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PERFORMING THE POST-MORTEM ON YOUR ENTERING CLASS

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Summer is over, a new class is comfortably tucked in and you can relax and celebrate your recent recruitment efforts while marveling at the numbers and the profile of the incoming class. Does this scenario sound familiar? So it is reported on many campuses throughout the country.

Now is not, however, the time for complacency. Rather, it is the time to evaluate this achievement and plan constructively for next year's class. An enrollment-cycle post-mortem to analyze what worked and what did not can be essential to

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PERFORMING THE POST-MORTEM ON YOUR CLASS CONTINUED:

ensuring future success.

Dr. James L. Fisher, president-emeritus of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), once said, "A college or university that is standing still is going backwards." So often we hear of colleges that have a good year in enrollment followed by a downturn in the following cycle because of unwarranted complacency. Now, when the momentum is high, is the ideal time for the institution to plan for even greater productivity, rather than to make the too-common mistake of becoming caught up in the hcopla of today's accomplishment.

Effective college presidents regularly demand a focused analysis by their chief enrollment officers. At the completion of each recruitment cycle, presidents should request an evaluation of:

- Overall numbers and the accompanying academic-preparedness profile;
- Effectiveness of financial aid packaging;
- Effectiveness of recruitment publications;
- Effectiveness of technology (including e-blasts, personalized URLs, the web and social media);
- Effectiveness of the call center;
- Effectiveness of the chief enrollment officer and director of financial aid;
- Effectiveness of all support staff;
- Effectiveness of staff travel programs;
- Productivity of college fairs and search pieces.

The bottom line is whether the process is producing desired (planned) results; if not, what adjustments need to be made? Only the kind of analysis described above can provide the needed perspective. Because objectivity is difficult when one is so close to an institutional process, we recommend using an outside enrollment consultant and/or formal research to hone next year's "funnel," staffing and procedures.

One effective president in the Mid-Atlantic region utilizes "Survey Monkey" to question students (and parents) who deposited but who ultimately did not enroll. The president then randomly calls some of the responders to collect additional data. He uses the same technique with students who

transfer to another institution. "The results are amazing," he reports. "I get good, candid feedback, and from time to time we do get students to re-enroll after a disappointing experience somewhere else." He indicated that he has used this approach successfully for more than a decade.

Another president in the Midwest annually uses an enrollment consultant to give a "fresh set of eyes" to the process. "We've had a successful operation for many years," he noted. "But evaluative comments and new ideas always spark a better discussion when they come from outside the organization. Outside counsel can say things in a way the insiders often can't." He has utilized John Dysart of The Dysart Group in this capacity for nearly 20 years. Highly effective presidents go a step further. Always thinking ahead, they convene summer planning retreats to set the desired marketing tone on campus. They constantly challenge their campuses to look at new enrollment opportunities. Currently, that approach might include an innovative mix of traditional and non-traditional programs; online, three-year options in selected areas; and international and synergistic partnerships with "like-minded" institutions.

The president of a selective liberal arts college in the South proudly reels off a list of dual-degree programs with a highly selective private research institution that creates a "value added" for students. "They can take a prescribed curriculum for three years with us," he notes, "then attend the other institution for 1 ½ to 2 years... earn two world-class degrees and be in the workforce within a shorter period of time, ultimately saving thousands of tuition dollars for his or her family.

The completion of a recruitment cycle often compels a staffing change. Presidents with whom we work add that this is the most competitive market in years for the recruitment and retention of admissions and financial aid leaders and staff. We recommend experienced search consultants to evaluate critical staffing positions as an effective return on investment and we are always happy to suggest specific consultants upon request.

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