percent of Pell Grant recipients indicated that they were having at least a little difficulty paying their bills, with 25 percent reporting having “a lot of difficulty” (119). Despite their best efforts to stretch limited resources, including wages from one or more jobs, many students had difficulty making financial ends meet.

Consequently, a number of students reported food or housing insecurity or both. Similar to Hamilton (2016), who recounts the stories of working-class students who frequently did not have enough money either to eat or to pay their rent, Goldrick-Rab notes that scarcity is unevenly distributed among racial/ethnic minorities and students from low-income households. Furthermore, she observes, “Sometimes silent struggles...resolve themselves; [however], more often than not, students suffer alone” (138). When students’ basic needs go unmet, education is far from their highest priority.

## Financial Aid and Low-Income Families

Goldrick-Rab states, “The circumstances, constraints, and conditions of family life have shifted substantially while the higher education financing system has remained largely the same” (139). As costs continue to increase, students and families find it more and more difficult to pay their expected contributions. The author suggests that the current financial aid system fails to recognize the complexity and interdependence of families and assumes that finances only flow in one direction: from parents to students.

In reality, students from low-income families often contribute money, time, or both to ensure their families’ economic survival. While there is rarely an explicit requirement that children share economic resources with their families, they do so on the basis of implicit understandings, norms of interdependence, obligation, and reciprocity (152). It is not surprising that students raised in families that shared everything, including inadequate or limited food, would feel compelled to also share their own financial aid disbursements. Yet such contributions can be counterproductive to students’ achievement of their educational goals.

Goldrick-Rab argues that the current financial aid system ignores the financial realities of many low-income families. She states, “The system fails to recognize families’ struggles with poverty or near poverty status, income volatility, and the lack of available support from social programs” (162). The author suggests that increasing low-income students’ college attainment may require finding new ways to resolve the challenges they frequently experience in supporting their families.

## Does Financial Assistance Matter?

As a result of the WSLS, Goldrick-Rab and colleagues noted that offering low-income students additional grant aid can “reduce their need to work very long hours...and avoid working at night” (176), both of which have been shown to increase time to degree. However, under the current system of financial disbursement, additional aid reduces the overall amount of loans a student would require but does not necessarily make money available for immediate use.

Students in this study had difficulty keeping the WSG. Some lost their eligibility because their enrollment status switched to part time; others failed to make satisfactory academic progress. Students also may have experienced an increase in family income that made them ineligible for a Pell Grant and therefore disqualified them for the WSG. Goldrick-Rab writes, “The most important lesson this experiment taught us is that financial aid is not money. Money clearly matters a great deal to how students experience college and whether they complete degrees” (231).

Goldrick-Rab suggests that the current financial aid system is an “invitation to debt” for low-income students (241). It entices students to “try” college but fails to meet some of their most basic needs. Financial aid cannot ensure purchasing power if it does not also control costs and maintain other subsidies for students and their families. “Vast numbers of students face a single, simple truth: financial aid pales in comparison to the real costs of attending college” (237).

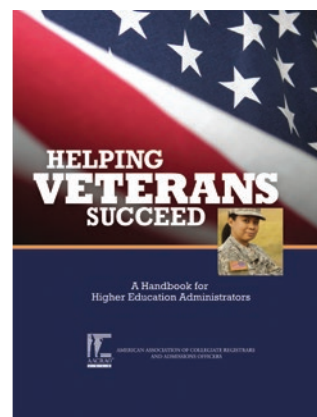
# Adapt.



### *Helping Veterans Succeed: A Handbook for Higher Education*

**Administrators** is AACRAO's first comprehensive guide to address the unique needs of student veterans on campus. Through 16 chapters, this handbook gives campus administrators the tools to effectively help veterans achieve their academic goals and transition successfully into the workforce. Written by experts in the field, it covers transfer of credit and prior learning credits, campus communication strategies, certification, orientation efforts, implementing a Yellow Ribbon Program, and helping veterans transition from the classroom to the workforce. In addition, case studies and appendices offer relevant tips and resources for higher education professionals serving student veterans.

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## Moving Forward

The author identifies a number of ways in which the federal government and colleges and universities can shore up the existing financial aid system, including recalculating and renaming the “expected family contribution” to “estimated financial contribution”; providing greater transparency in pricing, language, and policies that govern financial assistance; and eliminating non-need-based aid. “Spending on non-need-based aid (merit aid) perpetuates inequality” by allocating ‘scarce’ resources to students who have limited or no financial need (251).

In addition, Goldrick-Rab notes that colleges and universities must recognize that low-income students and their families have needs that extend beyond academic concerns. She advocates for the expansion of non-academic services on college and university campuses, such as emergency aid programs that make money available for students’ immediate use, better coordination of social services and their governing policies, two-generation models of education for parents and students, and more campus-based food banks.

Beyond these “fixes” to the current financial aid system, Goldrick-Rab presents a call to action to build a new higher education system based on accessible and affordable high-quality public higher education (241). She states, “Twelve years of education does not go as far as it once did, and after a century of technological advancements and up-skilling, it is reasonable to expect that some post-high school education is beneficial” (256). Therefore, the time is right for the United States to engage in a national discussion about making available high-quality thirteenth and fourteenth years of public education and identifying appropriate ways to pay for it.

Goldrick-Rab describes a number of states and municipalities that are already experimenting with providing two years of community college for free and notes that coverage of direct educational expenses such as tuition and fees would allow students to apply financial aid to indirect educational expenses including room and board, transportation, and books and supplies—expenses with which students struggle most. She suggests further that paying for the first two years would be possible by ending subsidies to for-profit colleges and universities (Angulo 2016) and eliminating tax credits that are “demonstrably ineffective” (258).

## Summary

*Paying the Price* is a well-written and extremely thought-provoking investigation of the federal financial aid system in the United States, past, present, and future. Goldrick-Rab does an exceptional job demystifying federal policies that regulate the disbursement of financial aid. She provides enough detail to underscore the faults in the system without overwhelming the reader. The author’s writing style conveys passion and purpose for reform, and she skillfully uses numbers as well as personal stories to present a compelling case for change. Further, Goldrick-Rab identifies immediate solutions to some of the struggles students face and incremental steps toward a more permanent and viable restructuring of higher education in the United States.

Goldrick-Rab frames access to higher education as a right, not a privilege, and observes that without a higher education credential, individuals are systematically locked out of nearly every decent-paying job opportunity, every safe neighborhood, and every opportunity to create safe futures for their children (237–238). She recognizes that higher education, especially among low-income students, is a bridge to a better future and notes that the effects of higher education accrue across generations and pay substantial dividends to students, families, and their communities (252). “By helping people from low-income families move up the economic ladders via college attainment, we greatly reduce the likelihood they will need social welfare programs in the future” (235).

While beyond the scope of this book, the author provides scant details regarding the capacity of public colleges and universities to handle the large influx of students that would result from implementation of her recommendation for free tuition and fees for the first two years of higher education. The author’s approach also seems to minimize the value and importance of student enrollment at technical and trade schools. Petrilli (2014) notes that alternative pathways to the middle class through skilled-trade positions may be a more realistic option and better fit for many students. Neither of these topics takes away from the overall success of the book, but their inclusion might have strengthened already persuasive arguments.

*Paying the Price* makes important contributions to the research literature on financial aid and access to higher education in the United States. It addresses both a timely and relevant topic and should appeal to

a broad audience. It may be of particular interest to college and university leaders, legislators and policy

makers, and individuals interested in higher education investments at the state and federal levels.

## *Are You Smart Enough? How Colleges' Obsession with Smartness Shortchanges Students*

ASTIN, A. 2016. STERLING, VA: STYLUS PUBLISHING. 147 PP.

*Reviewed by Matthew Fifolt*

In *Are You Smart Enough?* Astin poses a simple yet profound statement regarding postsecondary education in the United States: “Colleges and universities have come to value merely *being* smart more than developing ‘*smartness*’” (1). That is to say that institutions of higher education are so preoccupied with acquiring the smartest students in order to increase or maintain their reputational standing that they fail to fulfill their principal mission—“to educate people, to equip them with appropriate knowledge, skills, and other personal qualities that enable them to perform critical functions in the society and be responsible citizens” (37).

According to Astin, this obsession with smartness has created a pecking order of colleges and universities based on the number of smart students institutions can enroll, as determined by standardized tests such as the ACT or SAT. He notes, “The ‘quality’ or ‘excellence’ of a college or university is thus judged on the basis of the average test scores of its *entering* students, rather than on how well it *educates* them once they enroll” (5). This focus on inputs is akin to judging the quality of a hospital based on the wellness of its patients (admitting only the least sick patients) rather than the care patients receive.

The author contends that the institutional pecking order is based not on objective measures of performance but rather on people’s beliefs about which institutions are ‘the best.’ Long before there were commercial institutional rankings (*e.g., U.S. News & World Report*), there were shared beliefs and folklore about elite colleges and universities. These beliefs were validated over time by specific events, such as a professor being awarded a Nobel prize or the institution receiving a large government grant.

Astin identifies a reciprocal relationship between institutional resources and reputation: “Having more resources makes it easier to enhance your reputation,

and having a good reputation helps you acquire more resources. The most significant resource, of course, is smart students” (15). Regardless of the type of measures used, three conclusions may be drawn on the basis of college rankings over time:

- ◆ The pecking order of U.S. colleges and universities has changed very little during the past half century;
- ◆ Our shared cultural beliefs about “quality” in higher education show remarkable stability over time;
- ◆ The nation’s smartest students continue to manifest these same beliefs in their college preferences (23).

Consequently, institutions and the public “define the ‘excellence’ of a college or university in terms of *who* enrolls rather than how well they are *educated* after they enroll” (25). Again, Astin suggests that this preoccupation with acquiring smart students overshadows the more relevant questions of whether and how much students are actually learning.

### Assessing Learning

Astin notes that colleges and universities rely on standardized test scores and school grades to select students and assess student learning and growth during college. In fact, the most consistent assessment of student performance is course grades. Grades and grade point average (GPA), however, do not speak to an individual’s mastery of knowledge; rather, they compare students with one another at a single point in time. According to Astin, to truly assess learning, an instructor needs to “compare individual students with *themselves* at different points in time” (41). The author proposes a shift away from assessments that rank, rate, compare, and

judge students and toward assessments that enhance the learning process (43).

If U.S. higher education adopted an approach to excellence based on educational effectiveness rather than the reputation/supply of smart students, the consequences would be striking. For example, teaching effectiveness would be given greater weight in hiring and promotion practices, underrepresented students would no longer be considered a liability, and, at least in theory, all institutions could be ‘excellent’ within such a system. Astin states, “Institutional values would shift from mere *acquisitiveness* (acquiring more smart students, smart faculty, and money) and *self-aggrandizement* (enhancing the institution’s reputation) toward a greater sense of responsibility to contribute to the well-being of the individual and the larger society” (45).

## Equity and Access

Because standardized assessment tools are easy to administer to large groups of students and relatively inexpensive to score, they have become the default mechanism for comparing students for the purpose of college admission. Standardized tests, however, are poor assessments of student learning. According to Astin, higher education administrators often suggest that higher test scores and grades will ‘predict’ success in college, and often this is true. However, predicting success is largely irrelevant to the educational mission of the university (to add value to its students and contribute to their learning and development) (56).

Astin further notes that standardized tests disadvantage racial and ethnic minorities, first-generation college students, and students from poor and working-class families. Scores on standardized tests are frequently correlated with access to resources, which are unequally distributed among students (Goldrick-Rab 2016, Hamilton 2016, Mettler 2014). In fact, admission, retention, and graduation rates for students on the bottom rung of the economic ladder continue to remain significantly lower than those of their more affluent peers (Martí 2016, Tierney and Duncheon 2015).

*Remediation.* According to Duncheon (2015), student matriculation in higher education remains stagnant in the United States due, in large part, to remediation. Remediation is of particular concern for students who are first generation or low income as well as for students of color, who frequently have fewer financial resources

than their college-ready peers. “Unequal treatment,” states Astin, “tends to exacerbate inequalities of wealth, power, and race that have already reached unacceptable levels in the United States” (62).

The current system of remedial education in post-secondary education is riddled with problems. First, institutions use categorical terminology to describe a phenomenon that is relativistic and arbitrary. That is, a so-called “low score” may vary from one setting to another. Second, students must pay for remedial courses, even though such courses do not accrue credit toward graduation requirements. According to Astin, this sends a clear message that these courses are not valued among faculty.

Finally, there is little, if any, evidence that supports students receiving a radically different form of pedagogy or being segregated from other students in order to learn. Astin states, “Remedial students, given the opportunity, are more than capable of college-level work. They just need extra time, combined with support services, such as tutoring and academic counseling” (53). He suggests that providing more effective education for at-risk students “would not only further the cause of educational equity but also help alleviate some of our most serious social and economic problems” (62).

## Comparing Values and Practices

College and university mission statements are intended to reflect institutional values and the qualities their graduates are expected to have developed. However, institutional assessments rarely measure these attributes. While grades and test scores adequately assess a student’s cognitive skills, significantly less attention is paid to student acquisition of affective outcomes. Astin suggests that course grades measure “only a narrow slice of the diverse talents that higher education attempts to cultivate” (75). He states further:

*If college and university faculty are going to take seriously their institution’s commitment to cultivating student qualities such as creativity, leadership, character, and social responsibility, then they will have to acknowledge that grades and standardized test scores are insufficient as measures of student progress and achievement (84).*

An alternative to course grades is narrative evaluations, in which instructors provide written appraisals

of student performance. Comparable to a professional performance evaluation, narrative evaluations help students identify their areas of strength as well as areas of growth potential. With narrative evaluations, students do not compare themselves with other students but rather to “the best they can be” (76). This form of assessment requires faculty to get to know their students’ work personally, thereby strengthening their relationship with their students.

Narrative evaluations may take more time to complete than traditional grading, but many instructors have already laid the groundwork for narrative evaluations in preparing to assign grades. According to Astin, narrative evaluations can address anything that is relevant to student performance, including content knowledge, academic skills, and affective qualities. Narrative evaluations can also inform other instructors of how best to advise and mentor students throughout their educational experience.

Astin identifies a number of schools that are using narrative evaluations in addition to or in place of traditional grades, including public institutions that enroll greater numbers of students. In addition to providing students with valuable feedback, narrative evaluations allow schools and colleges to assess their educational programs more effectively over time.

## The Future of Higher Education

According to Astin, higher education in the United States can no longer afford to conduct business as usual if it is to respond to the rapidly changing needs of society. “The long-term social and economic welfare of our nation depends on finding more effective ways not only to educate the underprepared and remedial students but also to ‘add value’ to students at all levels of preparation” (100). He further suggests that helping more underprepared students complete college programs of study would lead to an “increase in economic productivity and a concomitant reduction in unemployment, incarceration, and racial tension” (103).

Astin identifies four promising practices to strengthen programs for underprepared students. While none of these recommendations is new to our understanding of college student development, they have been highlighted in the research literature as topics that promote college student success. Recommendations include en-

hancements to student involvement, peer interaction, interaction with faculty, and writing.

With regard to peer interaction, the author observes that the greatest untapped resource in college and universities may be the best-prepared students themselves. Astin writes, “There is probably no other group better suited to tutoring less-well-prepared students than their better prepared peers. If faculty could build this kind of peer tutoring into the curriculum in a systematic fashion, everyone would benefit” (123).

Better-prepared students would master course material more deeply by teaching it to others while less-well-prepared students would learn course content and academic skills through collaborative learning. If this type of mentoring/tutoring could be expanded beyond campus through service-learning opportunities, college students could work with underprepared students in the public schools, thereby strengthening ties between higher education and the local community.

Finally, Astin notes that writing skills are needed in most courses, and poor writing is one of the issues cited most frequently by faculty members. “Clear writing generally depends on clear thinking, so learning how to write well can also be an important part of learning how to think critically” (121).

## Summary

*Are You Smart Enough?* addresses issues of privilege and inequity in higher education in the United States. Astin challenges unspoken assumptions and taken-for-granted policies and practices of selective admissions and standardized testing and poses difficult questions about our education system, a system that favors smart students and invests the fewest resources in the students who need them the most.

Recognizing the enormity of the challenge of changing institutional culture, Astin presents incremental steps toward change. One recommendation encourages administrators and faculty to adopt a systems perspective in which colleges and universities set aside their institutional agendas in order to pursue a shared vision for system improvement (Lane 2015). However, given current methods for assessing institutional strength, even Astin acknowledges that a shift of this magnitude could not occur without an extended conversation about the culture of the university and the shared be-

ADMISSIONS' EVOLVING ROLE: FROM GATEKEEPER TO STRATEGIC PARTNER \* THE AMERICAN WAY OF STUDENT AID \* STATE COLLEGE SAVINGS PLANS AND PREPAID TUITION PLANS: A REAPPRAISAL AND REVIEW \* AFFIRMATIVE ACTION: WHAT IS NEXT? \* THE "INSIGHT RESUMÉ:" OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY'S APPROACH TO HOLISTIC ASSESSMENT \* HOLISTIC METHODS OF ASSESSMENT: THE VIEW FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN \* SMALL PRIVATE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES: RECRUITING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES \* COMMUNITY COLLEGE ADMISSIONS: KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN \* TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED RECRUITMENT COMMUNICATIONS \* INTERACTIVE SERVICES: STAYING IN TUNE WITH A WEB-SAVVY GENERATION \* FACULTY'S ROLE IN RECRUITMENT \* LOW-INCOME

R E A T E :  
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liefs and values that help shape the policies and practices of institutions of higher learning (6).

Despite the many challenges that colleges and universities face—including an obsession with smartness and continued reliance on standardized testing and traditional letter grading—Astin remains optimistic regarding the future of higher education in the United States. He writes, “Higher education is one of the most

precious resources that we as Americans have at our disposal” (127). Astin concludes that successfully educating our more underprepared students would go a long way toward reducing social and economic disparities and addressing many of the problems that plague our nation. For this reason, he describes the education of underprepared students as “the most important issue in American higher education” (62).

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