

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

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PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES: THE BOARD, PRESIDENT AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

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In a climate of unfilled seats, a decline in the number of high school graduates and “widespread concern about the price of higher education,” in the words of a November 23 front-page *Washington Post* article, it is vital that college boards, presidents and enrollment managers work seamlessly as a team.

Working in tandem, a president and trustees can effectively advance a college or university, if expectations are clear and each understands and observes its proper role. But frequently miscommunications occur around how “hands on” a board should be in day-to-day institutional management. Micromanagement and mixed messages can derail even the most competent of CEOs.

Boards can and should frame “*the big picture*,” setting the stage for long-term success. The trustees’ appropriate role is to hire, evaluate and support the CEO, holding him or her accountable. In enrollment, this has come to the forefront as numerous high-profile institutions have publicly come forward with re-statements of enrollments, class profiles and national rankings. A 2013 global governance survey by the McKinsey Company, international management consultants, suggests that most corporate boards still need to be more focused on both strategy and risk management.

Thus, we also suggest that effective boards should:

- Participate in the formulation of an enrollment strategic plan that includes specific goals for graduate, undergraduate, traditional, non-traditional and when appropriate, on-line programs.
- Participate in setting the desired profile for the overall college and each recruitment cycle, including the aca-

demical profile, but also the mix of traditional, non-traditional and transfer students.

- Participate in the development of a strategic pricing strategy, including the cost of tuition and fees, room and board, books, travel and living expenses.
- Participate in the development of a financial aid strategy to attract the desired student profile.
- Review internal and external publications and e-communications to ensure that they clearly and accurately represent the college and its programs (resisting exaggerated claims).

In addition, whether the enrollment function of the board is housed in student affairs or a standing enrollment management committee, *trustees should require reports and participate in discussion twice yearly* to discuss/assess progress. Reports should include detailed summaries that include marketing methodology, inquiries, applications, acceptance rate, profile of accepted students, deposits/confirmations and financial aid awards to accepted and confirmed students.

Questions to ask:

- How do tuition, room, board and fees compare to those of peer institutions? (A five-year trending report is useful.)
- How are gross tuition and net revenue trending (also over a five-year period)?
- What percentage of students receive financial aid and what is the average award?
- What is the academic profile of each component of the financial aid matrix?
- What is the student loan rate per year and average for a graduate?
- What is the freshman-to-sophomore retention rate of full-time students and the 4-year and 6-year cohort graduation rate?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly,

- What metrics of success will be used to gauge fulfillment of goals?

Moreover, trustees should be encouraged to keep abreast of best practices and trends in governance by reading current publications such as the Association of Governing Boards' (AGB's) *Trusteeship* to maximize their effectiveness. Committee meetings and retreats can include discussion and application of such articles. And finally, we recommend the occasional use of external consultants to facilitate discussion and provide valuable independent assessment.

At a time when college enrollments are falling at the rate of about two percent annually, the ongoing contribution of a proactive, informed Board working hand-in-glove with administration becomes imperative.

When both clearly understand and implement their rules, roles and expectations, operating strategically and using best practices, presidents and boards can maximize their effectiveness, minimize conflict and exert transformational leadership.

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They have collaborated on 11 books, including "President to President: Views on Technology in Higher Education" (Volumes I-III) and "Presidential Perspectives" (Volumes I-VIII). They edit the popular higher education thought series "Presidential Perspectives" (Aramark Higher Education), now in its eighth year ([www. presidentialperspectives.org](http://www.presidentialperspectives.org)).