

**Motivation Matters: Using a Multidimensional Theoretical Framework to Assess
What Enrollment Structures Reveal about Institutional Priorities**

Abstract: Why have some institutions chosen to centralize their enrollment systems more than others? What do these structural changes reveal about institutional priorities? What barriers stand in the way to centralization, especially when it is desired by enrollment professionals? This qualitative study utilizes a multidimensional theoretical framework to identify the rationale for the centralization of institutional enrollment systems by giving a voice to those administrators who are shaping and implementing these policies. By focusing on motivations for and barriers to organizational change, this research sheds light on institutional priorities and provides an important lens through which to understand organizational behavior and its potential effects.

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There was a time when enrollment management was simple and rather unnecessary. Prior to the baby boom and subsequent expansion of higher education following World War II, recruiting responsibilities fell to the president and faculty (Coomes, 2000), while the earliest admissions officer, the campus registrar, served as the principle institutional gatekeeper (Henderson, 2008). The admissions process was, by today's standards, unsophisticated. Students generally applied to one nearby college and were usually admitted, with admissions decisions often immediate and made in-person (Duffy & Goldberg, 1998). That was then.

Following a tidal wave of students during the mid-twentieth century during which time the number of applicants swelled beyond the number of available seats, a dramatic decline in high school graduation rates took place (Coomes, 2000). Consequently, a more competitive environment for students evolved and institutions began to more acutely coordinate their enrollment efforts (Hossler & Anderson, 2004; Huddleston, 2000; Coomes, 2000; Duffy & Goldberg, 1998). The level of competitiveness between institutions of all types has been further amplified in response to a steady decline in state support that has led public institutions to increasingly rely on alternative revenue sources such as tuition dollars (Cheslock & Gianneschi, 2007; Claar & Scott, 2003; Ehrenberg, 2006; Ehrenberg, 2003; McPherson & Schapiro, 1998; Serban & Burke, 1998) and the emergence of college rankings by publications such as *U.S. News & World Report* that outline the institutional hierarchy and influence admissions outcomes and resource availability within institutions (Meredith, 2004; Monks & Ehrenberg, 1999). Ultimately, a new and more tactical approach has emerged within many institutions “to ensure that critical areas for recruitment and retention such as admissions, records, financial aid,

student research, and marketing are working together to create a comprehensive plan to enroll more students, to shape the composition of the class, to reduce attrition rates, and to develop appropriate publications, services, and electronic alternatives for interacting with the college or university” (Dungy, 2003). In short, institutions over the last few decades have increasingly acted to more strategically identify and recruit potential students and move them through their enrollment pipeline (Kroc & Hanson, 2003).

According to Black (2004), the rise of enrollment management as a profession is very much “manifested in structural changes” (p.7). Although institutions have a variety of organizational models for enrollment management from which to choose, ranging from enrollment management committees to more formal divisional structures, institutions usually need to evolve by centralizing their enrollment operations (Hossler & Anderson, 2004). As such, there is a sense that colleges and universities with comprehensive enrollment divisions are more apt to succeed in their enrollment endeavors than are decentralized enrollment systems that may consist of fragmented silos. Evidence suggests that many institutions are centralizing their enrollment systems. From 1995 to 1999, a National Enrollment Management Survey (NEMS) conducted by Noel-Levitz, Inc., a consulting firm, showed an increase in the percentage of institutions that report having a chief enrollment officer at the vice presidential level. As of 2004, the last year the NEMS survey was conducted, most institutions reported having an individual responsible for enrollment management (Noel-Levitz, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

What remains to be seen is why some institutions have chosen to centralize their enrollment systems more than others. What is the motivation to centralize? What do these structural changes reveal about institutional priorities? What barriers stand in the way to centralization, especially when it is desired by enrollment professionals¹? This qualitative study seeks to identify the rationale for the centralization of institutional enrollment systems by giving a voice to those administrators who are shaping and implementing these policies. By focusing on motivations for and barriers to organizational change, this research sheds light on institutional priorities and provides an important lens through which to understand organizational behavior and its potential effects.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by a multidimensional theoretical framework. Drawing upon a nuanced use of resource dependency theory and academic capitalism theory, institutional theory, and literature regarding the power of organizational culture, this research seeks to understand the organizational behavior of institutions, specifically as it pertains to the structure of their enrollment systems. The following overview provides a concise summary of these theoretical constructs.

Resource dependency theory is grounded in the idea that organizations must maintain access to resources from the surrounding environment in order to survive

¹ Consistent with our larger research agenda, the study from which this article is drawn identifies senior admission officers and senior enrollment officers as members of a larger group, “enrollment professionals,” that includes any institutional member that has a specific and dedicated role in the overall process of recruiting, enrolling, retaining and graduating students.

(Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005). The theory speaks, in part, to the ways organizational decision-makers adapt to external pressures and manage dependence (Johnson, 1995). Organizations that face constrained resources may innovate in ways that allow them to compete for alternative resources (Scherer & Lee, 2002). If dependency relations are not institutionalized, structures may emerge to manage the flow of these alternative resources (Tolbert, 1985). Resource dependency theory has been applied to the study of health care service delivery innovation (Banaszak-Holl, Zinn, & Mor, 1996) and has served as a lens through which to understand the diversified revenue strategies employed by nonprofits to combat resource dependence (Froelich, 1999).

While resource dependence theory asserts that the external environment may facilitate changes in organizational structures to maintain and manage resource access, academic capitalism theory is more grounded in the spirit of competition *for* resources rather than the management *of* them, thereby highlighting how structural changes take place to enhance an institution's capacity to compete for resources in the new knowledge-based economy and leading institutions to embrace market and market-like behaviors (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004). This movement to reorient institutions through the infusion of a market ideology is a response, in part, to a shift in the way higher education is viewed. The individual benefits of higher education are taking precedence over the social benefits (Hovey, 1999; Selingo, 2003), and the public virtues of higher education are surrendering to the view of higher education as industry (Gumport, 2000).

Concurrently, efforts to deregulate and commercialize public entities, along with reductions in state support for higher education, have encouraged institutions and their internal actors to pursue external revenue streams, leading to a more competitive market

for both public and private institutions (Slaughter, 2001). Evidence of academic capitalism includes institutional and faculty competition for external funds, for-profit activity including patenting and licensing agreements, changes in academic labor, and, most applicable to this study, the restructuring and reorientation of administrative units at both public and private universities to pursue new market opportunities for external resources (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). The propensity for universities to view students as consumers is further evidence of the infusion of corporate values into the educational arena (Slaughter, 2001). This study draws upon resource dependency theory and academic capitalism theory to reveal the extent to which changes in the external environment, competition for resources, and the infusion of market principles have led to the centralization of enrollment units and to explain what these structural changes say about institutions and their priorities.

In addition, the theoretical foundation for this study is enhanced by the application of institutional theory. The major premise of institutional theory is that the primary goal of organizations is to become institutionalized and achieve external legitimacy, thereby maximizing access to resources (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In essence, institutionalization is an adaptive process that aims to promote stability with an eye on organizational perseverance (Scott, 1987). In the absence of a clear path to legitimacy organizations may look to model their own structures in the image of established, successful organizations through mimetic processes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Haveman, 1993). As a result of efforts by organizations operating in the same environment to adapt to similar constraints found within that environment, isomorphic homogenization may take place (DiMaggio &

Powell, 1991). This study uses the tenets of institutional theory to assess the extent to which institutions are centralizing their enrollment structures in response to isomorphic forces, and will examine the potential effects of such a trend.

Finally, organizational change cannot be properly examined without incorporating literature referencing the power of organizational culture. Culture can be a unifying force, establishing collectively shared understandings through the internal institutionalization of an organizational saga (Clark, 1972); shaping institutional values (Tierney, 1991); or, in some cases, determining an institution's ideology as a function of the identity shared among faculty and the surrounding community (Shaw & London, 2001). Organizational culture can also be a source for conflict. Culture can be used to socialize and impress professional or institutional values upon institutional actors, leading to tension (Kennedy, 1982) and/or to organized resistance (Rhoades & Rhoads, 2003). Organizations also contain many structural layers, some of which may withhold cooperation and tacitly challenge authority should they perceive their relative autonomy to be threatened by top-down administrative change agents (Newton, 2002). Literature related to organizational culture will be used to explain why efforts to centralize institutional enrollment systems are sometimes met with resistance and are ultimately unsuccessful.

Research Methods

This study gathered interview participants by using data from a salary survey of human resource representatives conducted by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) at 3,800 institutions in 2007-2008. As

part of the CUPA-HR survey, institutions self-identified themselves as having a designated chief admission officer (CAAdO), a designated chief enrollment officer (CEnO), or both. The following definitions were used by CUPA-HR for each personnel category:

Chief Enrollment Officer - Responsible for the development of marketing plans for recruitment and retention of students. Also coordinates institutional efforts in admissions, financial aid, records and registration and advising.

Chief Admission Officer - Responsible for the admission of undergraduates. May also be responsible for recruitment and selection and for the admission of graduate and professional students or for scholarship administration or similar functions.

Of the nearly 943 CUPA-HR survey respondents, 319 institutions reported having *both* a chief admission officer and a chief enrollment officer, while 423 institutions reported having *only* a chief admission officer. 201 institutions reported having a chief enrollment officer only but these institutions were not included in our study because our definition of a chief enrollment officer includes management of a chief admission officer and the undergraduate admissions unit.

Only the names of institutions were identified in CUPA-HR's data. Names of and contact information for CEnOs were found by searching the 2008 Higher Education Directory published by Higher Education Publications, Inc. as well as institutional websites for the highest ranking figure with "enrollment" in their title. Names of and contact information for CAAdOs were found by searching these resources for the highest ranking figure with "admission" in their title. Nine of the 319 institutions that had reported having both a CEnO and a CAAdO were dropped from the list of institutions to be surveyed because of ambiguity as to whether the institutions actually had two distinct

personnel serving as CEnOs and CAdOs, despite having stated so in response to CUPA-HR's survey.

To gather interview volunteers for the study and descriptive data, a survey link was e-mailed to the remaining contacts. Due to missing or invalid e-mail addresses, the number of CEnOs surveyed decreased to a total of $n=182$, the number of CAdOs at institutions with CEnOs surveyed decreased to a total of $n=177$, and the number of CAdOs at institutions without CEnOs surveyed decreased to $n=285$. When taking the survey, respondents had the option of volunteering to be interviewed at a later date by checking an appropriate box on the survey and entering contact information in a separate window online. The survey was completed, as scheduled, on December 19, 2008. When examining the names of interview volunteers that had completed the survey, it became apparent that survey participants had inadvertently taken the survey more than once and, because data could not be linked to the identity of participants, the study's principal investigators decided not to include the descriptive data collected in the final analysis, instead focusing exclusively on the study's qualitative interview component.

Semi-structured interviews of approximately one hour each were conducted by phone with the use of an interview protocol during the spring of 2009 with a total of 20 CEnOs, 17 CAdOs at institutions with CEnOs, and 18 CAdOs at institutions without CEnOs (total $n=55$). In sum, 55 interviews were conducted with chief enrollment and admission officers representing a diverse group of institutions based upon their Carnegie classification (including two-year colleges) and public/private designation (see Appendix). These interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and coded using open coding and selective coding techniques that led to the identification of theoretical codes

(Creswell, 2003). These theoretical codes were then collectively brought together and interpreted through the aforementioned theoretical lenses.

To enhance the data's validity, transcripts were read multiple times, leading to several analyses of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Bogden & Bilken, 1998). During data analysis, the study's principal investigators determined that one of the CEnOs and two of the CAdOs at institutions without CEnOs did not fit the study's definitions for each of these categories; data from each of these study participants was not included in the study's findings. As such, this study's findings are based off of interview data from 19 CEnOs, 17 CAdOs at institutions with CEnOs, and 16 CAdOs at institutions without CEnOs (total n=52). Two of the CAdOs at institutions with CEnOs served at institutions where the CEnOs were also participants. Thus, perspectives from enrollment professionals at 50 unique institutions are represented in this analysis. Following examination of the data, a number of consistent themes emerged as outlined in our findings. To protect the identity of any participants quoted, only their role as either a chief enrollment officer or chief admission officer and the type of institution at which they serve are provided.

Summary of Findings

Centralization to Pursue and Manage New Funding Sources

Consistent with resource dependence theory, interview data revealed a motivation by public institutions to centralize their enrollment systems in response to declining state appropriations. Public institutions that had traditionally depended on state support were encouraged to more effectively generate and manage tuition and fee revenue; resources

that had not historically been institutionalized. This often resulted in a number of structural and procedural changes. First, with cuts to state support becoming more common and demographic shifts on the horizon, officials at many public institutions saw the need to centralize their enrollment operations behind a chief enrollment officer:

I think [the chancellor] was well aware that state funding was more at risk and tuition funding was going to be more of a source of our operating revenue. And so he felt that it was time that we give more focused attention to enrollment issues. And this was nine, nine-and-a-half years ago. And so he then asked the Provost to create the [chief enrollment officer] position, which he did.

And then secondly, the pattern of enrollment at [institution] as I said had been up and down, up and down. Generally, the trend line was going up but not always and sometimes there were pretty dramatic drop in enrollment due to varying reasons. I think, in the best interests of the institution that erratic enrollment behavior needed to be modified and that could happen only with someone attending full time to those issues. (CEnO, Public Research Institution)

So the new Provost is the person who really served as the catalyst for creating [the CEnO] position, with the view that [enrollment-related units] needed to be pulled together, both from a functional standpoint and from a strategic planning standpoint...Like everybody else, we're in the midst of a financial debacle right now at the state level. And, of course, a year-and-a-half ago when this position started, that situation wasn't quite so grave. But even then we knew that the demographics were shifting on us, particularly here in the Northeast, as a result of that, we had to think more holistically about our enrollment planning. And the current financial issues have just heightened the awareness around the need to think about all of this more holistically. (CEnO Public Masters Institution)

Fearing a decrease in state support and a shifting demographic tide, senior officials pursued structural changes that shifted public institutions away from long-established resource relations with the state toward a new, more uncertain, and more contested dependence on students and the revenue they provide through tuition dollars.

Centralization was thought to more effectively manage these efforts.

Enrollment professionals at public institutions also called attention to the practice of diverting resources to the admissions function to stabilize and ultimately increase student enrollment in pursuit of tuition revenue.

Just as an example, just like you're hearing all over the country, I'm sure, we're absorbing budget cuts left and right. Our campus has lost about 20 percent of its funding from our state appropriation last June 30th or July 1st. Over this fiscal year, it's been a tremendous challenge. But Recruitment and Marketing has been held relatively harmless. We've absorbed much less cuts than other departments and offices on campus. (CAAdO, Public Baccalaureate Institution)

I think part of [why centralization seemed to be an appropriate response to a decline in enrollments] – and what accompanied the hiring of that [chief enrollment officer] – a significant investment of resources – resources that enabled the Admission office to for the first time work with an outside firm for its publications at that time; resources that allowed the office to engage a vendor in College Board search and fulfillment mailings, which had been done but on a much smaller scale and I think at a considerably lower degree of quality.

And if I were to be cynical about it, and that's probably my tendency, I think it's as much attributable to those investments in success as it was to sort of bringing in any particular sort of expertise. (CAAdO, Public Research Institution)

A supply-side approach is clearly evident. Senior officials at public institutions are guided by the principle that investments in revenue-generating units such as admissions and related recruitment and marketing areas will allow these units to operate more effectively and manage resources that are becoming increasingly central to the financial stability of public institutions.

By centralizing enrollment operations behind chief enrollment officers and more heavily investing in admissions units to recruit students and their tuition dollars, public institutions are redefining what it means to be public, and benefitting financially. For instance, one chief admission officer drew attention to the fact that her institution had doubled its tuition in the last four years in response to state cuts in funding, yet was attracting more students as a result because students associated cost with quality.

Likewise, a chief enrollment officer noted that his state actually increased appropriations for his public institution because the institution's enrollment numbers had improved following the centralization of enrollment units that are primarily oriented toward student recruitment. In effect, a shift in dependency relations is leading public institutions to prioritize tuition revenue to a greater extent, much like private institutions, and reshape their structures and practices accordingly.

Centralization to Compete for External Resources

Although resource dependence may be leading public universities to centralize their enrollment systems and manage new dependency relations, evidence from this study's interview data also suggests that *both* public and private institutions are moving to centralize their enrollment systems so as to engage an increasingly competitive and changing environment for external resources. In accordance with academic capitalism theory, institutions are restructuring to more closely align enrollment units such as admission and financial aid departments and act more strategically in pursuit of revenue.

Well, I think the environment has changed dramatically. That was a very traditional – Admissions did this. Financial Aid did this. And we all know that the competition, that the external marketing environment, the families, the expectation was different. So I think part of this [restructuring] had to do with external market, and I think part of it had to do with where the college was and where the aspirations were. (CEnO, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

[The restructuring] was three years ago. So let's say the decision was coming down three-and-a-half, four years ago. The economy hadn't tanked yet. The demographics were still, in terms of high school graduates, were still on the uptick. But with that being said, the competition, I think, was starting to send a message to [the institution] that you're going to have to revisit how you market the institution, your admission practices, your financial aid strategy, because, as I say, there had been decline in yield rates to kind of a dangerously low level. (CEnO, Private Masters Institution)

I think [the reason for the restructuring] was as much external... We weren't necessarily responding as efficiently and effectively to how admission processes were changing and how students were needing to be recruited and how the competition was doing things... And so we wanted to change the structure a little bit to make sure that we were looking at fresh new ideas and changing from Admission to Enrollment and getting Admission and Financial Aid on similar pages... (CEnO, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

...as people saw the competition for the students increasing, then more emphasis, budget, responsibilities and so forth were elevated to meet that external challenge. (CEnO, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

In effect, institutions are evolving to more effectively recruit students and their tuition dollars within a constrained market, with a focus on maintaining and expanding market share. Admissions and financial aid units have been brought together at many institutions toward this end, paving the way for practices such as tuition discounting and financial aid leveraging that allow institutions to more strategically compete for students and their tuition dollars. As institutions innovate through structural and operational changes in the face of resource constraints, made all the more salient by the influx of public institutions pursuing new revenue streams in response to a decline in state support, the nuanced interplay between resource dependency and academic capitalism becomes apparent.

To compete for external resources, chief enrollment and chief admission officers stated they must also *internally* maximize access to institutional resources. As previously noted, public institutions have begun more heavily committing resources to enrollment-related areas, namely admissions, recruitment, and marketing units. Although resource needs are certainly a reason behind this trend, interview data also points to structural changes as serving not only as a mechanism through which both public and private institutions pursue revenue but as a means through which chief enrollment officers have gained greater visibility and influence at their institution's highest administrative levels;

many chief enrollment officers having gained unfettered access to institutional decision-makers who hold the power of the purse.

And so the creation of this [chief enrollment officer] unit has allowed Admission and Aid to really be at the forefront of conversations at the table, in terms of the President's Cabinet. Our president says on a regular basis, "Right now there is nothing more important to me than Admission."...when we did our budgeting for next year, we asked office departments to actually cut their budgets by five percent so that we could reallocate funds to support the new strategic plan. So we asked them to cut, but we weren't actually truly cutting budgets; we were just moving money around. And the great consensus in the Cabinet was that Admissions should get the resources that they had asked for before anything else happened. I think a lot of that comes from the fact that the president is a tireless advocate for Admission and for Financial Aid. (CEnO, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

I think it's not so much the resource attention but – well, maybe in an indirect way – but having someone who really understands the enrollment management process reporting to the president really enabled, I think, a better communication flow, a better understanding on the higher levels of what the needs are. (CAoO, Private Masters Institution)

So then from there, [the chief enrollment officer] has been promoted and sits on the President's Cabinet and I think that's just as important [as having someone oversee all of the enrollment units] because then you have the president's ear and you're able to keep those enrollment issues and retention issues up-to-date and in front of the president. So that would help with supporting those units to make sure they have the funds needed to operate efficiently. (CAoO, Public Research Institution)

In effect, centralization has allowed chief enrollment officers to make the case enrollment units are critical revenue-generating units and, as such, encourage institutions to take a supply-side approach and maximize their resource commitments to enrollment-related areas.

The importance of having an advocate at the senior level is all the more recognizable when analyzing the diminished capacity of many chief admission officers in more decentralized enrollment structures to advocate for internal resources. When asked whether the availability of internal resources has been problematic due to the lack of a

chief enrollment officer, the following chief admission officer at an institution without a chief enrollment officer responded:

Yes. Because there are some things that I think it would be beneficial to have a stronger voice on Cabinet to really champion the needs that we have as opposed to [the Vice President of Student Services that oversees admissions] who certainly tries to do his best but he has a number of different responsibilities. (CAo, Public Associates Institution)

Another chief admission officer in a decentralized structure that operates without a chief enrollment officer echoed this theme, noting:

...I think that how we operate and the resources that we need within this area to take us to the next level is so important that I think the Cabinet needs to get involved. I think the other vice presidents need to be more keenly aware of the issues that our office is facing with regards to technology, trying to keep up with the competition, and so on and so forth...You always have to put trust in your boss, that he's looking out for your best interest, but I'm not so sure that – I would appreciate the opportunity to directly address some of the issues at that level. (CAo, Public Masters Institution)

If the lifeblood of an effective enrollment unit is access to resources within an institution, the criticality of having an advocate at the senior level cannot be understated.

Interestingly enough, structural shifts toward centralization have not only led to the creation of the chief enrollment officer position but provided a capacity for chief enrollment officers to reinforce their positions of power by providing opportunities for them to lobby for and secure resources on behalf of enrollment units.

Finally, when describing the movement to centralize enrollment operations, enrollment professionals did not shy from highlighting the need to control efforts to enhance “customer service” and “sell students” en route to generating external revenue. Terms such as “efficiency,” “consumer,” and “niche” were frequently used as enrollment professionals characterized enrollment management as the “business” of “selling education.” Part of any successful business model is structuring the organization to best

serve the customer, consistently identified by enrollment professionals as the students who attend institutions of higher education. According to enrollment professionals, coordination of enrollment units leads to superior service.

And as we know in enrollment management, by definition you are actually putting together a systematic way of managing enrollment. And that means coordinating efforts from different groups on campus so that in the end we are able to extend superior service to our students. (CAAdO, Private Research Institution)

One chief admission officer underscored the need to consistently encourage enrollment-related units such as registrars and academic advising units to put the customer first.

And so a lot of it is trying to impart on other departments, “How do you do what you need to do in your department, but how do you also serve the customer?” (CAAdO, Private Masters Institution)

Failure to centrally manage enrollment units can threaten an institution’s capacity to meet student expectations and brand itself in a positive light. As noted in the following quote, such a direction can sometimes facilitate centralization in an effort to reign in problematic units that fail to meet service expectations for students.

It was a customer service issue. There were times when our Financial Aid office wouldn’t answer the phone because all they could do was package. They didn’t have time to answer the phone. We used to have an incredibly high turnover rate – absenteeism – in Financial Aid and the Bursar’s office. We used to have – three years running, the editor of the school paper would say, “It must be fall because I got my bill and its wrong.” And she was right. It was wrong. We weren’t able to get students packaged before bills went out, which meant we had to redo bills; so all of that was an impetus to fix the system. (CEnO, Private Research Institution)

An institutional focus on customer service can best be described as a means to an end. Consistent with the market ideology that appears to govern the practice of enrollment management at many institutions, customer service is ultimately meant to produce financial gains. By moving to consolidate enrollment units beneath a centralized reporting structure, institutions seek to more effectively offer a desirable educational

product that will lead to enrollment growth and more tuition revenue. Statements from institutions that centralized in an effort to enhance their capacity to more comprehensively meet student needs and expectations en route to revenue gains reflect this philosophy. When asked to describe the extent to which financial motivations were at the center of institutional efforts to centralize their enrollment operations, participants responded:

Well, I wouldn't say there wasn't a thought to financial, because if you give better service – our belief was that if we could serve our students better we could keep them longer, they would complete more degrees, and we would attract more students...Our theory was you provide the best service you can, and we weren't providing the best service you can because we had some disconnected – we didn't have a connected enrollment team that really was able to work together and plan in a comprehensive way...I think if you have happier students you're going to keep them and they're going to talk to other people and you're going to have more students. (CEnO, Public Associates Institution)

I've seen students are better served. Their satisfaction rates are higher...We've continued to grow, so yes. Ultimately, we've continued to grow, which financially impacts the university. I know at the undergraduate level we've grown faster than was the original enrollment goals, that we've had a faster rate of growth. (CAo, Public Research Institution)

In summary, consistent with the tenets of academic capitalism theory, interview data revealed that a market ideology is clearly present and influencing institutional priorities. Competition for resources is facilitating a movement whereby enrollment units at both public and private institutions of all levels are being restructured and recast less as academic support units and more as revenue generating units, the long-term implications of which are unknown.

Centralization for Legitimacy

Although less prevalent, data suggested the movement to centralize enrollment operations may at times be disconnected from the functioning needs of institutions and, in many ways, grounded in a pursuit for legitimacy. As noted by institutional theorists, during times of uncertainty institutions may look to model themselves after what appear to be successfully evolving organizations as they seek to maintain access to resources and ensure that the organization endures. As such, institutional leaders may look to one another for guidance. The movement to centralize enrollment units appears, in some respects, to have been promulgated by institutional senior leaders looking to mimic institutional structures and practices that appeared to be gaining traction within professional circles, thereby normalizing this trend to an even greater extent.

I think there was certainly, on the part of the president and the provost, an understanding of what the structures were elsewhere. And certainly, it's pretty clear that sort of the concept of enrollment management or the concept of many of these offices being administered this way, they knew about that. (CEnO, Private Research Institution)

I think [the president] also looks at, and he had been the – there's the [state independent colleges and universities group], and one of the institution presidents is in charge of that. I believe it's on a two-year rotating cycle. He had been head of the [state independent college and universities group], so part of [the reasons to centralize enrollment units] comes from what he was hearing externally. (CEnO, Private Masters Institution)

[Centralization of enrollment units] appeared to be, at that point in time, a natural thing to do, combined with [the new appointed chief enrollment officer's] expertise and what we were seeing happening out and about. (CEnO, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

I think [the decision to centralize came] through the network of [religiously affiliated institution] presidents, as well as what's going on in the country; my guess is that was part of pretty much what drove it. (CEnO, Private Masters Institution)

In some circumstances, restructuring in the image of other institutions can be beneficial, most notably when those structures are modified and adapted to meet the unique needs of

an institution. Placed within the context of findings outlined earlier in this analysis, this approach allows institutions to structure their enrollment management units in a manner conducive to the pursuit of external resources.

We looked at best practices from other enrollment management units. We took a look at how they were structured; we saw what would work best with us, and it's just evolved really nicely over the last six years. (CAAdO, Public Research Institution)

However, when structural changes are made without regard to need, they can be visibly ceremonial. For example, one chief admission officer highlighted how institutional leaders hired a chief enrollment officer to match a perceived organizational trend; yet, following his departure, the institution has continued to operate effectively with the position vacant for several months. Ceremonial changes may project an image of outward stability by embracing an emerging normative model, but may not necessarily improve internal functions if the normative model is not adapted to the culture and specific needs of the institution.

Interview data with chief enrollment and chief admission officers further revealed how a more market-driven normative model is taking hold within institutions. Enrollment professionals described institutional presidents and provosts as motivated to create comprehensive enrollment units to reflect what was happening elsewhere and what they'd seen, sometimes after interacting with enrollment consulting firms such as Noel-Levitz, Inc., TargetX, and Ruffalo Cody. These firms are serving as conduits for the spread of normative values that embrace a more centralized approach to enrollment management and the aforementioned resource benefits associated with such a consolidated reporting structure. The following quote is representative of a handful of

chief enrollment officers who referenced consulting firms as having recommended centralization.

One of the reasons why we sort of shifted our structure when the provost came to [the institution] – he’s been here – I guess this is his fifth year. One of the things that he observed or felt was that the whole enrollment area was too decentralized and kind of siloed, and so he was very interested, in terms of structure, what made the most sense. And so like good provosts do, he brought a consultant in. The Huron Group was chosen. And so they were here doing a whole analysis of sort of the entire enrollment area; not what we were doing, but the structure, the organizational structure; who reports to who, what kind of committees are in place for decision making, that kind of thing.

And so we didn’t adopt, institutionally, everything that they recommended. I don’t think anybody ever does that with a consultant, but that led to this decision to form this Enrollment Services Division. Then I moved from [chief admission officer] to this [chief enrollment officer] position. My colleague, [name], moved to the operations position and so we basically became the center, trying to unite a variety of disparate offices that previously had sort of all individually reported to different people, whether that was the provost or others.

...Whenever there’s an interest in change of this kind, historically, we’ve typically had consultants come in to look at it and sort of be an objective third party, generate a report, talk to a lot of people, make recommendations, and then that becomes sort of the impetus for change. (CEnO, Private Research Institution)

Of note, consulting firms do not always spread market-driven normative values as hired advisors. Interview data revealed a symbiotic relationship between enrollment professionals and consulting firms whereby firms sometimes hire enrollment professionals to serve as consultants for their member institutions and whereby consultants sometimes leave their firms to take positions as enrollment managers and utilize consulting services at an institutional level. If structural centralization is being normalized by consulting firms and permeable boundaries exist among these firms and institutions of higher education, extensive opportunities for isomorphic homogenization emerge.

Isomorphic forces were further evident when considering the influence of events held by consulting firms as well as professional associations such as the College Board, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), and others. Enrollment professionals described how attendance at such functions by either themselves or senior leaders within their institutions planted a seed and initiated a movement toward the centralization of their enrollment units.

I attended one of the College Board programs in Chicago in the early stages of enrollment management. And Don Hossler conducted this couple-day seminar. And it was something that I had really believed in as needed, although I hadn't heard of anything formal. And so I attended that, came back and convinced the university at that point that we should move in that direction of enrollment management, and we did... (CEnO, Private Masters Institution)

I know [the chancellor] had attended some workshops, for example a Noel-Levitz workshop on 'What is Enrollment Management?', and I think he just became interested in the concept and wanted this institution to begin engaging in more deliberate management of its enrollment. (CEnO, Public Research Institution)

As such, mimetic processes were evident. A movement toward the centralization of enrollment units at an institution may be stimulated by a desire for enrollment professionals and/or senior institutional leaders to imitate structural and procedural changes highlighted and normalized during professional gatherings.

Finally, evidence suggests a market-driven model that embraces the centralization of enrollment units is being normalized by senior institutional leaders, virally spread from institution to institution. Enrollment professionals in this study described changes in administrative leadership as a catalyst for centralization.

At the time [centralization] was done – I want to say that was probably somewhere around 1997. It's probably about 11 years, 12 years. At the time that that was done, we went through a transition in leadership. We had a new president in the college. Prior to this person coming on board we had a nun,

[name], who had been president for 23 years. When she retired and we had a layperson come in, he came from another college from another state, and he brought this enrollment management idea with him from his previous institution and instituted it here, and that's how it came to be. (CAAdO, Private Masters Institution)

I think [centralization was the step that was needed for growth] just to increase efficiencies and to make sure that everything is kind of running as smoothly as possible, and partly because it's the background of the vice president. She preferred a structure like that. (CAAdO, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

Presidents, provosts, and vice presidents often serve at a number of institutions throughout their careers. As they move to each institution, they bring with them a set of values that inform their expectations for how an institution should be structured and operate.

In summary, enrollment professionals interviewed for this study gave credence to the idea that mimetic and normative isomorphic forces are contributing to the centralization of enrollment units. These forces are being spread within consulting firms and professional organizations, as well as by senior institutional leaders, leading institutions to collectively and visibly move toward the market in their orientation, structure, and behavior as they seek legitimate solutions to resource challenges during uncertain times.

Resistance to Centralization

By and large, the majority of interview participants, even at institutions with decentralized enrollment structures that do not have a chief enrollment officer in place, expressed a desire for greater coordination of enrollment units behind a central authority. There was a commonly-held perception that institutions need to more cohesively approach the practice of enrollment so as to more effectively sustain growth, better

prepare for impending demographic changes and more proactively address their enrollment needs, encourage cooperation and success across enrollment-related units, and redefine enrollment as more than admissions in an effort to more effectively move students through the system toward graduation and enhance an institution's bottom-line.

That being said, not everyone is ready to embrace the new market-driven paradigm, whether to compete for resources or simply to project an image of legitimacy toward these ends. Findings from this study speak to the power of institutional culture at both higher and lower levels of an institution and its capacity to challenge change agents and derail efforts to more centrally structure institutional enrollment efforts. For instance, one chief enrollment officer highlighted how his institution had centralized to such a degree, moving enrollment and student services units under one central manager, that once the vice president who initiated that change left the institution, institutional personnel immediately split enrollment management and student services units apart from one another. Another institution's move to centralize its enrollment units proved so unpopular with unit heads due to an inability for the newly formed chief enrollment officer to adequately manage the flow of resources to enrollment units that the chief enrollment officer left the institution and the position was disbanded by institutional leaders.

In other cases, institutional agents such as faculty members, presidents, and unit personnel have prevented centralization from happening in the first place. For example, a number of enrollment professionals outlined the influential role of committee- and consensus-based enrollment models at their institutions where faculty hold substantial authority pertaining to enrollment planning.

We do enrollment management the hardest way that you can do it, and that is by committee. We do not have an enrollment czar who tells us what to do. I am not an enrollment czar. I think I could be, but that's not the way we're structured. [Institution] is a place that is extremely tied to the concept of faculty governance, which means governance by committee in almost every aspect. And so it's not surprising that we approach enrollment management in the same way. (CAAdO, Public Research Institution)

Policy is driven by the faculty. Admissions' policies and all of that stuff is faculty driven, faculty derived. Most of the decisions that are made are made in a committee consensus model (CAAdO, Public Research Institution)

Empowered faculty have been noted to resist centralized efforts aimed at prioritizing enrollment goals that are sometimes at odds with one another, such as academic quality, diversity, and discount rates.

One of the strategic goals was to raise the SAT profile by 150 to 200 points while lowering the discount rate and increasing our minority population, and I said, "Which one of those do you want, because you're not going to get all three. You can't do it."...I had some pushback from some faculty and deans, yeah. (CEnO, Private Research Institution)

In addition, faculty have also been known, in part, to oppose attempts to integrate admission and financial aid units on the grounds that such a close relationship between these units threatens to undermine an institutional commitment to need-based aid.

The reason this institution is a throwback is because I would say this would probably resemble what occurred at many institutions in maybe the '70s. It has not adapted – I'm not saying it never will, perhaps it will in the future, but up to this point it just simply hasn't adapted that mainline enrollment management culture that tied admissions and financial aid in particular together in order to affect student decisions and affect enrollment outcomes...there is a prevalent philosophy that I would say is still the majority here at the [institution] among the faculty and among key administrators that going to an enrollment management model leans away from a strictly need-based approach. It just doesn't have wide support here. (CAAdO, Public Research Institution)

Finally, faculty members have reportedly defended against centralization efforts to avoid threats to their autonomy. More centralized enrollment units may carry with them the capacity to more closely assess the various roles institutional members play to help

recruit, enroll, retain, and graduate students. Faculty “would not want the light shown on them in terms of some transparency, in terms of measures of productivity and things like that” (CAAdO, Private Baccalaureate Institution). As such, faculty members at some institutions may resist efforts to centralize enrollment units.

In addition to faculty members, localized senior leaders are also at times deeply entrenched in tradition, the “old guard” resisting a movement toward centralization. Enrollment professionals described senior leaders as sometimes serving at the very least as barriers to bringing in particular units such as the registrar or retention functions under a chief enrollment officer, and at the most as steering an institution away from more systematic approaches to enrollment management.

We have a wonderful president. I have never worked with anybody who is as ethical and as values-oriented as he is. He has been in his role for 26 years; he has been at the institution for 30. And in many respects, when it comes to enrollment, he still functions – my assessment is, at least – that he still functions with 1985 thinking. We do not have much to – I think all of us are involved in enrollment management. We do not have a systematic approach to both understanding and being strategic about our overall enrollment. (CAAdO, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

In terms of the registrar, that reports up through the Academic Vice President. I did in my attempt to reorg and complete the one stop shop type of program here have that as part of the reorganization when I pulled Bursar and Aid together. But at that time the climate just wasn't right for us to pull all three together...it just didn't have the support from the top that it needed to move through. (CEnO, Private Masters Institution)

In a way, I think people segregate [responsibility for returning students] out away from me because my focus – again, I started off in admissions and so many people still remember me from that. I think they kind of have a feeling that with returning students there are so many issues with them that are not related to their initial admission and that are not related to probably some of the things that my division does, although I don't know if I'd agree with that. (CEnO, Public Research Institution)

Other senior leaders wish to avoid centralization to maintain a more collective commitment among institutional members to the enrollment function, concerned that creating an enrollment figurehead might lead to a more segmented culture as it pertains to enrollment responsibilities.

Direct quote from our president is that, “Enrollment is everyone’s business.” And I think he’s concerned, by giving someone – any one person or department – that title of Enrollment Management, then we have a culture of, “Well, it’s that person’s job; it’s that office’s job to coordinate things: events on campus for new students and the billing culture for current students.” But I think by taking the title away and that assignment away, he feels that we can create this atmosphere where everything everyone does is related to enrollment and increasing enrollment. (CAAdO, Public Masters Institution)

Many presidents and provosts who began their leadership service long before enrollment management had become a catch-phrase may not see a need for structural changes en route to enrollment stability, growth, or the retention of students.

In addition to resistance from faculty and senior leaders, members of enrollment-related units also sometimes lead a push to remain autonomous. These members are often historically localized within their institutions and resist significant changes to their roles as a function of structural adaptation, wish to maintain control over the direction of their unit, or fear the centralization of enrollment units may somehow disproportionately benefit admissions units.

I’d say there’s two different reasons [for resistance to centralization]. In some departments, it’s literally people just have too much to do and they can’t think about how they would change their day-to-day processes to make it work, and it’s easier to just do what you’ve always done. The other one is in some departments we just have people who believe it’s their – that they’ve always done it that way. It’s their department; they should be able to make those decisions. (CEnO, Public Associates Institution)

But anyway, at the level of the enrollment departments, I think it’s fair to say that the culture is defined to some degree by a resistance to thinking about things differently, which has created some interesting challenges when you come on

board as a change agent...A lot of these folks are near retirement and I think a comfort level has set in that have left them feeling as though they would be best served if they could kind of coast along. (CEnO, Public Masters Institution)

...the business lady that's over financial aid, she doesn't want that away from her. She likes that and our Vice President for Campus Life, he likes all these areas... (CAo, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

And understand too, our Director of Financial Aid, who has a lot of influence on our campus, is fearful of that type of structure because he sees what's out there. He knows that oftentimes the admissions person is either elevated to [the chief enrollment officer] role if it's internal, or someone who is brought in from the outside who has an admissions background. And our financial aid director will tell you he's suspicious of admissions people. He tells me that all the time. (CAo, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

In general, enrollment professionals often described themselves as proponents for change in response to a changing external environment that demands a more coordinated approach to enrollment in pursuit of resources; yet recognize that their efforts to centralize enrollment systems can be viewed as threatening to other institutional actors, resulting in internal power struggles.

Sometimes, however, chief admission officers, themselves, are key barriers to the centralization of enrollment units. Many chief admission officers at institutions without chief enrollment officers were quite convinced that their enrollment systems, though not necessarily integrated, function quite effectively.

We think it works the way it is. I've not worked for a president or a provost who's thought we should do it differently. (CAo, Public Research Institution)

Our record has been one that we seem to accomplish our various goals and charges. We've seen the trend lines in almost all areas, [name of interviewer], go up. So there's nothing that I think is extraordinary that would suggest that a more centralized approach would be warranted, at least at this time in the college's history. Everything that I look at, not just in terms of my office and division, but elsewhere that's related to enrollment, seems to be tracking in the direction that we would hope. (CAo, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

The Chancellor here now – let’s see. He’s been here for five – I think he’s in his fifth year. He first talked to me about [adding a chief enrollment officer], evolving my role to that, but I said, “You know, at this point I just don’t think we need it.” (CAAdO, Private Research Institution)

...I believe that if you have an articulated mission, vision and goals and no matter how many different subsets of people are off doing their corner of it, if the mission and the goals are well-articulated and understood, then a unified command structure manifested in a sole individual is not needed. In this setting, the unified control individual is the plan. (CAAdO, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

Additionally, some of these chief admission officers were concerned that centralizing beneath a chief enrollment officer could limit the attention senior leaders give to admissions units, a development with potentially serious repercussions as far as internal resource allocation is concerned. There was a sense that a chief enrollment officer, with oversight over a number of enrollment-related units, might not be able to adequately represent the institution’s admissions interests at the senior level, crowding out admissions when it came to advocating for the unit’s needs.

And I know that, as I think about whatever my next step is, whenever my next step is, that my next position will not report to anyone other than a president. There’s value in that. And, yeah, I think a chief enrollment person – again say that’s first year experience and financial aid and admissions and maybe even athletics if you think about coaches as recruiters – now you’ve got four departments competing for interest and competing for time. I would be concerned that we wouldn’t get enough face time, if you will. (CAAdO, Private Baccalaureate Institution)

This concern was given additional credibility by a chief admission officer at an institution with a chief enrollment officer.

And the other thing is that I think you really need to have somebody who’s at least close to being a peer to the other units within the campus when you’re lobbying for resources that are typically going to be there at the chancellor’s level. Right now, if we go to the table, our dean is going to be representing all the undergraduate deans as well as Enrollment Services and several other programs, when Student Services has their own vice chancellor. And that doesn’t put you in a very strong position, in my opinion...so if you don’t have a voice at the highest table, you’re lost pretty - once you get down the organizational chain it’s going to

be, you're competing against larger numbers of voices every time you step down. So in my opinion it's, if \$200 million, probably about 20 percent of your revenue stream is wrapped up in undergraduate tuition, you'd want to have that person responsible for bringing in that revenue and ensuring that it's continuously being brought in, you would want to have that person at the table most of the time. And I don't really see that happening here. (CAAdO, Public Research Institution)

Consequently, it is little surprise that in many cases chief admission officers themselves are resisting efforts to create structures more conducive to comprehensive enrollment management.

In summary, resistance comes from many corners of an institution. Institutional culture is a powerful force for both change and stability. As a result, the degree to which institutions have centralized their enrollment efforts in an effort to become more strategic is as varied as the types of institutions within America's higher education system.

Considering the findings from this study, of greater concern may be the extent to which institutions are positioning themselves to act more strategically when it comes to the recruitment and enrollment of students in pursuit of resources and legitimacy as opposed to structuring their enrollment efforts in a manner that is most conducive to maximizing student access and leading to beneficial and transformative student outcomes.

Discussion and Significance of the Study

How and why institutions go about structuring their enrollment systems speaks to their underlying priorities. As the principal findings of this analysis suggest, despite resistance from many institutional actors, institutions are centralizing their enrollment systems to manage new dependency relations, to more effectively compete for external resources, and, in some cases, in response to isomorphic forces in pursuit of legitimacy.

Hence, evidence directly and indirectly points to management of, competition for, and access to external resources as the primary motivation for structural change.

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks that guided this research and on our analysis of the commentary of respondents, we expect to see continued centralization of enrollment functions. This conclusion would hold, we believe, even without the current economic crisis. Institutions have long been observed to seek the maximization of their resources (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2006). This said, economic woes continue to plague the nation, and institutional leaders will likely redouble their efforts to organize themselves to meet this external challenge. With regard to enrollments, the economic worries are likely to manifest themselves in increased competition for tuition-paying students, in seeking increased efficiencies in operations, and in organizational structures that are consistent with similarly striving institutions. As we have seen here, presidents, provosts, and their leadership teams are committed to centralizing enrollment units in pursuit of resources, to respond to the external environment, to follow institutional trends, and to fulfill their aspirations.

In addition, several factors at play strengthen the trend toward centralization. Our research provides evidence that senior officials who are experienced with centralized enrollment models often institute those models when they move to new institutions. In addition, we have seen that the consulting firms used in this arena promote the centralization of enrollment units. Indeed, we have observed that these firms employ former enrollment practitioners as consultants and educational institutions themselves sometimes appoint personnel from consulting firms to enrollment leadership roles. Finally, we note that enrollment professionals, notably admission directors, though some

resist the trend, often promote a centralized model to ensure a voice at the senior leadership level, to better compete for scarce institutional resources, and to better coordinate services for students en route to revenue maximization.

Moreover, it is our contention that new external forces, namely world economic and educational competition, will drive institutions to structure their enrollment units to meet these external challenges. America's educational standing in the world has slipped, and President Obama has called for the United States to return to its former position as the world's leader in educational attainment by the year 2020. The United States, the unmistakable leader in high school and college attainment during the 1960s and 1970s, now ranks 21st for high school completion rates among nations with advanced economies and 11th for postsecondary attainment among younger workers (age 25-34) (College Board Commission on Access, Admissions and Success in Higher Education, 2008). If we are to meet, or even approach, the President's goals, America's educational institutions will need to work extraordinarily hard and effectively to enroll more students and to see them successfully through the college experience. Given the results of this research, we expect that further centralization of enrollment activities will be one key response, especially as institutions compete for federal stimulus dollars and other appropriations made available to aid in this effort.

As we note, not all institutions are centralizing nor do they centralize in the same ways. Institutional cultures, resource needs, and the unique environments in which various institutions operate cause enrollment models to vary. However, it is clear that centralization of institutional enrollment functions is trending forward. While the trend is certainly not universal, it is the rare institution that is not moving to connect the dots in

data-driven ways between student recruitment, enrollment, and, to some extent, persistence efforts.

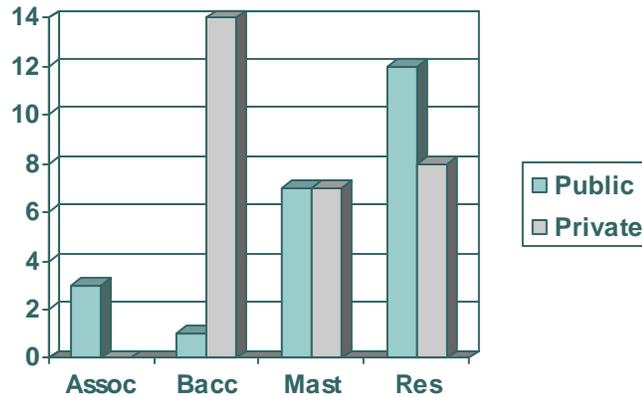
Future Research and Final Commentary

This research is just beginning. What more can we learn from the various models of centralization? How might these models of centralization and/or their motivations for structural change commonly vary based on institutional size and classification? Which structures are most effective and to what ends? The results of this study suggest that centralization is fundamentally about capturing revenue. However, to what extent do various degrees of centralization allow institutions to also more effectively deliver their academic functions and to meet educational purposes by moving students through the system toward graduation? On the contrary, to what extent are an institution's academic functions compromised by organizational motivations to maximize revenue? Gumport (2000) notes that, by prioritizing economic needs and allowing them to dictate organizational change, institutions may ultimately restructure their purpose and place within the greater social context. We hope to further explore the extent to which institutions are heading toward such a fate and the effects of such a transformation in future studies.

Appendix

Figure 1.1 Carnegie Classification and Public/Private Designation of Participating

Institutions (n=52)



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