WHITE PAPER

ESTABLISHING REALISTIC ENROLLMENT GOALS

by Dr. Lynda Wallace-Hulecki

In one of the enrollment management leadership positions held by this author prior to becoming a consultant, I had been recruited into a newly defined role with a mandate to reverse the downward trend in new student enrollment, while maintaining the academic caliber of the incoming class and achieving net tuition revenue targets. At the same time, a new CIO was recruited with a mandate to implement a multi-million dollar technology initiative on time and on budget—one component of which was a new student information system. Both initiatives were defined at the highest levels as mission critical. As you can imagine, the challenges were many.

The starting point for addressing the enrollment challenge involved (a) focusing the collective effort on what mattered most within the context of competing priorities and demand for resources, (b) clarifying and garnering agreement on a select few enrollment goals that were 'realistic' and plausibly achievable when considering organizational capacity conditions, culture, budgetary exigencies, and external market pressures impacting enrollment; and (c) translating the enrollment goals into results-based terms in order to account for performance progress at the strategic levels, as well as guide performance management at the operational level in real-time. In brief, to be successful, an inclusive process of assessment, consultation and negotiation was required that engaged everyone from frontline staff to executive leaders in clarifying and defining meaningful enrollment goals. While the complexity and magnitude of the issues may differ, many (if not most) of our client institutions encounter similar challenges.

Consider the enrollment goals at your own school. Are they clearly defined so that they are commonly understood? Have they been agreed upon by decision leaders, including those responsible for implementation? Are they reasonably attainable when considering internal and external environmental conditions? Do they give direction to decision-making at both the operational and strategic levels? If the answer is 'no', then this white paper offers valuable insights that may be of assistance to you.

The white paper is organized into four sections. The first section discusses the importance of 'strategic' and 'actionable' intelligence (i.e., research, data, and analytics) in the management of enrollment, as well as the organizational conditions for building capacity in enrollment intelligence. The second section presents a model for defining 'realistic' enrollment goals using four lenses in analyzing environmental conditions likely to impact enrollment. The third section defines the elements of 'meaningful' enrollment goals that are both strategically aligned and sufficiently granular to be 'operationalized'. And finally, the fourth section describes the 'power of process' and a 'practical' step-by-step guide for formulating enrollment goals that are linked to performance management and accountability.

It should be mentioned that in an earlier white paper written by this author, a data-driven methodology for enrollment goal-setting (available on SEM Works website: www.semworks.net) is presented. This white paper builds on this earlier work and includes updated information on new developments in the field, as well as specific examples in the application of the methodology drawn from lessons learned at numerous institutions since the writing of the white paper.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENROLLMENT INTELLIGENCE

Strategic enrollment management (SEM) is inherently goal-driven and results-oriented. Increasingly, campus leaders are recognizing that to be strategic in enrollment management, reliable and systematic enrollment intelligence (i.e., data, research, analytics) is needed in order to formulate meaningful enrollment goals, focus on the 'right' strategies of potential high impact, effectively monitor performance progress in real-time, account for performance results, and ensure the optimal use of available resources. In its absence, investments in performance improvement strategies and program/service innovations are likely to provide only tactical and short-term benefit—an outcome which most institutions can ill-afford.

With that said, the initiation of an enrollment planning process should *not* be delayed until enrollment intelligence needs and gaps can be identified and addressed. Indeed, the opposite is true. The process of enrollment planning can bring focus to where investments are needed to build capacity in enrollment intelligence—which brings the discussion to two related issues that require clarification: (a) the need for a common language pertaining to 'enrollment intelligence', and (b) the fundamental elements for building capacity in enrollment intelligence. Each of these will be discussed here.

(a) Enrollment Intelligence Defined

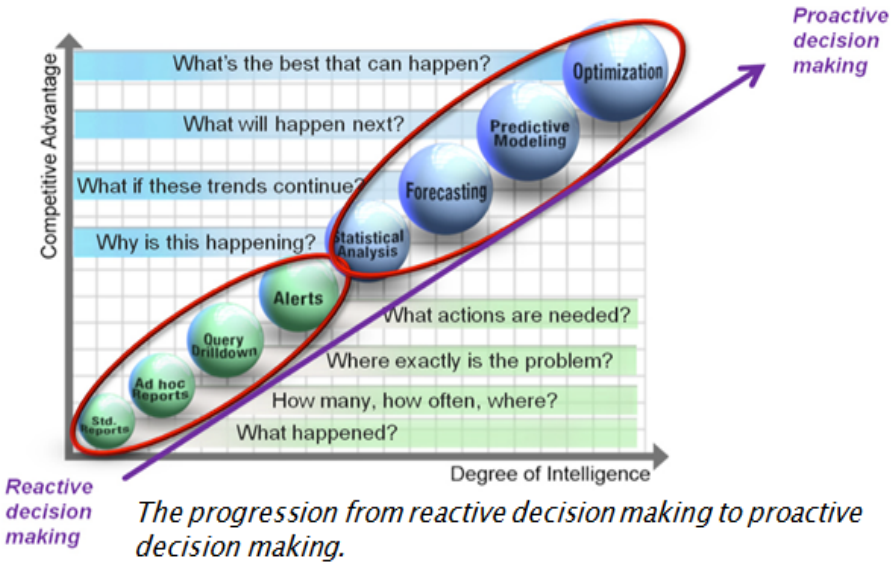
In the corporate sector, 'business intelligence' (BI) has long been used as an umbrella term in reference to the applications, infrastructure and tools, and best practices that enable access to and analysis of information to improve and optimize decisions, performance, and competitiveness (adapted from Gartner's IT Glossary, website, 2013). For the purposes of discussion here, the term 'enrollment intelligence' has been adopted to reflect the application of BI concepts to the enrollment management function, including two variants on the term:

- *Actionable intelligence*: Refers to the generation of the right information, for the right people, at the right time, to inform 'real-time' performance management at the operational level—at the level of a recruiter, for example
- *Strategic intelligence*: Refers to the generation and effective use of intelligence information to inform the broader aspects of SEM planning and execution including, but not limited to, enrollment goal-setting, strategy development, performance management, assessment of return on investment (ROI), resource allocation decisions, and continuous improvement processes.

Within an enrollment management context, the reality for many institutions is the inability to transform available research and data into 'strategic' and 'actionable' intelligence for purposes such as (a) defining 'optimum enrollment capacity' at a sufficiently granular level to inform resource allocation decisions and realize net revenue imperatives, (b) understanding the complex factors that influence college choice, student persistence and academic success, and (c) informing the development of enrollment goals and strategies linked to operational performance management and assessment of ROI for strategies employed (Black, 2008; Campbell, DeBlois & Oblinger, 2007; Davenport and Harris, 2007; Norris, Baer, & Offerman, 2009; Norris, 2008; Goldstein and Katz, 2005).

Recent research suggests that although higher education lags in the application of intelligence systems relative to the private sector, major advancements are being made as institutions strive to build capacity for high performance, sustain financial vitality, and competitively differentiate (Norris and Baer, 2013; Bichsel, 2012). Innovations and investments are being made in the application of increasingly sophisticated combinations of reporting, query, and analytics that enable institutions to move from the rudimentary levels associated with the monitoring and reporting of transactional data, to more sophisticated applications useful for proactive decision making, as shown in *Figure 1*.

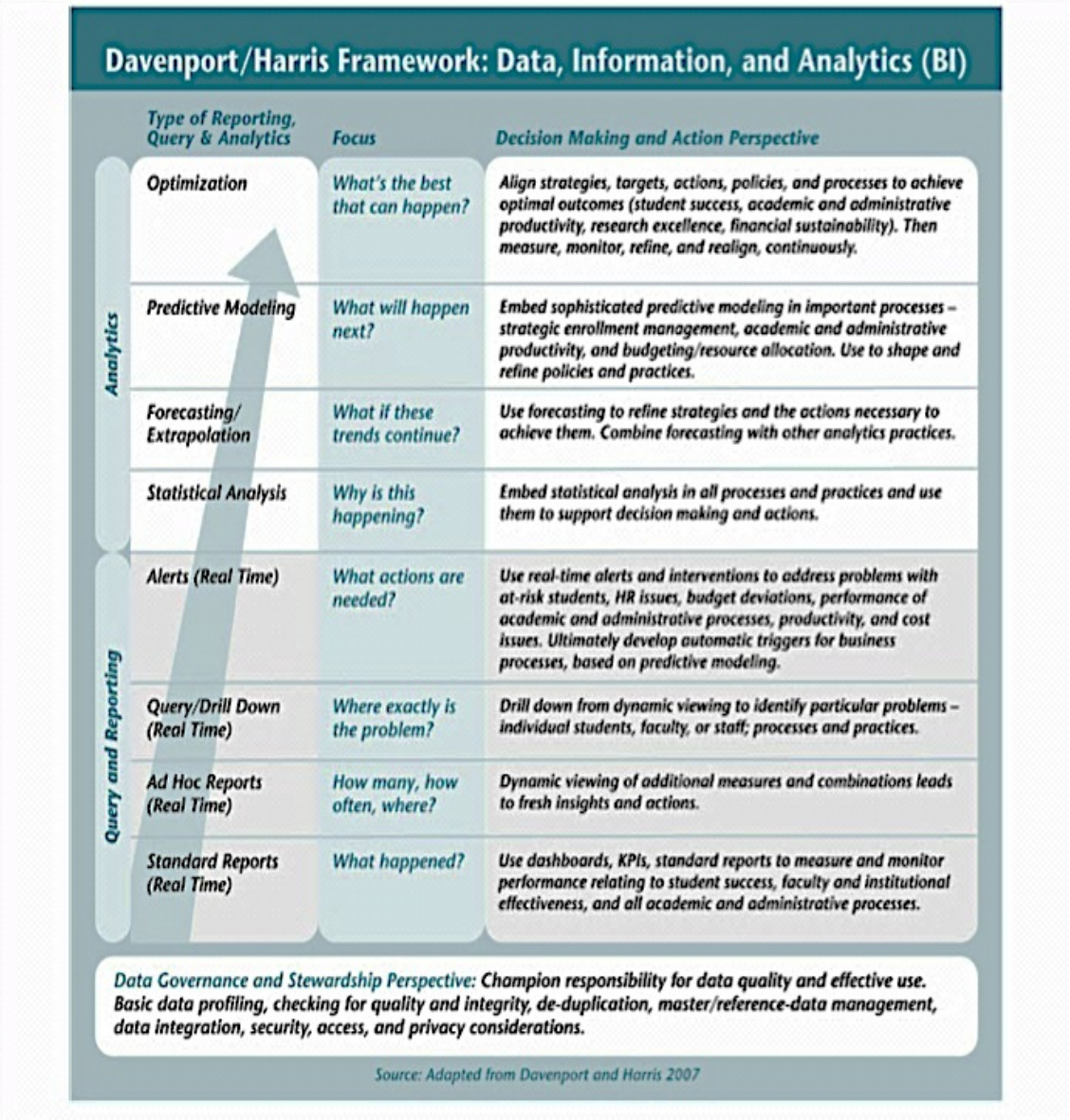
Figure 1: Typology of Intelligence Information



Source: Competing on Analytics (Davenport and Harris, 2007)

A subset of intelligence tools that is gaining increasing attention in higher education is in the development and use of '**analytics**' to support enrollment management and student success initiatives. Innovations in the use of 'action analytics', 'student success analytics', 'academic analytics', 'learning analytics', 'administrative analytics', to name a few variants on the term, are prevalent in the literature and growing in use among colleges and universities alike. EDUCAUSE—a leading organization of higher education information technology professionals—defines analytics as a tool used to address strategic questions or problems that encompass the use of data, statistical analysis, and explanatory and predictive models (Bichsel, 2012). For example, predictive modeling tools are increasingly being used to manage and improve the pipeline of incoming students, and to proactively identify in-course students who are at-risk. According to Norris and Baer (2013), optimizing student success is the "killer app" for analytics in higher education. On the basis of their research, these authors assert that institutions cannot achieve optimization of student success unless they master and leverage a combination of data, reporting, query, and analysis along the continuum included in the aforementioned Davenport and Harris framework and depicted in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2: Optimizing Student Success



Source: Building Organizational Capacity for Analytics (Norris and Baer, 2013)

In relation to reporting systems, 'dashboards' are gaining in popularity. Dashboards are a style of performance management reporting tool that typically employ graphical visualization of organizational goals relative to measures of performance progress that are useful at both the strategic and operational levels. Foundational to the development of these types of performance management tools are well-defined organizational goals linked to key performance indicators (KPIs), associated metrics and analytics—the topics of discussion in later sections of this white paper.

(b) Building Capacity in Enrollment Intelligence

When discussing institutional needs and challenges pertaining to the development of enrollment intelligence, most client schools immediately focus on the adequacy of their enterprise technology and tools for data management, reporting and analysis. While necessary, these elements alone are insufficient for building capacity in the generation and use of intelligence to effect operational performance improvement and strategic change.

Developing an understanding of the capacity conditions for success in enrollment performance measurement was the focus of this author's doctoral research and dissertation (Wallace-Hulecki, 2011). Among the most notable insights drawn from the best practice study conducted was the unequivocal importance of strategic leadership in advancing transformative change in organizational culture, behaviors, and performance management systems. Results from the aforementioned research by Norris and Baer (2103) yielded similar results. Indeed, building organizational capacity for enrollment intelligence and analytics is a journey, not a quick fix; and requires investments in a combination of elements underlying transformative change.

On the strength of findings from recent research in the field, as well as experience in consulting with a host of client institutions, building organizational capacity for enrollment intelligence and analytics requires at a minimum the six (6) fundamental elements depicted in *Figure 3* and described below:

Figure 3: Organizational Capacity Conditions for Enrollment Intelligence

- **Strategic and collaborative leadership** within and across divisional boundaries in advancing a culture of evidence, whereby everyone values data as a strategic asset, information is shared, and there is committed to investment in the development of enrollment intelligence systems, as well as in the generation and use of 'one version of the truth' in enrollment planning.

- **A talent team of data and reporting experts** who are committed to ensuring data quality, data sharing, and the management and use of data as a strategic asset—including operational data stewards, IT database and reporting experts, and institutional research experts who are adept at statistical analysis.

- **Performance management systems** that hold campus leaders at the level of the dean/director and higher accountable for actively promoting the importance of quality data and data-driven decision-making, advancing innovations in enrollment intelligence systems, and for the use of intelligence information in operational and strategic decisions (as appropriate).

- **A skilled enrollment analyst** who is dedicated to supporting the enrollment planning process and responsible for assessing enrollment intelligence needs and gaps, conducting relevant research and analyses, as well as assisting in the use and interpretation of intelligence for enrollment goal-setting, strategy development, and the assessment of return on investment (ROI) of strategies implemented.

- **A technology infrastructure** that includes the tools and applications to enable access, analysis and use of the intelligence appropriate to the needs and technical sophistication of the user community.

- **Enabling governance structures and decision processes** that ensure an inclusive and consultative process in assessing enrollment intelligence needs, gaps and opportunities; ensuring clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities in the generation and use of intelligence information; advancing enterprise-wide data management policies, systems and practices; and fostering an integrative process for prioritizing developments and allocating resources.

Leadership is the engine that drives performance improvement for sustained results. Institutional leaders at all levels and in all roles (formal and informal) must become SEM evangelists in managing culture to drive change by collectively leading the charge. Regardless of the level of sophistication of the enrollment intelligence at hand, it is important that you **begin the journey** by

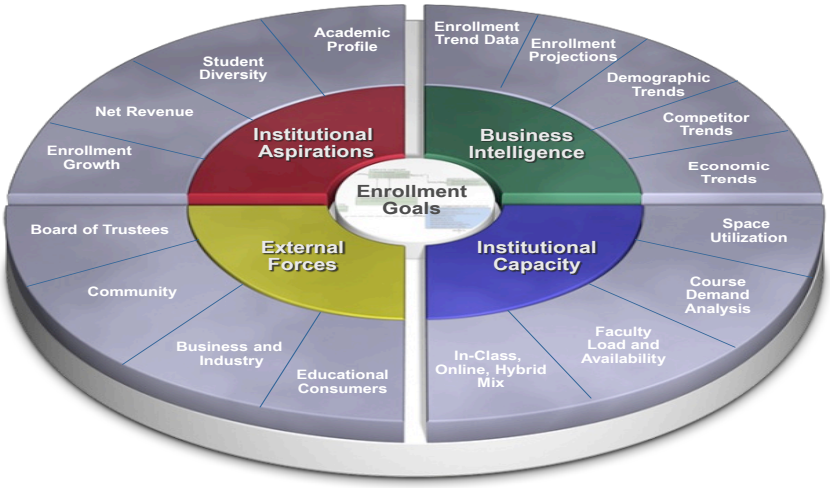
(a) **communicating** the importance of research and data to the vitality of the academic enterprise, (b) **engaging** campus constituents (academic and administrative) in identifying the critical research questions to inform enrollment goal-setting and planning, (c) **assessing** what data are available and accessible for the purposes at hand, (d) **investing** in building the capacity for more advanced enrollment intelligence systems over time, and (e) **fostering a culture of evidence** in the use of enrollment intelligence in decision-making at all levels.

THE FOUR LENSES OF ENROLLMENT GOAL-SETTING

Identifying enrollment goals is an imprecise science, and goal-setting is markedly different than projecting enrollment outcomes. In point of fact, projections are formulaic in nature and often do not account for the efforts of the institution. Conversely, enrollment goals more broadly consider data and other factors that reflect the contextual reality (past, present, and future) as well as institutional aspirations, constraints, and planned initiatives. Therefore, the enrollment goal-setting process must be grounded in an understanding of the factors and conditions both internal and external to the school that impact student enrollment behaviors and institutional performance—what is often garnered from an **environmental systems analysis**.

The enrollment goal-setting model depicted in *Figure 4* reflects a comprehensive, data-driven, and systems approach to enrollment goal-setting that applies a four lens systems perspective including: (1) a clear articulation of **institutional aspirations**, (2) available **business intelligence**, (3) an analysis of **institutional capacity**, and (4) an understanding of **external forces**.

Figure 4: The Four Lenses Construct for Enrollment Goal-Setting



The enrollment variables portrayed in *Figure 4* reflect only a few that may be used in undertaking an environmental systems assessment. Determining what variables are important for your enrollment

planning purposes should stem from the institution's vision, strategic plan and planning process. Indeed, in its most sophisticated form, a SEM plan operationalizes the institution's vision and academic development directions and, therefore, should be an extension of an integrated planning process.

The chart below presents examples of the types of variables that may be considered in an environment analysis. The variables listed are illustrative only and not intended to be comprehensive, nor prescriptive in nature.

Chart 1: Types of Environmental Factors

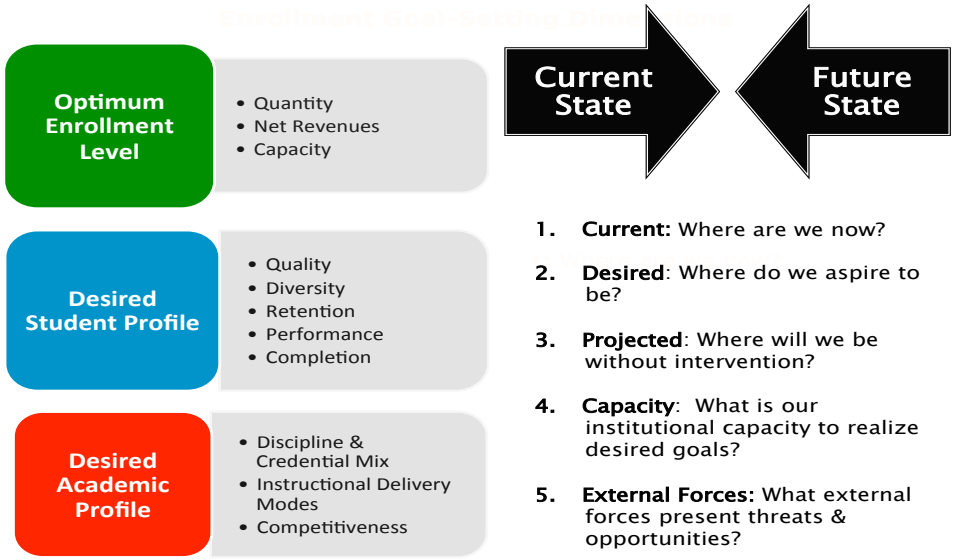
Business Intelligence (Trends, Projections, Analytics)	Institutional Capacity (Strengths & Pressure Points)	External Forces (Threats & Opportunities)
Marketing & Competitiveness • Reputation & image • Competitive market forces (market share, pricing) **Recruitment/Admission** • Inquiry/applicant activity • New student enrollment size & mix (e.g., freshmen, adult learners, dual enrolled, transfers) • Student diversity profile & mix (e.g., age gender, geographic origin, affinity group, FT/PT) • Student education goals • Program & credential mix • Applicant & new student enrollment projections **Retention & Success** • Continuing student enrollment size & mix • Profile of successful persisters vs early leavers • Student enrollment patterns (term-to-term persistence & year-to-year retention rates) • Student success analytics (academic performance, progression, time to graduate) • Attrition causation factors • Continuing student enrollment projections **Education Outcomes** • Employment • Transfer • Student Satisfaction **Affordability** • Scholarships $ awarded • Student unmet financial need **Financial Positioning** • Net tuition revenues • Cost of a lost seat **Resource Optimization** • ROI on marketing, recruitment, scholarship & retention programs	**Facilities** • Space utilization (class/lab room & seat fill rates) **Course/Curriculum** • Course demand • Service course dependency **Instructional Scalability** • Faculty load & availability • Course delivery modalities (in-class, online, blended) **Program Development** • Research infrastructure • Capacity to invest in program development & renewal • Instructional development support • Library resources **Service Unit 'scalability'** • Marketing inquiries/$ spent • Admission conversion rates per staff person • Registration wait times • Telephone inquiry abandonment rates • Advisor/advisee loads • Student learning support service backlogs	**Population (local, regional, state)** • Population demographics & projections • Community education needs **Education Participation** • K-12 enrollment trends & projections • College-going rates **Social Values/Lifestyle** • Values of educational consumers **Political/Policy** • Government funding policy • Funders/donors • Accreditors **Economic & Workforce** • Economic context • Business & industry outlook • Occupational demand • Labor context **Technology** • Applications in higher education • Emerging trends & issues **Education Providers** • Competitor context (private, public, not-for-profit)

Within the context of enrollment goal-setting, the objective of an environmental analysis is to identify the strategic issues and opportunities that are most likely to impact the institution's enrollment and financial vitality into the future. Whatever you do about the issues is contained in a strategy; the reason to do something at all is a strategic issue or opportunity over which the institution has some influence. Therefore, an environmental analysis informs the development of an **enrollment vision** and **planning parameters** following from consideration of the following questions:

1. What does the **current enrollment profile** look like (i.e., level of enrollment, student profile, academic program profile/mix) relative to the institution's mission, vision, values and aspirations?
2. What is the **desired enrollment profile** relative to the institution's strategic development directions?
3. Based upon **historical trends and projections**, what is likely to happen without intervention?
4. What **institutional capacity** (academic and administrative) is available or potentially can be expanded to realize the desired enrollment profile?
5. What **external forces** present threats and opportunities to realizing the desired enrollment profile and sustained financial vitality?

Each of these questions must be addressed from a **multi-dimensional perspective** on the optimal enrollment level, desired student profile and desired academic profile, as depicted in *Figure 5* and described below.

Figure 5: Enrollment Planning Parameters



- The OPTIMUM LEVEL OF ENROLLMENT (e.g., quantity, net revenues, capacity) refers to the level of enrollment the institution desires to realize in consideration of institutional financial imperatives and organizational capacity conditions.
- The DESIRED STUDENT PROFILE (e.g., quality, diversity, retention, performance, completion) refers to the desired student mix in consideration of the institution's mission and mandate, as well as priorities for quality and access.
- The DESIRED ACADEMIC PROFILE (e.g., discipline/credential mix, instructional delivery modalities, competitiveness) refers to the program/discipline mix of student enrollment in consideration of student and industry needs, instructional and organizational capacity, political pressures, and the institution's competitive positioning and context.

Following from the identification of enrollment planning variables, the required enrollment intelligence can be determined that is associated with each, as well as the potential sources from which the information can be derived (e.g., internal databases and reporting systems, market research, secondary data/research sources). A data/research and analytic reporting strategy subsequently can be developed to identify and address gaps and opportunities for the collection, analysis and reporting of the requisite information, associated capacity requirements, and priorities for the development of enrollment intelligence over time.

DEFINING ENROLLMENT GOALS THAT CAN BE OPERATIONALIZED

As alluded to in the *Preface*, goals must be sufficiently granular to guide decisions, prioritize investments in strategy, and influence day-to-day action. Enrollment management becomes a **performance-based management process** when enrollment strategies are linked to measureable goals that are stated in outcomes-based terms, often referred to as **Key Performance Indicators** (KPIs), and associated performance metrics (quantifiable performance measures).

Meaningful KPIs have the following characteristics:

- Goal-aligned
- Few in number
- Meaningful (at all levels)
- Simple
- Measureable (quantitative and qualitative)
- Outcomes-based
- Balanced (multi-dimensional)
- Owned (designated responsibility)
- Legitimate data source (auditable)
- Actionable (benchmarked against a standard of performance)

KPIs are typically established at both the strategic and tactical levels. Strategic KPIs (sometimes referred to as 'lag' indicators) reflect desired longer-term enrollment outcomes; whereas tactical KPIs (sometimes referred to as 'lead' indicators) are measures of performance drivers—those

critical actions that are predictive of the outcome. In the book, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* (McChesney, Covey & Huling; 2012), the authors describe 'lag' indicators as the measures that one usually spends the most time praying over; and the 'lead' indicators as the measures of the high impact things that must be done to reach the lag measures—thereby being both 'predictive' in nature and able to be 'influenced'. In addition to lag and lead indicators, there are also 'diagnostic' indicators that should be identified to determine whether cause-effect relationships exist between lead and lag measures.

More often than not, we encounter enrollment goals that lack specificity and measurability, such as a goal to "reduce summer melt", or "increase enrollment in undersubscribed programs", or "improve marketing effectiveness". Each of these statements reflects a goal area, but none are defined in sufficiently meaningful terms that can be translated into action. What is meant by summer melt? What criteria determine whether a program is undersubscribed? What factors determine the effectiveness of marketing efforts?

Well-defined enrollment goals should pass the **SMART test** (a term popularized by American sales guru and author Zig Ziglar): **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-based. An illustration of the application of SMART principles to the above ill-defined goals is shown in *Chart 2*.

Chart 2: Examples of Well-defined (SMART) KPIs

Enrollment Goal Area	Associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)			
	Outcome-based Lag KPI	**Predictive Lead KPI**	**Diagnostic KPI**	**Metrics to be Tracked**
• **Reduce summer melt**	• Increase enrollment of confirmed students who enrol in fall term by 1% annually to 2017	• Number of advance registrations for college orientation	• Predictive value of participation at orientation to initial enrollment	• Registration confirmations • New enrollment • Registrations for orientation
• **Increase enrollment in under-subscribed programs**	• Increase new student enrollment by at least 1% over the prior year's fall term in programs that have not met the registration threshold in two of the past three years	• Number of applications in undersubscribed programs by February 1st relative to prior years	• Predictive value of 'date of application' to initial enrollment	• New enrollment • Program registrations • Applications (time-based)
• **Improve effective-ness of marketing efforts**	• Improve the impact of marketing efforts on the decisions of confirmed students to enroll in fall term	• Increase in prospective student yield from inquiry to applicant, applicant to	• ROI of marketing efforts employed	• Inquiries • Applications • Confirmations • New student enrollment

Enrollment Goal Area	Associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)			
	Outcome-based Lag KPI	**Predictive Lead KPI**	**Diagnostic KPI**	**Metrics to be Tracked**
		confirmed, and confirmed to enrolled stages of admission in fall term		

A commonly used technique for ensuring the KPIs are focused on what matters most is Kaplan and Norton's 'Balanced Scorecard' framework. The value of this framework is that it brings a 'balanced' view in gauging organizational performance from multiple perspectives—from a customer (student & stakeholder) perspective, a process perspective, a financial/resource perspective, and organizational capacity perspective (i.e., learning, innovation and development).

Too often, performance improvements focus on operational processes without due consideration to the other factors that affect performance, such as (a) what our students value (among other stakeholders), (b) our capacity conditions for sustained success (e.g., staffing levels & skills, investment in innovations) and (c) whether we are optimizing the use of resources. *Chart 3* demonstrates the application of a balanced framework to the previously referenced goal of a client school "to reduce the summer melt".

Chart 3: A Balanced Approach to Developing KPIs

KPI DIMENSIONS	**ENROLLMENT GOAL** **Reduce Summer Melt: Increase enrollment of confirmed students who enrol in fall term by 1% annually to 2017**	
	LEAD KPIs (Predictive)	**LAG KPIs (Outcomes)**
STUDENTS: What do students value?	• Timeliness of responses to inquiries (phone, web, in-person) • Frequency of communications following confirmation of admission	Satisfaction with: • Timeliness of information received • Relevance of information received • The service experience
PROCESSES: What internal processes must we excel at?	• Frequency of visits to college • Frequency of visits to program web pages • Number of advance registrations for college orientation	• Conversion of confirmed-to-registered students
ORG. CAPACITY: How will we sustain competitive advantage?	• Use of KPIs by frontline staff/faculty in operations decisions	• Accountability is infused in staff performance management systems
FINANCIAL: How will we optimize resources?	**Diagnostic KPI:** • Predictive value of student attributes (e.g., age, gender, geographic origin) on confirmed-to-registered conversion • Predictive value of student behaviors (e.g., attendance at orientation) on confirmed-to-registered conversion	

Well-defined enrollment goals bring focus to the development of targeted strategies. As can be discerned from this discussion, there is an art and science to developing meaningful enrollment goals that can be perfected over time. When embarking on this journey, the following principles may prove useful in ensuring that everyone involved in the process understands the foundations for developing meaningful enrollment goals that can be operationalized:

1. Where possible, goals will be **strategically aligned** with the institution's mission, vision, values, and broader strategic directions.
2. Goals will be **few** in number.
3. Goals will be **measureable and realistic**.
4. Goals will be **granular enough** to be operationalized.
5. Goals will reflect identified **high priority student populations and markets**.
6. Goals will consider **resource and capacity conditions** at the institution.
7. Where related data and information exist, **a data-informed approach** to goal identification will be utilized.

THE POWER OF PROCESS

Enrollment goal-setting is often considered to be either too vague a process, too time and resource intensive, or even unnecessary—for example, when performance expectations are mandated by external funding agencies or accrediting bodies. More often than not, institutional enrollment goals are established as part of a campus-wide strategic planning process, and derive from a compilation of disparate sub-plans emanating from the work of institutional task forces and/or divisional planning activities. In these situations, the articulated goals tend to reflect the aspirations of a select few, more than the realities derived from a data-driven and inclusive consultative process. As a consequence, campus constituents may view the goals as 'lofty dreams' or 'lacking integrity'. Time and energy may be expended arguing more about the data than on the strategic issues that matter most, and/or on the wrong issues—which could lead to costly and even devastating consequences. Indeed, in our experience, few colleges or universities have recognized and harnessed the power of enrollment goal-setting as a process to focus on high impact opportunities, and to foster shared responsibility and accountability for institutional performance improvement.

Depending on the level of engagement desired, the enrollment goal-setting process can be as brief as a **half-day retreat** with key institutional decision leaders or as involved as a **two-to-three month** broadly consultative process. The enrollment goal-setting process posited here and depicted in *Figure 6* reflects the latter—a broadly consultative process that engages campus constituents in a **critical analysis of available enrollment intelligence** with a view to bringing into alignment the

school's vision-based enrollment aspirations with the priorities, capacity conditions, and capabilities of academic divisions and service units. The methodology draws upon information from multiple sources (i.e., perspectives of campus leaders, business intelligence analytics and reporting systems, primary research and analyses, secondary information resources) to inform the development of realistic and well-defined SMART enrollment goals.

Figure 6: Eight Step Enrollment Goal-Setting Process

As can be observed in *Figure 6,* the actual process of enrollment goal-setting involves the first **six-steps**. However, the formulation of enrollment goals must be aligned with strategies, integrated with SEM planning and resource allocation decisions, and tied to assessment and accountability for performance improvement. These essential steps have been encompassed under **steps seven and eight** in order to avoid a common planning pitfall—the development of strategy for strategy's sake.

In order to address the gaps between 'aspiration' and 'reality' in enrollment goal-setting, an **inclusive and iterative, top-down and bottom-up consultative process** is advocated that is anchored within the institution's academic and financial contexts. The focal point for driving the process should be a SEM Committee, if one exists, or alternatively an extension of a pre-exiting decision body, such as the president's cabinet or the dean's council.

To demonstrate the importance of an integrative approach, the enrollment goal-setting process should be **jointly sponsored** by the executive leaders of the academic, enrollment services and administrative divisions. The type of information to be systematically collected may change over time as the institution's situational context changes. Therefore, what is collected, how it is defined, the frequency of reporting, and in what form should be reviewed on a periodic basis in

consideration of the planning information needs of key decision leaders at all levels of operation. Of particular importance is that decision leaders not only **agree to what is collected and reported**, but also **commit to its use** in decision-making at both strategic and operational levels.

Effectively implemented, an inclusive and iterative consultative approach to enrollment goal-setting fosters a culture of evidence in the use of enrollment intelligence, understanding and buy-in to enrollment strategies, and promotes accountability among those responsible for implementing approved strategies. The consultative process presented in *Figure 6* and described in more detail below, is not atypical of the key elements associated with strategic planning—1. Research, 2. Vision, 3. Plan, 4. Analyze, 5. Strategize, 6. Develop, 7. Implement, and 8. Assess/Adjust. Experience suggests that with strong executive commitment to the process and when expertly facilitated, the goal-setting process from initiation through to approval of an enrollment vision and goals can span a period of **two-to-three months (or more)**. Therefore, the identification of the right individual to facilitate this process is critical to its success.

A designated enrollment leader or respected academic leader often champions the process. Whoever is selected should have credibility with the academic community, an understanding of SEM planning concepts and functions, as well as be highly analytical and data literate, politically savvy, a systems thinker, an effective communicator, and problem-solver. Alternatively, it may be prudent to have an objective and expert third party, like SEM Works, facilitate the process. In our consulting experience, we have observed that many schools seek external assistance to introduce an enrollment goal-setting process for the first time as a component of a broader SEM planning initiative. Insights gleaned from the consultancy helps to identify the capacity conditions needed into the future. A third party may also be beneficial in situations in which there is limited capacity to conduct an environmental systems analysis, a less time-intensive process is desired, there is insufficient bandwidth among the institution's leadership to shepherd the process, and/or in highly political circumstances where an impartial perspective can assist in addressing the hard questions.

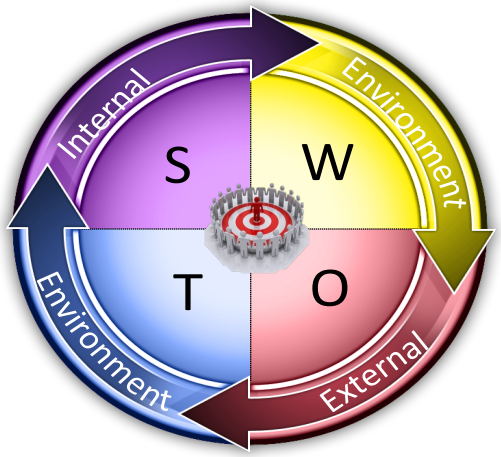
A description of each step of the enrollment goal-setting process follows, including examples from the field in the practical application of the methodology.

Step 1—RESEARCH—Conduct an Environmental Systems Analysis.

As discussed earlier in this white paper, an environmental systems analysis considers **external forces** within the local, state, national and international contexts (e.g., population demographics, social/lifestyle values, political context, workforce and occupational context, educational competitors, technology), as well as **internal organizational strengths and capacity conditions** (e.g., people, policy, structures, systems, practices). A common framework for conducting an environmental systems analysis is Michael Porter's Five Forces Model (or a variant on this

construct) in combination with a SWOT analysis, which focuses on analyzing the institution's internal **s**trengths and **w**eaknesses, as well as external **o**pportunities and **t**hreats, as depicted in *Figure 7*.

Figure 7: Environmental Systems Analysis



As previously mentioned, conducting an environmental systems analysis may be fairly time-intensive. A practical approach that some institutions have adopted is to identify a talent team of 4-6 individuals who bring diverse backgrounds to the task at hand. For example, the team may consist of an enrollment leader, a faculty member who is expert in geo-demographics, a data/reporting expert who is knowledgeable on accessing information from your student information system, a librarian who is adept at conducting secondary information searches, as well as one-to-two well-respected faculty/staff members who are skilled in facilitating interviews and focus groups (a value-adding technique for obtaining insights from key stakeholders, such as students, faculty, staff, community leaders, etc.). Following the identification of the variables to be reviewed in the environmental analysis (refer to the 'Four Lenses of Enrollment Goal-Setting' section of this white paper), the talent team can be set to work in collecting, compiling and reporting on what they learn within a predefined timeline of 4-6 weeks.

Another option is to secure the services of an expert third party, like SEM Works, to conduct an external analysis of the environmental context—what we refer to as an *Enrollment Opportunities Analysis*—which includes a high level scan of the external environment, as well as a focused competitive analysis based on a review of available secondary information sources and institutional websites at select competitor/aspirant/peer schools. This information, in combination with a best practices operations audit of the institution's enrollment management function, culminate in recommendations from experts in the field for focusing the development of an enrollment vision and 'directional' enrollment goals for the near-term (1-3 years).

Step 2—VISION—Establish Enrollment Vision and 'Aspirational' Enrollment Goals.

An **enrollment vision** is a simple statement that conveys the enrollment imperative within the context of the institution's vision, values and development directions. A few examples from client schools include:

- The right students in the right programs with the right learner outcomes.
- Reverse the downward trend in new student freshmen enrollment to regain market share.
- Strategically grow enrollment—quantity, quality, diversity, and program mix.
- Strategically grow enrollment where institutional strengths and capacity are aligned with student and industry demand.
- Strengthen student access, progression, completion, and lifelong career success.
- Seamless and successful transition into, through, and beyond the college.
- Optimize enrollment relative to institutional resource capacity conditions.

An important component of the visioning process is to determine the **5-7 high priority student populations and/or market segments** for targeted enrollment strategies. In our experience, most colleges and universities serve dozens of student population segments and markets. Key to the development of an actionable and learner-centered SEM Plan is the need to focus on those student populations and markets of highest potential to advance the enrollment goals of the institution. Typically, the priority student population segments reflect those most representative of the communities/regions you serve, such as freshmen direct from high school, adult/workforce development learners, transfer students, first generation learners, underrepresented populations, to name a few. Target populations may also reflect specific markets you serve such as by geographic region (local, in-state, out-of-state, international), by campus location, by learning modality (part-time learners, online learners), or some other variant on the theme.

Following from the development of a vision statement and the identification of high priority student segments, **'aspirational' goals** should be articulated based on insights gleaned from the environmental systems analysis. The aspirational goals should be strategically aligned, plausibly attainable (albeit a stretch to which you aspire), benchmarked (where relevant), and perhaps most importantly, **few in number** albeit broad in dimension as previously discussed

Ideally, three years of **baseline enrollment data** should be compiled on the 'current state' in order to determine whether there is stability or change occurring in the profile of your applicants, new students, and continuing students; as well as whether the change (if any) is desirable or not. Many client schools focus solely on aggregate enrollment trends on the total student population. In doing so, assumptions (often incorrectly) are made about the root cause(s) underlying the enrollment challenge. Is the decline in total student enrollment a consequence of enrollment declines in

applications, new student intake, and/or in continuing students? Is it occurring across all student population segments or only select ones? Without a deeper understanding of enrollment trends at a sufficiently granular level, misdirected enrollment goals may be established leading to misguided strategies and potentially misappropriated resources—negative consequences no institution can afford.

With that said, experience suggests that compiling three years of trend data often proves to be a challenge for many colleges and universities, particularly those that are absent an institutional research function. If this is the case at your institution, start with the most recent full year of data you have so that you can at least establish one full cycle of new and continuing student enrollment patterns. To the extent possible, the generation of the baseline enrollment data should derive from consistent database sources, definitions and methodologies.

A template for compiling baseline enrollment data is provided in *Figure 8*. In addition to three years of trend data, the template allows for the capture of various goal scenarios. For example, the '**P**rojected' column is intended to capture what would happen based on historical trends without intervention using either a simple method of extrapolation, or more sophisticated modeling techniques. The '**A**spirational' column is intended to capture the 'desired' future state stemming from the visioning process. The final column labeled '**R**eality' is intended to capture the views of academic and enrollment leaders stemming from the consultative process associated with Step 3, which follows.

Figure 8: Baseline Enrollment Template

New Student Goals

Student Segments	Applications				New Enrolled				New Student Intake Goals (P=Projected, A=Aspirational, R=Reality)								
	Fall 2012		Fall 2014		Fall 2012		Fall 2014		Fall 2015			Fall 2016			Fall 2017		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	P	A	R	P	A	R	P	A	R
Total																	
Priority Student Segments																	
• List variables																	
Academic Profile																	
• List variables																	

Continuing Student Goals

Student Segments	Continuing Enrolled				New Enrolled				Continuing Student Intake Goals (P=Projected, A=Aspirational, R=Reality)								
	Fall 2012		Fall 2014		Fall 2012		Fall 2014		Fall 2015			Fall 2016			Fall 2017		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	P	A	R	P	A	R	P	A	R
Total																	
Priority Student Segments																	
• List variables																	
Academic Profile																	
• List variables																	

Total Student Goals

Student Segments		Total Student Intake Goals (P=Projected, A=Aspirational, R=Reality)								
	Fall 2014	Fall 2015			Fall 2016			Fall 2017		
		P	A	R	P	A	R	P	A	R
Total										
Priority Student Segments										
• List variables										
Academic Profile										
• List variables										

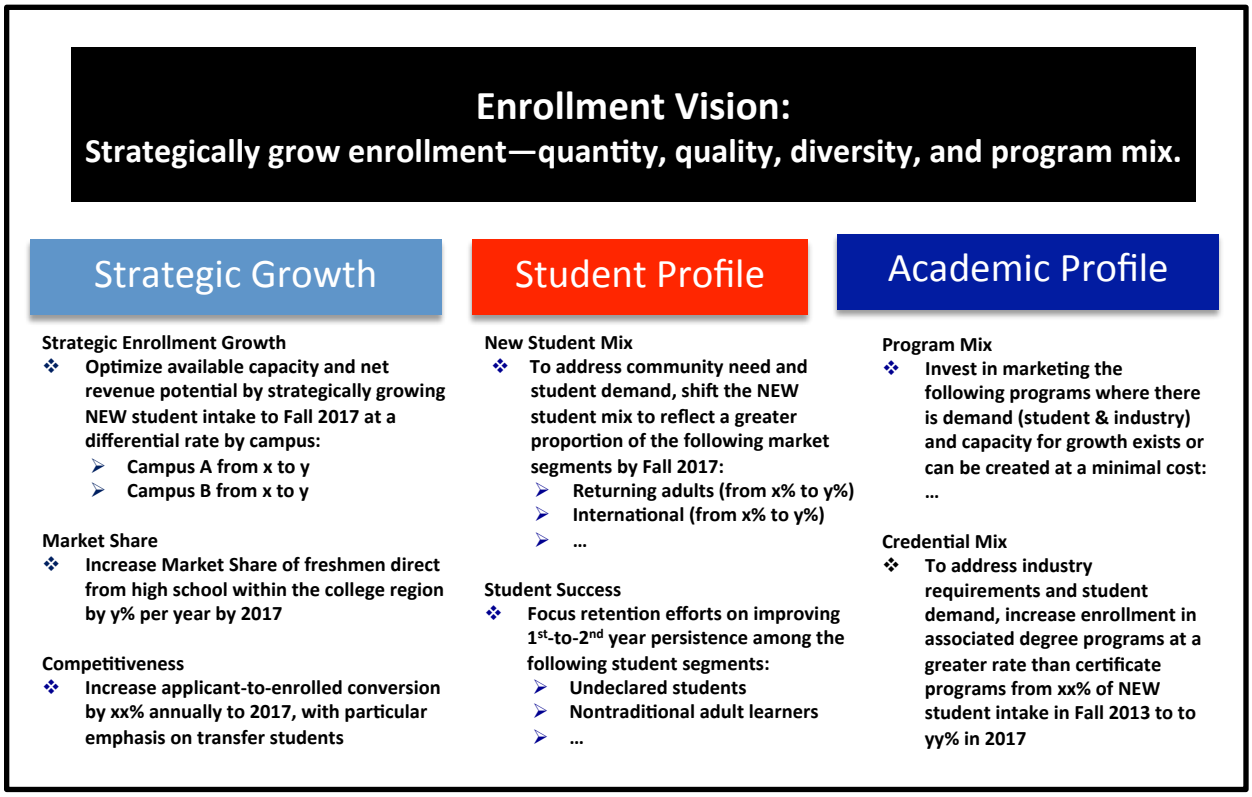
In determining the desired 'future state' denoted as 'aspirations', there may be value in **benchmarking** your institution's performance against peer, aspirant, and/or competitor schools. Data on comparator schools may be readily available from government data repositories (e.g., IPEDS, state-level funding authorities), accrediting agencies, consortium-based research initiatives, and the like. The compilation of relevant benchmarks could be a component of the environmental systems analysis conducted under Step 1.

To illustrate the value of institutional benchmarking, one client school identified an aspirational goal to increase the relative proportion of new students from one student segment—adult learners. Following a review of the enrollment mix at select comparator schools, it was determined that this student population segment at most comparator institutions constituted twice the enrollment level than at the client school. Therefore, an 'aspirational' enrollment goal was established to double the current level of enrollment over a period of three years. While this was a valuable starting point, 'planned' enrollment growth targets submitted by the academic divisions in the multi-year budgeting process indicated that only marginal growth was planned in programs of high demand by this student segment, reflecting a serious disconnect between the client school's aspirations and academic development priorities. Through the enrollment goal-setting process (detailed in Steps 3

through 6), it became apparent that in order to realize the school's aspirational goal within the defined timeframe, strategies were needed to incentivize enrollment growth, address capacity constraints, and create the conditions for program innovation and development. Alternatively, the school's aspirational goal needed to be adjusted.

A framework for the deliverable from the visioning exercise is presented in *Figure 9*. Insights gleaned from the information amassed from the environmental systems analysis (Step 1), in combination with an examination of the current enrollment state using the templates presented in *Figure 8*, set the stage for developing aspirational enrollment goals by the institution's leadership group for subsequent stakeholder consultations (Step 3).

Figure 9: Framework for an Enrollment Vision and Aspirational Goals



Step 3—PLAN—Consult Academic and Enrollment Leaders.

Determining the realities of the academic program context and organizational capacity conditions of service units goes beyond quantitative analyses alone. Other factors that must be considered include at a minimum:

- External pressures impacting specific academic programs/disciplines
- Priorities of academic and service divisions

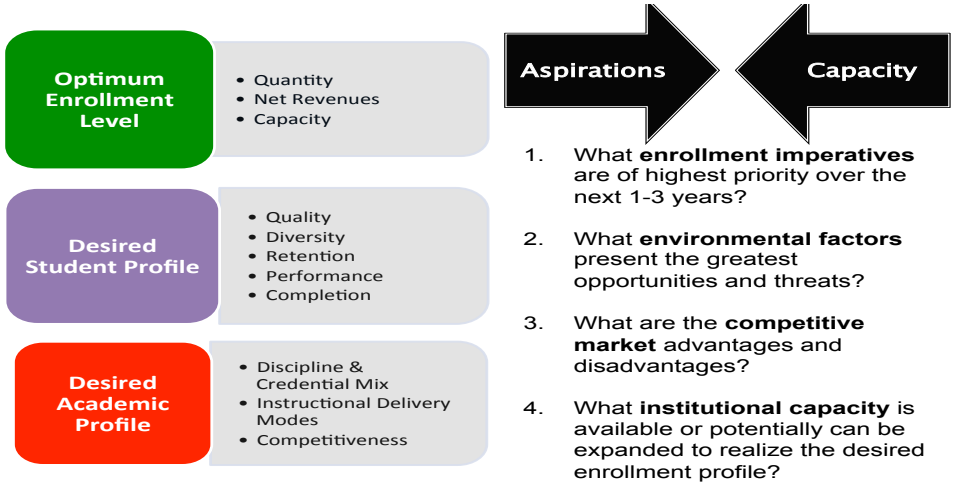
- ❖ Potential to optimize existing program/curricular structures
- ❖ Potential to invest in program and service innovation and development
- ❖ Potential to optimize the use of technology (academic and service units)
- ❖ Impediments created by outdated policies and structures
- ❖ Organizational culture and sub-cultures

This type of information can best be ascertained through **facilitated discussions** with the leaders of each academic and service division, and used to supplement and qualify the information amassed in the environmental systems analysis and enrollment trends associated with the 'current state'. In this way, the enrollment goal-setting process involves a **triangulation** of information sources that lends **credibility** to the process.

In considering the *Enrollment Planning Parameters* presented earlier, four strategic research questions may prove to be a useful starting point in framing the consultative process as depicted in *Figure 10*:

1. What **enrollment imperatives** are of highest priority over the next 1-3 years (e.g., quantity, quality, diversity, program/credential mix, student retention, net revenues)?
2. What **environmental factors** present the greatest opportunities and threats?
3. What are the **competitive market** advantages and disadvantages?
4. What **institutional capacity** (academic divisions and student support services) is available or potentially can be expanded to realize the desired enrollment profile?

Figure 10: Aligning Aspirations and Organizational Capacity



The deliverable from this step of the enrollment goal-setting process is a clear indication of the enrollment goals, priorities, and capacity conditions of each academic and service division relative to the institution's 'projected' and 'aspirational' goals reflected in *Figure 8*.

Step 4—GAP ANALYSIS—Analyze Gaps.

This step of the enrollment goal-setting process involves an analysis of the gaps between the 'current state', 'desired state (aspirations)', 'projected state (formulaic)' and the identified 'reality' based on feedback from the consultative process in Step 3. The gap analysis should be undertaken as a collaborative effort between the data analysts/experts responsible for producing the enrollment profiles, and the academic and enrollment leaders engaged in the consultative process. In this way, adjustments to the methodology and data definitions can be made (as appropriate), and the gap analysis can take into consideration multiple perspectives.

A well-facilitated **half-day enrollment summit** may prove to be a pragmatic approach to bringing clarity on the environmental factors likely to impact enrollment based on enrollment insights gleaned from all sources. On the strength of available enrollment intelligence, the deliverable from this process is a set of agreed upon **assumptions** for up to **three plausible enrollment goal scenarios**—such as a conservative, moderately aggressive, and stretch scenario. An illustration of the deliverable from this process applied by a former client is presented in *Figure 11*.

Figure 11: Template for Articulating Assumptions

Key Assumptions	**Scenario 1: Conservative**	**Scenario 2: Moderately Aggressive**	**Scenario 3: Stretch**
New Student Intake	Status quo at 2013/14 level	1% increase per year to 2017 in associate diploma programs	2% increase per year to 2017 in associate diploma programs
1st Year Student Persistence	Status quo at 2013/14 level	1% increase per year to 2017 in 1st year persistence of 'new' freshmen	1% increase per year to 2017 in 1st year persistence of 'new' freshmen
Potential Implications: • **Net Revenues** • **Capacity Conditions** • **Other**			

Some of our client schools have adopted a more pragmatic approach, and opted to forgo the scenario planning process. In this situation, following from the enrollment summit, the assumptions underlying a **single 'best-fit' scenario** are defined—thereby eliminating the need for a critical assessment of multiple scenarios as described in Step 5.

Step 5—STRATEGIZE—Formulate Plausible Enrollment Goal Scenarios.

If a scenario-based approach is desired, plausible enrollment scenarios are developed by the data analysts/experts (and others as appropriate) based on a **critical assessment** of enrollment in the application of the assumptions articulated in Step 4. In addition, implications are identified associated with each scenario (e.g., net revenue estimates, capacity conditions, anticipated positive and negative consequences). The deliverable from this step is a **synthesized decision package** on each scenario for presentation to the senior leaders and/or SEM Committee (as appropriate) in Step 6.

Step 6—DEVELOP—Establish Enrollment Goals.

At this juncture, the enrollment goal scenarios are presented to the senior academic and enrollment leaders in order to inform a determination of the **single 'best-fit' scenario** to guide the institution's enrollment planning. A template that illustrates how the resultant enrollment goals provide directional focus to the strategy development and resource allocation decision processes is presented in *Figure 12*.

Figure 12: Aligning Enrollment Goals and Strategies

EXAMPLE ENROLLMENT GOAL: INCREASE NEW ADULT STUDENT ENROLLMENT FROM X% TO Y% OF TOTAL INSTITUTIONAL HEADCOUNT ENROLLMENT BETWEEN FALL 2015 AND 2017.	
TARGET STUDENT SEGMENT(S)	• Adult students (25 years and older)
TARGET PROGRAM(S) OF OPPORTUNITY	• List of targeted programs of opportunity for enrollment growth in adult students
STRATEGIES	List of strategies development: • Marketing, Recruitment & Communications Strategies • Service Delivery Strategies • Scholarship Leveraging Strategies • Retention & Student Success Strategies (frontloaded at admission) • Academic Program Innovation & Development Strategies
TIMELINE	Delineation of timeline and associated milestones for each strategy • TBD in the strategy development process
LEAD KPIS	Indicators of effectiveness associated with each approved strategy • TBD in the strategy development process
LAG KPIS	Measure(s) of goal attainment: • Adult student enrollment as a % of total headcount enrollment
STRATEGY OWNER/ ACCOUNTABILITY	Individual(s) responsible and accountable for strategy execution
SUPPORT UNITS	Units enabling strategy implementation
ANTECEDENTS FOR SUCCESS	Organizational capacity conditions for successful implementation
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	People, financial, technology, research/information, facilities, etc.

Steps 7 and 8—IMPLEMENT, ASSESS AND ADJUST—Infuse Enrollment Goals in SEM Planning, Monitor Performance, and Adjust

Following review and approval by the appropriate governance bodies, the resultant enrollment goals must be **communicated broadly and infused into the SEM planning process** to guide the development of enrollment strategies and resource allocation decisions as depicted in *Figure 13*. Modeling **commitment to change** is not only demonstrated by engaging campus constituents in the enrollment goal-setting process, but also by creating the workplace conditions for success in the development and execution of strategies. This is achieved by effectively linking enrollment goals to strategies for performance improvement, by integrating priority strategies with resource allocation decisions, by removing barriers that impede the successful execution of approved strategies, by utilizing incentives and reward systems in-keeping with faculty and staff values, and by holding individuals accountable for results with tangible consequences (both positive and negative).

The review of enrollment performance relative to the institution's articulated goals should be undertaken on a regular basis, and adjustments should be made as warranted. Therefore, each enrollment goal and strategy that is approved must be aligned with a data/reporting strategy for performance management.

Figure 13: Infusing Enrollment Goals in SEM Planning

FINAL THOUGHTS

To thrive into the future, campus leaders must have the strategic and actionable intelligence to focus on the 'right' strategic issues, and to strategically deploy resources where the highest potential return on investment exists. Articulating data-driven enrollment goals in terms that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based give clear direction to the collective effort in advancing an institution's vision for enrollment success. The process of enrollment goal-setting can be a powerful tool in influencing positive change. Within the context of SEM planning, enrollment goal-setting can give focus to the SEM planning effort, foster commitment to and shared responsibility for enrollment outcomes, and establish the basis upon which success is defined and measured in meaningful terms. When linked to resource allocation decisions and accountability, the goal-setting process helps to effectively align the allocation of institutional resources to ensure the conditions are in place for successful goal attainment.

The six-step data-driven process for establishing enrollment goals described in this white paper brings into alignment the institution's enrollment vision and aspirations with the realities of the capacity conditions and capabilities of academic and service divisions. Indeed, it has been the experience of this author in applying this model at numerous colleges and universities that institutional aspirational enrollment goals are typically *at variance* from the enrollment priorities and/or capacity conditions of academic divisions and service units. Through the application of this six-step process, more realistic and plausibly-attainable enrollment goals may be established to guide the development of targeted strategies for improved performance and sustainable success.

Taken collectively, the templates presented throughout this white paper provide a framework for the systematic collection, analysis, and reporting of 'enrollment insights' that can be used to foster campus-wide engagement in strategic thinking and data-driven decisions. The effective application of the methodology requires a commitment of campus leaders at all levels to shared responsibility for enrollment outcomes.

If you have determined in reading this white paper that you are data rich but analysis poor, you may be an institution at risk. Developing the requisite enrollment intelligence for sustained enrollment success is a journey, not a quick fix; and requires the collective will to invest in building the fundamental capacity conditions: strategic and collaborative leadership, a talent team of data and reporting experts, a skilled enrollment analyst, performance management systems, technology infrastructure, and enabling governance structures. However, simply generating enrollment intelligence is insufficient to affect change. Fostering a culture of evidence requires campus leaders to become 'data evangelists' in promoting the value of data as an institutional resource, the importance of the routine collection and dissemination of relevant information at all levels within

the organization, and the systematic application of relevant information in decision-making processes at both the tactical and strategic levels.

There is no guarantee that by setting data-driven enrollment goals you will realize organizational success. However, within the reality of the current day's complex and volatile higher education environment, without clearly articulated, measurable, and realistic enrollment goals by which to organize the collective institutional effort, there is little doubt that you are more than likely to fail than succeed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr. Lynda Wallace-Hulecki is the vice president of research services and senior consultant at SEM Works. Her higher education career and consulting experience spans more than thirty-five years within both the university and two-year college sectors in Canada and the United States. She has extensive leadership experience and an impressive record of accomplishments in bringing about campus-wide strategic enrollment success, an integrated approach to academic and enrollment planning, and transformative change in policies, systems and practices. For twenty-three years of her career, Wallace-Hulecki directed an institutional analysis and planning office—a position for which she was awarded a distinguished administrator award.

Dr. Wallace-Hulecki has served on both federal and provincial committees related to inter-provincial student mobility and higher education accountability in Canada. Wallace-Hulecki has been an active member of numerous professional organizations (e.g., AACRAO, ARUCC, NASPA, AIR, SCUP, EDUCAUSE) as a presenter and a presentation reviewer. She has written numerous white papers on the application of SEM theory in practice, and recently authored two chapters in *Strategic Enrollment Intelligence,* Canada's first book on enrollment management.

Lynda earned a B.Sc. in the mathematical sciences from the University of Manitoba, as well as a M.Ed. in higher education administration—student affairs, and an Ed.D. in leadership and higher education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She has participated in Harvard's Institute for Management and Leadership in Education (MLE), as well as in the world-class Chair Academy for college and university leaders. In 2011, Lynda was appointed to the International Practitioner's

Advisory Board for the Leadership Academy. Lynda's graduate research focused on the evolving field of strategic enrollment management, and on the application of learned concepts in leading change, in building organizational capacity for enrollment performance measurement, and in building shared responsibility for enrollment outcomes with the campus community through an integrated approach to academic and enrollment planning.

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