

 THE RESEARCH AGENDA

Delineating A Practitioner-Defined Research Agenda for Enrollment Management

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This article presents a practitioner-defined research agenda for enrollment management. This agenda consists of 45 topics for research identified by enrollment management practitioners as the most pressing topics/issues that they regard as ones that would benefit from a study conducted by researchers. Implications of this agenda for practitioners and researchers are offered.

Delineating A Practitioner-Defined Research Agenda for Enrollment Management

Enrollment management constitutes an administrative function of colleges and universities as organizations. Like other administrative functions, enrollment management should embrace the use of research findings to guide their practice of enrollment management (Braxton and Hossler 2019). At an earlier stage in the evolution of enrollment management, Bontrager (2004) described the need for a data rich environment that would enable senior enrollment officers to study the effects of institutional policies and practices on student enrollment behaviors. In 2008, Hossler and Kalsbeek (2008) identified a range of areas for which enrollment managers should look to research to help guide enrollment efforts: market position; why students do or do not

matriculate; factors that influence graduation, drop out, or transfer; the impact of financial aid on matriculation and persistence; policies and practices that enhance student diversity; and the effects of specific academic programs, as well as student life programs, on student enrollment decisions. To date, however, a systematic study of the research needs of enrollment managers and their relative importance has not been undertaken.

Such a use of research findings precludes enrollment managers from making “trial by error” or “shoot from the hip” types of action (Braxton and Ream 2017). In a broader sense, the use of research findings to guide administrative practice stands as a goal of a scholarship of practice given its emphasis on the improvement of administrative practice (Braxton 2017).

A scholarship of practice for enrollment management requires the development of a two-way loop with

one loop being the practice community of enrollment management to the research community of enrollment management and the other being from the research community of enrollment management to the practice community of enrollment management (Braxton and Hossler 2019). This article focuses on the development of the practitioner-to-researcher loop.

The delineation of a practitioner-defined research agenda for enrollment management constitutes the primary activity of the development of this loop of a scholarship of practice (Braxton and Hossler 2019). A practitioner-defined research agenda consists of those topics for research that enrollment managers need to address—the day-to-day issues and concerns they encounter in their practice of enrollment management (Braxton and Hossler 2019). Because practitioners frequently view research as irrelevant to their day-to-day practice (Kielhofner 2005), the delineation of a practitioner-defined research agenda can work to shape a different perception among practitioners about the relevance of research findings to their work.

Braxton and Hossler (2019) offer approaches to the development of a practitioner-defined research agenda for enrollment management. One of the approaches they suggest entails the administration of a survey to enrollment managers by a professional organization such as the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). AACRAO enacted this approach through their administration of a 60 Second Survey in January 2020. The authors of this article contributed to the development of the questions included in this 60 Second Survey. Accordingly, the presentation of the findings of this survey constitute the primary purpose of this article. These findings delineate a practitioner-defined research agenda for enrollment management. This practitioner-defined research agenda, in turn, contributes to the development of the path from the practice community of enrollment management to the research community of enrollment management.

Before presenting the results of the 60 Second Survey, we describe this survey and its administration by AACRAO. The next section of this article describes the administration of the 60 Second Survey.

The Administration of the 60 Second Survey

The 60-Second Survey was successfully emailed in January 2020 to 11,119 members of AACRAO using the Qualtrics survey platform, and a total of 1,184 individuals responded. This survey consisted of sixteen items; one of these pertained to the delineation of a practitioner-defined research agenda for enrollment management. This particular survey item took the following form: “As you consider the types of decisions and actions you encounter in your practice of enrollment management, what are the most pressing topics/issues that you think would benefit from a study conducted by researchers?” A total of 550 responses were received to this open-ended response question. These responses ranged from one-word answers to several sentences in length.

Methodology for the Delineation of the Practitioner-Defined Research Agenda

The 550 responses were analyzed through an iterative qualitative coding process (Miles and Huberman 1994). The entire analysis was conducted in three separate stages. The responses were first analyzed through an initial line-by-line reading and coding of responses in alignment with the topics/issues represented by the checkbox options of the survey completed by respondents. Only a small number of the responses aligned with these checkbox categories. In the second stage of analysis, an iterative, line-by-line coding process was employed to identify the themes that emerged in the responses (Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss 1987). While this analytical approach is typically used in grounded theory methodology, it was key in identifying the research topics that enrollment manager practitioners deemed as needing further research (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). The third stage of analysis encompassed a final line-by-line reading of the responses and initial codes to develop focused codes (Charmaz 2014). The focused codes reflect the most salient initial codes. The saliency of each code was tracked so researchers could examine which research topics and issues practitioners were most interested in (Charmaz 2014).

The stages of this iterative qualitative coding process were used to develop a practitioner-defined research agenda for enrollment management. This resulted in forming 45 categories of the most pressing issues that enrollment managers think necessitate further research. Of the 45 categories, 26 categories had fewer than ten respondents who called for research on that topic or issue.

The Practitioner-Defined Research Agenda for Enrollment Management

Before our presentation of this practitioner-defined research agenda, we acknowledge that circumstances external and internal to colleges and universities may lead to the emergence of new pressing topics or issues that enrollment practitioners may deem as needing the findings of research to guide their practice. As con-

sequence, efforts to delineate a practitioner-defined research agenda for enrollment management should take place on a recurring basis. Nevertheless, the practitioner-defined research agenda we present herein constitutes an initial effort to put forth such an agenda.

As previously stated, the number of individuals listing a topic germane to a category offers an indication of the saliency of the topic/issues to enrollment management practitioners. We present each of these 45 categories in descending order of their saliency to enrollment management practitioners. Beside the name of each category, we specify the number of individuals listing a topic pertinent to that particular category. These 46 categories define a practitioner-defined research agenda for enrollment management. Table 1 lists these categories. We define each category below.

TABLE 1 ► The Categories of Needed Research by Enrollment Management Professionals

Category	Saliency	Category	Saliency
Efficacy of Various Retention Strategies	90	Standardized Test Scores in EM	8
EM Trends	57	Completion	7
SEM Planning	46	Decision Points	7
Changing Enrollment Landscape	41	Yield	7
EM Best Practices	35	Generation Z	7
Shifting Demographics	32	Goals	6
Cost of Higher Education	32	Dual Enrollment	5
Curriculum	32	Institutional Culture	5
Recruitment Markets	19	Low-Income	5
Diversity	17	Perceptions	5
Financial Aid	17	Staffing	5
Projection Modeling	17	Online Education	4
Attrition	15	Return on Investment (ROI)	4
Transfer	15	Transfer Articulation Agreements	4
Data in EM	14	Advising Models	3
Technology in EM	14	Future Jobs	3
Access	11	Mental Health	3
Graduation	11	Non-Cognitive Factors in Admissions & Retention	3
Trends in Changing and Evolving Roles in Admissions	10	Rural Education	2
EM Organizational Structure & Resources	9	Special Needs	2
Funding	9	Student Engagement	2
Academic Preparedness	8	Summer Melt	2
Persistence	8		

■ **Efficacy of Various Retention Strategies (90):** This category reflects the need for more research on a wide array of retention strategies and their effectiveness in the context of varying institution types and for students of varying backgrounds. The responses ranged from an interest in strategies to retain “students of color,” “African American males,” “adult learners,” “part-time students,” “first generation students,” “low-income students,” “graduate students” and “non-traditional students.” The respondents also requested more research on retention interventions, specifically for undergraduate students, and the efficacy of those interventions.

Further, the respondents indicated a desire to know more about the effects of financial aid on retention, research on graduation strategies, and more research on college completion. Survey respondents also expressed an interest in whether there are relationships between majors and student persistence and retention and whether or not retention and persistence rates vary by major.

■ **EM Trends (57):** This represents the concerns of respondents who would like research on current and emerging enrollment management trends at colleges and universities in the United States. Some of the responses reflect an interest in general trends while others reflect interests that are more specific. The respondents were interested in trends relating to international students, community colleges, the types of institutions different groups of students tend to apply to and enroll in, as well as trends relating to graduate students and adult learners. Notably, several respondents requested that trends be analyzed in spaces beyond admissions to include offices of student success, career centers, and student life centers, among others.

In addition, several respondents expressed an interest in topics that fall under the general rubric of enrollment management trends, including research on decision points in the admissions process and/or decisions related to enrollment management in institutions. The responses revealed an interest in knowing what the critical decision points are for

students, what factors influence decisions for parents and students, why students choose to attend or not to attend an institution, and who “matters most” in the decision-making process.

■ **SEM Planning (46):** The SEM planning category represents the concerns of respondents who would like to see more research on strategic enrollment management planning. Many communicated a desire to know more about SEM planning that is comprehensively integrated into the college/university campuses and SEM planning processes that engage multiple stakeholders on college and university campuses. Other respondents expressed a need for SEM planning research that addresses how colleges and universities are integrating strategies to reduce equity gaps and support minority students. Additionally, others communicated a need for research on SEM planning that is specific to community colleges. Many respondents also expressed an interest in how different stakeholders are engaged in and/or influence the SEM planning processes at their institutions.

Finally, the responses reflected an interest in research on enrollment goals at institutions. Respondents specifically want to know more about how institutions determine and meet enrollment goals as well as how they set and meet revenue goals.

■ **Changing Enrollment Landscape (41):** This depicts an interest from respondents in the numerous factors that influence the enrollment landscape. Most salient in the responses was an interest in research that might address how to navigate a changing enrollment landscape as competition among institutions continues to increase. Specifically, respondents indicated interest in how to increase enrollment in the midst of a changing and increasingly competitive enrollment landscape. Some respondents are curious to know if there are different impacts of a changing enrollment landscape based on institutional types. Further, this category encompasses an interest in how political factors such as the U.S. v. the National Association for College Admission Counseling (Department of Justice 2019) lawsuit may influence the changing enrollment landscape.

Finally, another dimension of this code includes an interest in research addressing the pressures institutions are facing in this changing enrollment landscape and how institutions are planning to respond to such pressures during change and declining enrollments.

■ **EM Best Practices (35):** This category encompasses an interest in research on best practices in enrollment management. The list below highlights the variety of specific topics respondents are interested in regarding best practices:

- Educational experiences
- Housing
- Class sizes
- Ease of navigation for students
- Communication with stakeholders
- Best practices for community colleges
- Increasing enrollment
- Launching and supporting student success initiatives
- Marketing and recruitment

■ **Shifting Demographics (32):** This reflects the interest to understand how student demographics have shifted in the United States. Some respondents are interested in how student demographics have shifted on a global scale. Nearly all respondents who expressed an interest in shifting demographics also expressed the need to examine how these shifts might impact institutions of higher education. Some respondents also expressed an interest in understanding which strategies are most effective for supporting students from different demographic groups.

■ **Cost of Higher Education (32):** Many respondents communicated an interest to understand more about the cost of higher education as it relates to students, families, and institutions of higher education. This code further captures an interest to understand how free tuition might impact institutions of higher education. Some of the respondents were also interested in research on student debt as well as debt reduction efforts.

■ **Curriculum (32):** This covers respondent interest in matters related to curriculum, from aspects of

scheduling to research on aligning majors and degree programs with labor-market demand. The list below outlines topics covered under this code:

- Majors in demand by students
- Majors in demand by employers
- Scheduling
- Offering majors/degree programs in alignment with labor-market trends.

This category especially reflects an interest to examine whether or not colleges and universities ought to scale down programs where there is less employer demand and whether or not this might allow institutions to reduce cost and reallocate resources to degree programs that are aligned with greater industry demand.

■ **Recruitment Markets (19):** These respondents are interested in research examining how recruitment markets have changed in more recent years. These responses varied from general interest in how recruitment markets have changed to how specific recruitment markets have changed. Specific recruitment markets listed by respondents include:

- International recruitment markets
- Graduate recruitment markets
- Undergraduate recruitment markets
- Online education

■ **Diversity (17):** This category demonstrates the need for research on enrollment management practices for increasing and supporting diversity in student bodies at varying institution types. This category also reflects a desire to know more about what factors might impact diversity at colleges and universities.

■ **Financial Aid (17):** This captures respondent interest in further research on financial and financial aid trends. Aspects of this category include:

- Financial aid and retention
- Financial aid and student success
- Managing financial aid discounts in varying types of institutions
- FASFA

→ Financial aid for first generation and Pell eligible students

■ **Projection Modeling (17):** Projection modeling covers an interest in research on enrollment projection modeling. This category specifically relates to SEM planning and goals of institutions as well as enrollment projection modeling for undergraduates, graduates, international students, and transfer students.

■ **Attrition (15):** In general, this category denotes an interest in more research on attrition issues and how attrition varies by institution type. The respondents are also interested in learning more about how institutions are addressing such issues. Some responses reflected an interest in further understanding reasons students leave institutions and whether those reasons could be categorized as academic, financial, or some combination of the two.

■ **Transfer (15):** This category reflects topics and issues specifically as they relate to transfer students. Respondents cited the need for additional research on the increased competition for transfer students, trends relating to transfer students, student success measures for transfer students, and general enrollment management practices related to transfer students. Four respondents specifically wanted to know more about transfer articulation agreements and their relationship with transfer student enrollments.

■ **Data in EM (14):** This category conveys respondent interest in additional research on data use and management in enrollment management. The respondents cited an interest to learn more about how institutions are engaging in data-driven decision making. A few of the responses also communicate an interest to learn more about how varying institutions are managing their data since data collection is decentralized within many institutions.

■ **Technology in EM (14):** This category captures an interest for more research on the varying technologies and their effectiveness as they relate to enrollment management. The respondents are also curious to know more about how technology impacts enrollment management. Specificities include:

→ The use of social media to engage prospective and current students

→ Appropriate practices in using technology to text prospective and current students

→ Tech-enabling the work of enrollment management (*i.e.*, electronic information exchange, electronic transcripts, etc.)

→ Impacts of artificial intelligence on enrollment management.

■ **Access (11):** This reflects an interest in research related to increasing access to higher education for students of all backgrounds. These respondents request further research to understand what barriers currently exist for graduating high school students, how to close equity gaps in higher education, and the effectiveness of strategies being used to increase access.

■ **Graduation (11):** This topical area indexes a general interest in graduation trends among various institution types. It also reflects an interest in: whether or not there are correlations between major selections and graduation rates; strategies to increase graduation rates; and how to increase graduation rates for underrepresented students.

■ **Trends in Changing and Evolving Roles in Admissions (10):** Most responses under this category reflect an interest in research on the role of faculty in admissions. These respondents are also interested in more research on the role that current students play in the admissions processes, such as involving students in recruitment. A couple of respondents communicated an interest to know more about the role of the registrar in admissions processes.

■ **EM Organizational Structure & Resources (9):** This category encapsulates responses that are interested in research on the structure and resources for enrollment management at colleges and universities. Responses included interest in leadership practices, organizational structure, and budget, as well as how those factors influence the effectiveness of enrollment management at institutions.

■ **Funding (9):** This reflects an interest in research on the various funding sources and practices for institutions on higher education. Responses specifically

included: comparing funding between two-year community colleges and four-year colleges; alternative funding models; declining state funding; how national funding might change; whether or not funding influences course offerings; and net tuition revenue.

- **Academic Preparedness (8):** This captures responses requesting research on the academic preparedness of incoming college students with particular emphasis on how to determine college readiness and what services colleges and universities are offering to support students who are academically underprepared for university-level work.
- **Persistence (8):** This category includes responses that reflected an interest in research on persistence. Practitioners are interested in learning more about: how privileged registration programs are impacting persistence; correlations between SAT scores and persistence into second year; motivations to persist; resiliency of students; comparing persistence among institution types; persistence in graduate school for adult learners; and research on students who persisted in the face of difficulties in higher education and/or returned to higher education after experiencing difficulties.
- **Standardized Test Scores in EM (8):** This category's responses reflected an interest to see research on standardized test scores in enrollment management, including: correlations between scores and student success; comparing success of students who enter under standardized test scores and students who enter under multiple measures; potential effects on admissions if/when standardized test scores are eliminated and/or made optional; and impacts of standardized test waivers at the graduate level.
- **Completion (7):** This covers requests for more research on completion with dimensions including admissions attitudes toward completion in community colleges, issues that affect completion rates, completion of degrees by adult learners, and comparing completion rates to the number of times students change their majors.
- **Decision Points (7):** Responses interested in research on decision points in the admissions process and/or decisions related to enrollment management in institutions stand as the crux of this category. Most responses reflect an interest in knowing what the critical decision points are for students, what factors influence decisions for parents and students, why students choose to attend or not to attend an institution, and who "matters most" in the decision-making process.
- **Yield (7):** This category indexes an interest from respondents to know more about strategies to increase yield, how institutions analyze yield, yield across varying institution types, yield management, and yield related to specific recruitment practices/techniques.
- **Generation Z (6):** This category reflects an interest in research to help better understand Generation Z, learning patterns of Generation Z, effective recruitment techniques for Generation Z, and how to engage Generation Z students.
- **Goals (6):** This indicates an interest to see research on enrollment goals at institutions, including how institutions determine enrollment goals, how institutions meet their goals, and setting and meeting revenue goals.
- **Dual Enrollment (5):** This category suggests an interest in dual enrollment trends, how dual enrollment impacts two-year and four-year institutions, whether or not dual enrollment has any correlation with time to degree, effects of dual enrollment on later college success, and trends in dual enrollment opportunities being created at the graduate level.
- **Institutional Culture (5):** This category reflects an interest to see research on institutional cultures, including: aligning institution mission and brand; managing difficult campus climates; trends in campus cultures; how institutional culture impacts SEM strategies and practices as well as affects institutional culture change.
- **Low-Income (5):** This includes respondents who want to see research on low-income students at varying institutions as well as strategies to support low-income students. Additionally, responses include interest in low-income students at private

institutions and changing the incentives for enrollment of low-income students.

- **Perceptions (5):** This reflects an interest in research on the perceptions of higher education. Specifically, respondents are interested in how media influences public opinion of higher education, perceptions of higher education by parents and students as well as by different segments of the population, and perceptions on the relevance and value of higher education.
- **Staffing (5):** Respondents interested in research on staffing in enrollment management reported wanting to know more about ideal staffing levels/ratios of staff to students, research to include staff who work one-on-one with students, staffing costs and comparisons to ROI, and increasing staff while simultaneously increasing recruitment efforts.
- **Online Education (4):** This category captures respondents communicating the need for more research on: how to adapt online education to varying student populations; best practices and enrollment success in adapting curriculum to online education that is traditionally taught face to face; supports that are needed/used for students in online education; and how student success compares/differs for students who have the ease of transferring to an online education format.
- **Return on Investment (ROI) (4):** ROI reflects an interest in: research on how institutions calculate ROI; comparing ROI for students with CTE degrees versus transferrable degrees; and how the ROI of varying degrees compare/differ.
- **Transfer Articulation Agreements (4):** Overall, these respondents want to know more about: how long transfer articulation agreements take; how institutions track transfer articulation agreements; transfer articulation agreement turnaround times and their influence on enrollment decisions; how many students use transfer articulation agreements; and their value compared to how long they take to establish.
- **Advising Models (3):** This category indexes an interest in research on effective advising models at varying institutions as well as trends related to faculty serving in the role as advisors.
- **Future Jobs (3):** Respondents would like more research on emerging and potential future employment opportunities/trends as well as what factors influence a person's decision to return to higher education for a career change.
- **Mental Health (3):** This category takes the form of a request for more research on the rise of mental health issues on college and university campuses, trends related to mental health, factors contributing to the rise of mental health challenges, and strategies to best support students facing mental health challenges.
- **Non-Cognitive Factors in Admissions & Retention (3):** This category reflects an interest in research to understand the role that non-cognitive factors play in admissions processes at varying institutions as well as the impact of non-cognitive factors on retention.
- **Rural Education (2):** Respondents requested research on the need for more rural education opportunities and how rural education opportunities differ before and after the 2016 presidential election.
- **Special Needs (2):** Respondents requested research on students with special needs and how to best support them.
- **Student Engagement (2):** Respondents requested general research on student engagement as well as research on creative student life programming with limited budgets.
- **Summer Melt (2):** Respondents requested research on reasons for summer melt (between confirmation and registration of new admits).

Collectively, these topics reflect the impressive range of responsibilities of enrollment management organizations, the wide-angle lens of the functions that comprise enrollment management. In the 1980s, descriptions of enrollment functions focused on admissions and financial aid. Over time functions such as orientation, registration and records, enrollment research, and enhancing student success became part of enrollment organizations (Ward and Hossler 2016). As Hossler (in press) notes, the addition of these functions resulted in enrollment management organizations becoming influential in the allocation of resources and the promi-

nence of EM on the decisions of senior administrators at colleges and universities. As a result, professional staff outside of admissions and financial aid view their roles through the lens of enrollment management. The organizational expansion of enrollment management units is central to understanding the research needs of senior enrollment leaders as well as the needs of the managers of offices such as admissions, financial aid, registration and records, and student success.

Implications for Practitioners and Researchers

Our description of the practitioner-defined research agenda presents a full array of topics and issues that enrollment management practitioners regard as ones needing research. This practitioner-defined research agenda provides practitioners of enrollment management with a knowledge of the topics other practitioners deem as needing research studies, as well as well-crafted syntheses, to guide their professional practice. In addition, this study can help set the research agenda for institutional researchers who focus on enrollment management. It is becoming commonplace for many large institutions to have full-time, dedicated research staff focusing entirely upon enrollment management related research. A knowledge of these topics of the practitioner-defined research agenda may stimulate enrollment management practitioners and institutional researchers to either add needed studies to any of the above categories or to suggest new studies that do not fit into any of these categories. We invite enrollment management practitioners to offer such suggested studies to us.

Members of the research community of enrollment management will also find uses for this practitioner-defined research agenda as it provides rich opportunities for research. Braxton and Hossler (2019) indicate that this research community includes doctoral students at the dissertation stage of their studies, faculty members associated with graduate programs in higher education as a field of study, and researchers of the American College Testing Program, the College Board, the Educational Testing Service, and the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Institutional researchers and

enrollment management officers who conduct research constitute additional members of this research community (Braxton and Hossler 2019).

Members of this research community may select topics from this practitioner-defined research agenda for pursuit. They may also elect to do integrated reviews or syntheses of the extant research on topics of the practitioner-defined research agenda because studies on some of the topics or sub-topics of the 45 categories of this agenda may already have been conducted and escaped the attention of enrollment management practitioners. Both members of the practice and research communities of enrollment might find such syntheses useful.

Doctoral students may find the topics of the practitioner-defined research agenda to be of value to them as they endeavor to identify a topic for their dissertation research. Faculty members affiliated with higher education graduate programs may also elect to include the practitioner-defined research agenda as a course reading as well as topic for class discussion.

As previously stated, a scholarship of practice for enrollment management requires the development of a two-way loop with one loop being the practice community of enrollment management to the research community of enrollment management and the other being from the research community of enrollment management to the practice community of enrollment management (Braxton and Hossler 2019). Researchers who conduct studies derived from the practitioner-defined research agenda play a necessary and essential role in the formation of the loop from the research community to the practice community of enrollment management. The necessary and essential role played by researchers entails the timely dissemination of the findings of their research to practitioners. A discussion of the various issues associated with the timely dissemination of findings is beyond the scope of this article. We refer readers interested in a discussion of these issues to Braxton and Hossler (2019). Nevertheless, we suggest that researchers present their findings at the Strategic Enrollment Management Conference sponsored by AACRAO, the College Board Forum, the Enrollment Managers Conference of ACT, and the annual conference of the Association of

Institutional Research. Presentation of findings at such conferences offers a medium for the rapid and timely dissemination of research findings to practitioners.

Closing Thoughts

This article identifies the most pressing institutional policy arenas for the practice of enrollment management. These include student success, student persistence, and student attrition. The effects of changing demographics and public policy upon the practices of enrollment management are also identified as rich areas for further research. Topics including the financing and costs of higher education and enhancing student diversity are also identified as important areas of research. Enrollment professionals also expressed the need for more research on marketing, the use of technology, and SEM analytics. Finally, studies that focus on the internal operations of enrollment management organizations including research on best practices and studies of the organizational structure of enrollment management organizations.

Following previous discussions of the two-way practitioner-research loop work on enrollment management (see Braxton and Hossler 2019), this article identifies the most important areas for research on enrollment management. Too often, administrators can be heard critiquing the dearth of research that can be used to help inform their decisions. At the same time, researchers in the field of higher education are wont to wonder aloud why college and university administrators do not make use of their research. As Braxton and Hossler (2019) noted, there is too little communication between practitioner and researchers. By identifying topics that enrollment management professionals would like researched, the practitioner-defined research agenda provides insights for researchers to conduct research that would garner the interests of the enrollment management professionals. In addition, the practitioner-defined research agenda helps enrollment management professionals better understand their field of practice, as the topics of this agenda can reveal new trends in strategic enrollment management. Simply identifying new topics can help busy professionals stay abreast of current concerns in SEM. These trends can shed light on the topics

where there is consensus regarding the most important areas for further research and understanding.

The imagery of a loop between researchers and enrollment professionals affords a helpful visual and way to think about the research needs of enrollment management professionals. The direction of the links between professional needs and research products, however, should not be understood as always starting from practitioners to inform the studies of academic researchers. There are already robust bodies of work for several of the topics identified by practitioners, such as student success; impact of financial aid; and the college choice process of traditional age students, underrepresented groups, and adult students. Some topics of the practitioner-defined research agenda suggest that enrollment professionals may not be making sufficient effort to stay abreast of research in many of the areas related to enrollment management. These same topics, as well as others, may also be a call to researchers to share their findings in journals that are more widely read by practitioners, even if these journals are not ranked among the most prestigious journals in the field of higher education. Indirectly, some of the topics of the practitioner-defined research agenda also suggest that high-quality literature reviews, which synthesize findings across studies with a set of realistic implications for enrollment managers, would be well received. Just as the reward structures of research universities do not reward faculty members for publishing in journals with a stronger practice focus, those same reward structures do not reward faculty for creating high-quality literature reviews with practical implications in areas of practice for strategic enrollment management.

Finally, this article calls for enrollment professionals to stay abreast of research in their field. In addition, we urge researchers in the field of higher education to put more effort toward making their work useful and available to enrollment professionals, as opposed to expecting them to read journals that focus a good deal of attention on methods but with little attention devoted to implications for practice. This is no small task for higher education scholars. Many researchers have little experience in more senior-level administrative rolls,

and as a result, insufficient insight into the practical implications of their scholarship. It might be necessary to involve enrollment management professionals in the study so that they can help to develop a set of strong implications for practice. The totality of these efforts

works toward enabling enrollment management professionals to use research findings to guide their practice of enrollment management (Braxton and Hossler 2019) and, in doing so, avoid making “trial by error” or “shoot from the hip” types of action (Braxton and Ream 2017).

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Braxton has published more than 110 publications in the form of articles in referred journals, books, and book chapters. He is a recipient of the Research Achievement Award bestowed by the Association for the Study of Higher Education and the Contribution to Knowledge

Award given by the American College Personnel Association (ACPA)-College Student Educators International. Both awards are for outstanding contributions to knowledge that advance the understanding of higher education.

Professor Braxton served as editor of the *Journal of College Student Development* from 2008 to 2015. He currently serves as an associate editor for the *Journal of College Student Retention: Theory, Research and Practice*. He is also a past president of the Association for the Study of Higher



Donald Hossler

Donald Hossler is an Emeritus Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at

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Hossler's areas of specialization include college choice, student persistence, student financial aid policy, and enrollment management. Hossler has received career achievement awards for

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Alexandra Cannell Wendt

Alexandra Cannell Wendt is an M.Ed. Candidate in the Higher Education Administration Program

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