

## **Enrollment Management (EM)**

**R. Stanton Hales**  
**Former President, College of Wooster**  
**Former Vice President for Academic Affairs, College of Wooster**

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- Thanks to Ann Die Hasselmo for the invitation to speak to this impressive group, a surprisingly large group relative to original expectations. Jessica and I are pleased to be part of a program aimed at cultivating academic leadership for this century. Especially interesting is the theme of this session, addressing areas that allegedly are “not typically” part of the CAO’s role.
- The longer I work in higher education, the more nuanced my understanding is becoming of “leadership,” the more elusive and complex a combination it seems to be of, among other things, knowledge, ambition, personality, active nature and a bias for action, versatility, judgment, and an inherent inclination towards “statesmanship.” At least some of these can be fed and strengthened through programs such as this one.
- Thanks also to the subcommittee (Barbara Karlin, Paul Koch, Kent Neely, and Mel Netzhammer) for the reading material on EM that they have suggested. It is an interesting challenge to assemble some thoughts in response to the article by Kathy Kurz and Jim Scannell article (*EM Grows Up*) and others, and I assume you have at least skimmed it.
- Given our respective experiences, it is natural for Jessica to address more recent EM complexities found in public institutions, while I will begin by focusing on the more “classical” side, represented by independent institutions, historically and most typically four-year, undergraduate, liberal arts colleges.
- My professional career in education is 42 years old, certainly longer than the 30-35 years claimed for the life of EM, and I do remember the simple days when it was just “admissions.” There was precious little strategic linkage among the various areas now so deep in collaboration: admissions, financial aid, branding and marketing, student life and student information systems, registrar, advising, alumni relations, etc.
- Demographic and financial shifts and strains of the 70s did indeed create pressures on colleges and universities to find more sophisticated ways to keep beds more consistently filled to capacity and to keep revenue more consistent and more consistently high. [I refer purposefully to “consistency” because of the need and desire to avoid the “feast or famine” phenomenon that began too often to

characterize admissions and enrollment numbers.] And we seem now to be in another such “bumpy” period.

- EM was indeed initially a simple reaction/response to these pressures, but I acknowledge that it has evolved into more than just a simple response. As Kurz and Scannell observe, it is seen by the press and a public as a true bellwether for higher education in general (surpassing football and Rhodes scholars). For this reason too, EM must be part of a president’s portfolio.
- However, I would maintain that in addition to these physical realities, there was also self-imposed pressure related to less tangible matters: competition for pure reputation, exemplified by rankings of many sorts, especially *US News*.
- Yes, gatekeepers became salesmen, but more accurately: gatekeepers became salesman who did everything they could still to look like gatekeepers, because keeping up appearances was seen as essential. Of course, it is not a matter of either-or, being all one or all the other, but it is really a continuum. In my moving from Pomona to Wooster in 1990, it was just a shift in relative balance. Reputation plays a role in desire: BA II’s aim for BA I’s; those out of the top 100 aim to be in; those in the bottom 50 aim for the top 50; once in, they aim for top 5. It remains inexorable! In other words: first survive, then advance, then excel.
- In any case, many pressures have led, and positively so, to linkage of old “silos,” to greatly increased collaboration among departments, and to use of data and setting more measurable goals. Effective presidents must be knowledgeable about all of them.
- This notion of “linkage” is easy to talk about, harder to achieve. It requires an orderly process of keen analysis, thoughtful (re-)organization, planned coordination, consciously regular communication, with a model for long-term integration. To do all this well is a full test of administrative and executive ability, a test of true leadership.
- And to exercise EM well is a natural challenge, one very much “at home” in institutions of “arts and sciences,” because in my mind EM is a pretty darn good example of a challenge that itself is both an art and a science. It’s not just science: good data and analysis, and it is not just the art of salesmanship, branding, and marketing; it is a delicate and delightful combination of all of these and more
- For many small, independent colleges, especially historically religious colleges, many in rural areas, the forces and pressure factors have gone beyond the simple three of full beds, steady revenue, and reputation:
- What are these factors? decline in denominational traditions in attendance; shift in geographic preferences (urban over rural); career education over liberal arts;

competition from state growth. Opposing forces: “rising tide” argument argues for greater collaboration among them (e.g. APCU), but “best of breed” mentality still fuels competition among them.

- In my experience, the issue of EM as a presence or an absence in CAO roles is not so clear cut. To be sure, I have known CAO’s (but was actually surprised to find this) who were proud to say that they knew little about admissions in particular, or EM in general, and felt that they and faculty should be able to remain separate from EM. I think this may be the exception rather than the rule.
- At Pomona in 60’s and 70’s, all faculty eventually served on the admissions committee, so all reasonable internal candidates for dean were increasingly versed in the nuances of EM. So when I arrived at Wooster as VPAA in 1990, it felt natural to find as Dean of Admissions (and former interim VPAA/CAO) a history professor who was an expert at linkage, collaboration, and all aspects of EM. Most important, rather than believing that a separate VPEM could take pressure off the academic side, he and I agreed that faculty were essential to all aspects of EM: from applications, to yield, to retention, to financial aid success, to marketing, and more. This was central to my five years as VPAA, and important during my dozen as president.
- There are various reasons for this, but one that is powerful to me is the belief through personal experience, that good HS students have a set of strong relationships with their HS teachers (good and bad, like parental relationships), and it is their anticipation of such relationships in college that is a major part of their college decision. Faculty presence in the enrollment process can be very influential; correspondingly, its absence is deadly.
- Having both a CAO and a president who understand EM and value the inherent and essential faculty role in it is the optimal situation, and thus I believe that programs like this one are as important for you in your CAO role as for any presidential role you might play. The greater the faculty role, the greater the role of substance in admissions and EM efforts and the less the superficial flash. Knowing how to cultivate and reward faculty involvement is an invaluable talent in presidents and CAOs.
- Finally, a substantial role and responsibility for the CAO and president in EM will also help provide greater protection against the ethical violations that, in my opinion, occur in the manipulation of data for competition’s sake in e.g. *USNews*. It’s a kind of grade inflation in many of the numbers submitted.
- As one example, measures of selectivity can be artificially lowered, and yield artificially increased, by defining an applicant to be anyone who just fills out a simple part I of the admissions form rather than the whole thing, or perhaps just

an inquiry. Responsibility for integrity in all phases of the EM effort lies with both the CAO and the president.

- The five institutional examples in the Kurz-Scannell article illustrate well that EM means different things to different categories of school. Each of you now deals with aspects of EM that pertain to your category, but who knows at what sort of school you might end up as president. Thus, I certainly encourage you to continue your reading on the matter, but whether CAO or president never to forget how crucial faculty involvement is to high performance in EM.
- I welcome questions and conversation on these and other related topics.