

Strategic Enrollment Management: The Path Forward

One of the most important tasks for any university is to recruit and enroll a talented and diverse group of students each year and ensure that they successfully graduate with a degree. This task is the goal of enrollment management. There is widespread consensus across all three campuses on both the importance of enrollment management and the need for the University of Illinois to improve its enrollment management operations.

The University has made this a high priority, one that has been endorsed strongly by the Board of Trustees, beginning with discussions at its July 2010 retreat. At that time I suggested the importance of approaching the recruitment, retention, and success of students through strategic enrollment management and planning. Over the 20 months since the 2010 retreat, the Board endorsed the appointment of an executive director for enrollment planning and management, the commission of an external review of our enrollment management operations, and the report that was produced as a result of that review. I also requested that the campus chancellors and the University Senates Conference (USC) share with me any questions or suggestions they had with the report's recommendations to ensure that any concerns are addressed. Others have also weighed in with suggestions and opinions, which are welcome. In this document, I address how we will monitor these concerns as we move forward in this important area.

As a preamble, it is important to note that the goal of this implementation plan is to improve the efficacy of enrollment management efforts at each campus, recognizing that enrollment management must be student-centric. In other words, our goal must be to improve outcomes for students by ensuring that all qualified students have an opportunity to succeed on our campuses and to obtain a degree. As I have noted throughout the last several months as we worked to craft a strategic approach to enrollment management, there is not, and never has been, a plan to change the locus of decision-making regarding admissions decisions or financial aid offers for undergraduate students. These decisions will continue to be made at the campus and college levels following the processes currently in place. In the final analyses, the success of these efforts must be gauged in terms of student experiences and success, as each campus strives for excellence in student recruitment and enrollment.

ENROLLMENT GOALS (RECOMMENDATIONS 1, 2, AND 3)

The first step in implementing a systematic approach to enrollment management is to establish strategic enrollment goals in a timely manner (*Recommendation 1*) through a collaborative process involving program-, college-, campus-, and University-level decision makers (*Recommendation 2*). The USC supported Recommendations 1 and 2.

To implement these recommendations, the vice president for academic affairs (VPAA) and three campus provosts will constitute an *Enrollment Management Policy Council*. Working together, they will recommend to the president and the chancellors a process and relevant mechanisms for setting enrollment strategies and annual enrollment goals for each college and campus. Two concurrent sets of activities must be performed to set these enrollment targets (it will be important to ensure that the first set of activities inform the second, and vice-versa):

- (i) First, each college, working with the provost, should establish strategic enrollment goals for the college. In establishing these goals the colleges should follow current practices regarding consultation with departmental and program administrative officers and faculty governance groups.
- (ii) The chancellors and the president, on recommendation of the Enrollment Management Policy Council (EMPC), will establish overall University and campus goals and policies regarding first-year and transfer enrollment, student mix and diversity, program fields (viz. STEM), financial aid, and other strategic enrollment parameters.

Given the USC's support for establishing a formal goal-setting process, I expect that discussions will begin immediately so that processes are in place to set enrollment goals for the entering class in 2013. The outputs of the process will include targets for the size and composition of freshmen and transfer enrollment at each campus.

Recommendation 3 of the report addresses long-term enrollment goals at each campus. Decisions regarding long-term enrollment goals for each campus should, of course, be the result of a deliberative and consultative process. This process should involve the chancellors and provosts with input from deans, program chairs, and faculty and should be part of the overall goal setting process described in (i) and (ii) above.

STUDENT DIVERSITY (RECOMMENDATIONS 4, 5, AND 6)

Recommendations 4, 5, and 6 of the report emphasize the paramount importance of student diversity in the context of enrollment goals. They note the importance of setting clear goals, formulating plans for achieving those goals, coordinating the activities of enrollment professionals working toward those goals, and establishing clear accountability for results.

There is widespread consensus that student diversity is an important aspect of the University's mission. Each of our campuses and colleges is focused on improving student diversity. The USC also supports the goal of student diversity, and senators provided many valuable comments on this recommendation. For example, some senators urged that diversity be viewed more broadly than just ethnic diversity. Others noted that diversity should be an integral part of articulating what a class looks like. A key question was how department level input will be coordinated. Cost was another concern.

It has always been my position that student diversity should be an integral aspect in articulating enrollment goals. Thus, I believe that an effective process for establishing diversity goals (*Recommendation 4*) is to consider them as an integral part of the college-, campus-, and University-level goal-setting processes described in (i) and (ii) above.

Concern was expressed that any coordination of diversity recruitment across campuses, as suggested by *Recommendations 5 and 6*, may result in goals not consistent with those established by individual colleges or campuses. This concern is allayed by noting that the intent is to better coordinate diversity recruitment efforts so that the goals established by the campuses are more effectively achieved. Each campus is investing additional resources in diversity recruitment and retention. This is very encouraging. However, these separate efforts will be more effective and cost less with greater coordination. Successful

examples of University-coordinated diversity effort include the recently enhanced President Award Program (PAP) and recruitment initiatives such as the Salute to Academic Achievement and attendant activities.

JOINING THE COMMON APPLICATION CONSORTIUM (RECOMMENDATION 7)

Recommendation 7 of the report suggests that the University join the Common Application Consortium. Over 450 schools nationally are now part of this consortium and over 750,000 students submit their college applications using the consortium's website. While a number of the senators felt that joining the consortium will likely be beneficial for our campuses, there was also concern that not enough data was available to make a conclusive decision at this time. Especially noted was the lack of information on the costs of adopting the common application—including the cost and feasibility of adapting existing information systems. The opinion was also expressed that we need to learn from those who have already adopted or are currently in the process of adopting the common application.

To answer these and related questions, I will charge a committee headed by the VPAA or his representative to conduct an assessment study. The committee will comprise the three individuals responsible for admissions at each campus, a dean from one of the campuses, a member of the USC, a member of the VPAA staff, and an IT administrator who is conversant with the Student Information Systems (SIS) and other enrollment data systems. The committee may seek the help of external consultants if needed. The committee will be expected to speak with representatives of the Common Application Consortium, selected institutions that have adopted the common application or are in the process of doing so and appropriate campus groups.

Once the study is completed, the president and chancellors, in consultation with the provosts and other stakeholders will be in a position to make a decision about whether we will adopt this recommendation, and, if so, how we can implement it most effectively.

ENROLLMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS (RECOMMENDATIONS 8 AND 9)

Recommendations 8 and 9 of the report deal with information system platforms for enrollment management. The first called for providing permeable access to each campus' SIS for authorized enrollment management staff across all campuses. The second called for developing a University-wide strategy to support enrollment information systems in order to generate cost savings in the purchase, maintenance, and updating of the systems.

While supportive of investing in good IT systems, senators felt that a more detailed cost analysis was necessary, including the cost of abandoning legacy systems. In addition, the workload for the IT department and the impact on the implementation timetable of other IT projects should also be reviewed.

I will direct the executive director of information technology to prepare a report addressing the feasibility of implementing these recommendations, including a full cost benefit analysis, estimated time to complete the project, and potential impact on other IT priorities. This study will also look at the feasibility of facilitating data and information sharing among campuses without creating a new central data system. Once this report is completed, I will consult with the chancellors regarding if, when, and how to move forward in this area.

Legal counsel as well as experts in privacy laws and data security will also be consulted to evaluate privacy issues pertaining to student data systems. The provosts and enrollment professionals at the three campuses will be consulted to develop the list of individuals who would have access to the system and in designing appropriate training and accountability for those individuals.

ADMISSIONS AND FINANCIAL AID PROCESSING SYSTEM (RECOMMENDATION 10)

The recommendation suggests that cost efficiencies can be gained by creating a shared service center for certain common processing functions performed by the admission and financial aid offices at the three campuses. For example, financial aid offices follow standardized processes to determine financial needs of admitted students. Providing these services through a shared service center could reduce cost of performing these functions. The viability of such a service center depends on having shared access to student information systems as described in the previous recommendation. Thus it is contingent on the results of the feasibility study outlined earlier. Once the structure of the IT system is clarified, the Enrollment Management Policy Council will make a determination regarding the nature and potential scope of the service center and questions regarding cost and personnel can be answered. The recommendation will be forwarded to the president and chancellors for a final decision. The design of the service center must be guided by the principle that all student admission decisions and financial aid offers—which have historically been made at the campus level—must continue to be part of campus operations. The service center will provide support services to facilitate the implementation of those decisions.

FINANCIAL AID PROGRAMS (RECOMMENDATIONS 11, 13, 14, 15, AND 16)

These recommendations propose measures to improve the effectiveness of financial aid and scholarship programs. There was broad support for the goal of increasing financial aid and scholarships and using those resources as effectively and strategically as possible. However, senators noted that the report currently lacked clarity in how these recommendations would be implemented.

We have already taken a number of steps to improve our financial aid programs. In June 2011, at my request, the University of Illinois Foundation initiated the *Access Illinois* scholarship program to raise \$100 million in private gifts to support financial aid and scholarships for our students. These funds would be in addition to scholarships raised during the recently completed *Brilliant Futures* campaign. Each of the three chancellors has joined me in bringing the message to our friends and alumni in support of this important priority. We have also worked with the Foundation to develop a matching program under the *Access Illinois* initiative to leverage gift dollars, providing more incentive for donors to contribute to student scholarships. Consistent with suggestions in *Recommendation 16*, the matching program emphasizes scholarship funds at the campus level to accommodate students who are initially unaffiliated with a college and students who may transfer from one college to another.

Working with the VPAA and chancellors, I've also instituted mechanisms to improve the effectiveness of the financial aid programs at each campus. Given the importance of financial aid in ensuring that a broad cross section of students has access to a University of Illinois education, all three campuses increased their financial aid budget this year. My office also increased the allocation for the President's Award Program (PAP) from \$4.5 million a year to \$7.25M. PAP, which provides financial support to students from underrepresented groups from throughout the state, was significantly enhanced this year by

increasing the monetary amount of the award, increasing award qualifications, and instituting a minimum GPA to retain the award. One suggestion made was that the University should adopt a broad view of diversity. The PAP is a good example of how to implement this suggestion. The PAP supports students from underrepresented ethnic groups, underrepresented Illinois counties, and low-income families.

Another important step I encouraged this year was to improve coordination between University (PAP)-, campus-, and college-level scholarship programs to provide each recipient with a consolidated award that is communicated through a single message, as suggested by *Recommendation 11*. This example of coordinated communication (as opposed to receiving separate letters from different financial aid offices) provides applicants with more timely and complete information and is typically more effective in improving yield. Parallel to this effort, I also asked the campuses to offer more multi-year awards as opposed to awards for only a student's first year as suggested in *Recommendation 15*. Multi-year awards, which are contingent on the student maintaining academic standing and tailored to his or her financial need, reduce financial uncertainty for students and their families and increase the likelihood of enrollment. Campus financial aid and admission offices are working closely with the colleges to expand both these efforts, and I will encourage them to continue to do so.

Given the important role that financial aid plays in ensuring that the campuses attract a mix of students that optimizes student opportunity and experience, the University devotes substantial institutional funds to financial aid programs (exceeding \$51 million in 2011 and projected to be approximately \$59 million this year). It is important, therefore, that we ensure that these resources are being used as effectively as possible. This is the intent of *Recommendations 13* and *14*. In essence the plan calls for careful analyses of the impact of financial aid in meeting enrollment goals, facilitating student success, and continuously improving the alignment of financial aid strategies with campus enrollment, retention, and graduation goals. Sophisticated approaches for such analysis have been developed and are available from external groups that specialize in these kinds of services. Therefore, at the appropriate time we may solicit Requests for Information (RFI) from potential providers of this kind of service.

I'll reiterate that decisions regarding individual financial aid and scholarship offers have historically been made at the campus level and that will remain the case. The term "centralized" in the context of these recommendations refers to the coordination of individual campus-level and college-level financial aid decisions. Such coordination, as noted earlier, would maximize the impact of those decisions and benefit prospective students. All campus level financial aid and scholarship resources will remain within the campus and continue to be part of campus operations.

TUITION (RECOMMENDATION 12)

An important recommendation made in the report that enjoys broad support is that tuition decisions be made by the end of February or earlier, if possible. I am happy to note that with the concurrence of the Board of Trustees we announced tuition rates for new students in 2012 at the January meeting of the board, and I expect that we will follow this schedule in the future. In the past tuition decisions were made later, sometimes as late as June. The early tuition decision will allow admission and financial aid professionals to communicate financial aid offers earlier and will assist in providing prospective students and their families with information in a timely manner.

BRANDING AND MARKETING (RECOMMENDATION 17, 18, 19, AND 20)

The report recommended that enrollment efforts could be enhanced by capitalizing on the University's brand in communications to prospective students while retaining strong messages of campus identity. Based on the wide-ranging feedback I have received I want to reaffirm my earlier statement that all existing branding will remain unchanged and campus identities will remain as they are today. Any potential review of University and campus branding would be made outside of the current enrollment management discussions. Such a branding review, if pursued, would involve all campus stakeholders and would be led by a committee of campus leaders. There are no plans for such a review.

PATHWAY AGREEMENT BETWEEN CAMPUSES (RECOMMENDATION 21)

"Pathway" agreements provide the ability for students from one institution to transfer to another if they are qualified to do so and admitted. The arrangements are built around articulation agreements that allow credits earned by a student at one institution to be transferred to another. Each of our campuses has formal articulation agreements with many community colleges that have facilitated students from community colleges transferring to our campuses if they are admitted. The agreements also allow for the transfer of credits for certain courses, particularly at the lower division level (general education curriculum). This recommendation calls for similar agreements between our campuses, focusing on lower division curricular articulation and course transfer.

Each campus has a well-established process for formulating articulation agreements that involves input from departments, faculty governance, and deans, and ultimately is approved by provosts and chancellors. As noted, this process has led to many agreements with community colleges that have served us well. Any new agreement would follow the same process. It is also important to note that pathway agreements do not give a student the right to transfer. They simply make it possible for students to do so if they are admitted by a college through established admission processes. Each college may have a different standard for admissions as they often do for entering first-year or transfer students.

As a number of the senators and many others have noted, this is a very student-friendly recommendation. I am pleased to report that the VPAA and the campus provosts have initiated discussions on how to facilitate inter-campus agreements in accordance with established governance processes. Their work will focus on lower division curricular articulation and credit transfer. The group will also investigate the feasibility of faculty sharing among campuses as suggested by some.

OVERALL APPROACH

As the preceding paragraphs reflect, a number of parallel activities will have to be undertaken to improve enrollment management practices and I have asked the VPAA to take responsibility for coordinating these activities. In doing so, the VPAA will work closely with the campus provosts and vice chancellors of student affairs. Faculty, deans, and department heads and chairs will continue to play the same role going forward as they have played in the past.

As noted earlier, in order to formalize this process of continuous improvement and facilitate inter-campus collaboration we will form an Enrollment Management Policy Council convened by the VPAA and including the provosts of the three campuses. Issues related to enrollment management—including policies and strategies regarding enrollment goals, admissions, retention, diversity initiatives, and financial aid—will be discussed at this policy council, with recommendations forwarded to the president and chancellors for a final decision. While student admission decisions and financial aid offers will remain as campus responsibilities and under campus authority, the council will oversee their implementation, share best practices, promote inter-campus cooperation, and initiate and oversee continuous improvement efforts. All three chancellors support the establishment of this council.

While the VPAA will have overall responsibility for coordinating enrollment management initiatives, he is likely to require assistance in fulfilling this obligation. For this reason the Board of Trustees had endorsed the appointment of an executive director of enrollment management, who would work with the campus enrollment management teams and the Enrollment Management Policy Council. The chancellors, the president, and the board chair had agreed that the heads of the campus enrollment management teams would report both to their respective vice chancellors or provosts and to the executive director. However, with the consent of the Board chair, and under the presumption that the Policy Council will perform effectively, I have decided not to create such a position. Instead, reporting lines currently in place for campus enrollment management teams will remain unchanged and, as the enrollment management initiative develops, a member of the VPAA office, such as an associate vice president, will be assigned to provide the required assistance to the VPAA. The individual in this position will work with the Enrollment Management Planning Council and with the campus enrollment managers to share best practices, promote inter-campus cooperation, and facilitate the initiatives of the council. As a member of the VPAA office, the individual will report to the VPAA.

I am grateful to the USC and others for the comments and inputs which have helped improve the proposal. I remain fully committed to continued dialogue with the USC and other stakeholders as we implement the proposals in this document. Specifically, I invite the USC to appoint one its members as a liaison to the Enrollment Management Planning Council to offer advice, counsel and feedback on matters discussed by the council. The VPAA will also periodically meet with the USC to update the full group on enrollment management initiatives, including activities of

the Enrollment Management Policy Council. In addition, the VPAA will constitute a faculty advisory group to provide advice and counsel on enrollment management and other academic matters related to that office. These steps will ensure continued faculty input during the implementation of these proposals.

The University of Illinois is a world-class institution. Each of our campuses strives to be best-in-class and each offers a unique learning environment and programming to provide qualified students with an opportunity to obtain an excellent college education. Our strength as a whole derives from the strengths of the campuses. Through greater coordination across our enrollment management operations we can leverage these strengths for the benefit of all. Synergies can also save costs, which can be reinvested in our students and our academic mission. As we move forward in this important strategic direction, we must remember at all times that the goal of enhanced enrollment management is to improve student opportunities, experiences, and success.