

F E A T U R E

Interview with Jerry Lucido



Christopher W.
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Jerome A. "Jerry" Lucido is Professor of Clinical Education at USC Rossier and Scholar-in-Residence at the USC Center for Enrollment Research, Policy and Practice (CERRP). CERRP is an independent research center serving admissions and enrollment specialists and is committed to fostering equity and expertise in educational access, admissions, and outcomes. Established in 2007 at the University of Southern California, the center became a part of the USC Rossier School of Education in 2010. The center is rooted in the belief that the educational attainment goals of the nation will be more fully realized as college admission, student financial aid, and degree completion processes become better informed, more expertly practiced, and more equitable. (Description taken from CERRP website.)

Wisdom, Equity, Wine, and A New Covenant: A Reflection on Jerry Lucido's Career in Enrollment Management and Passion for Advocacy and Change

Jerry Lucido reflects on his shift from founding the Center for Enrollment Research, Policy and Practice at USC to his current role as Senior Scholar. He underscores the center's commitment to promoting equitable policy and practice in enrollment management, discussing its history and the need for independent research in the field. Lucido also emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development and research in achieving greater equity in education.

Tremblay: Tell us about your current role, work, and organization; what does that entail?

Lucido: My current role is different from my past one. I was the founder and executive director of the Center for Enrollment Research, Policy and Practice (CERRP) at the University of Southern California,

but now, I'm the Senior Scholar in the center. I'm moving past my full-time work, past my teaching, working halftime (and staying halftime) until the time that I leave the university—probably at the end of June of 2025. This time provides me the opportunity to, while the center is in transition, continue to provide guidance to it, and to connect it to enrollment policy and practice professionals across the nation and worldwide.

The staff at the center is doing good work with conducting the research that we identify and with putting on our conferences, offering our certificate program, running the College Advising Corps, and all the things that we do as a research center. And with that, fundamentally, our entire center is about fostering equitable policy and practice and enrollment management and with an eye toward equitable results in admissions and graduation, and therefore fostering a more democratic society. That's the vision. And what we're so lucky to be able

to do is to focus on enrollment in doing that, not the whole sociology, psychology, politics of equity, but enrollment equity.

Tremblay: I am curious to know a little bit about the history of the center. How did it get started? What was your involvement in that?

Lucido: As a career develops, you find yourself an opportunity to be in particular places where you think you might be able to make an impact. When my career took me to the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, first as an associate vice chancellor for admission, and later as the vice provost for enrollment, I also had the opportunity to serve as a trustee on The College Board. And I began to see the importance of a voice in national policy and in enrollment policy.

And as I looked at the landscape of what we were doing in enrollment, there wasn't an agency that sort of said, 'Well, let's look and see how this whole distribution process is turning out.' It felt like there were thousands of campuses seeking to do their own thing—institutional benefit that could operate—if we weren't careful, at the expense of the nation's needs. And, of course, public policy intersects with this and how financial aid is done, how we see college admissions, how the Supreme Court view admissions, and all of the rest of it. But I felt like there needed to be that kind of agency and it didn't exist. The College Board did some of that work; AACRAO does that work, as do other associations, but there wasn't any sort of an independent research center that just did that.

I began to think about how would I start this at Chapel Hill. And I was working with the public policy dean, the law school dean, the business dean, to try to look at how we would conceptualize a center, but I wasn't getting traction not being a faculty member at the time. I was getting their commitment to work together with me to create it when, quite frankly, the University of Southern California (USC) came calling. They were interested in having a new vice provost for enrollment at USC. I was interested in creating a center.

We got together and talked about how I could help them by coming to USC as their vice provost and stay on and do that for a bit, while at the same time I founded the center and ultimately moved to do that increasingly in my work. And that's exactly how it turned out. So USC liked the vision of having a research center on this, and they liked having someone who wanted to have a bit of a national platform involved in their enrollment work. And after four years as vice provost at USC for enrollment, I moved over to the faculty. The center was founded in 2007, and I became a full-time faculty member in 2010.

Tremblay: What have you been primarily teaching as a faculty member?

Lucido: I was able to do a number of things as a faculty member. One, along with Don Hossler, I was able to found the master's program in enrollment management and policy. I was also able to create a certificate program on leadership and enrollment management out of the center. I was able to teach in both of those curricula, which is pretty advanced professional education in enrollment management—equity focused, research based, and a deeper dive than most people get when they involve themselves in professional training.

Tremblay: Tell me more about the research of the center.

Lucido: Our research program centered around things like how do colleges and universities actually use non-academic factors in holistic admissions and review? How do we examine holistic review? How do we look at things in context? What are these so-called "non-academic factors"? And we call them that because they're often called "non-cognitive," but I think they're cognitive, so we didn't use that term.

At the center, we've done Gates-funded research on COVID-19 and how it affected institutional decision-making and student decision-making. That's a recently-completed project. So we were providing real-time data by interviewing enrollment leaders around the country in various sectors of higher education about what they were doing and why, and

how they were able to sustain their enrollment, who was able to, and who wasn't.

We have a new project that we're excited about that is looking at a Title I program for higher education. We think there should be a parallel program in higher education that goes beyond the Pell. The Pell Grant is really important. It has limited buying power, but it also has no incentives really, or disincentives for institutions. And what I mean by that is the Pell comes with a student. It typically doesn't cover everything. And the students very often will require bridge programs, or they'll require additional academic support. Well, where's the money to do that? And so, we think that if we really want to move the needle on enrollment and graduation of low-income, middle-income students, we need to have a companion program to Pell that provides a per-student subsidy to institutions for admitting and graduating these students, but we wouldn't give it unless the institution agreed to make prog-

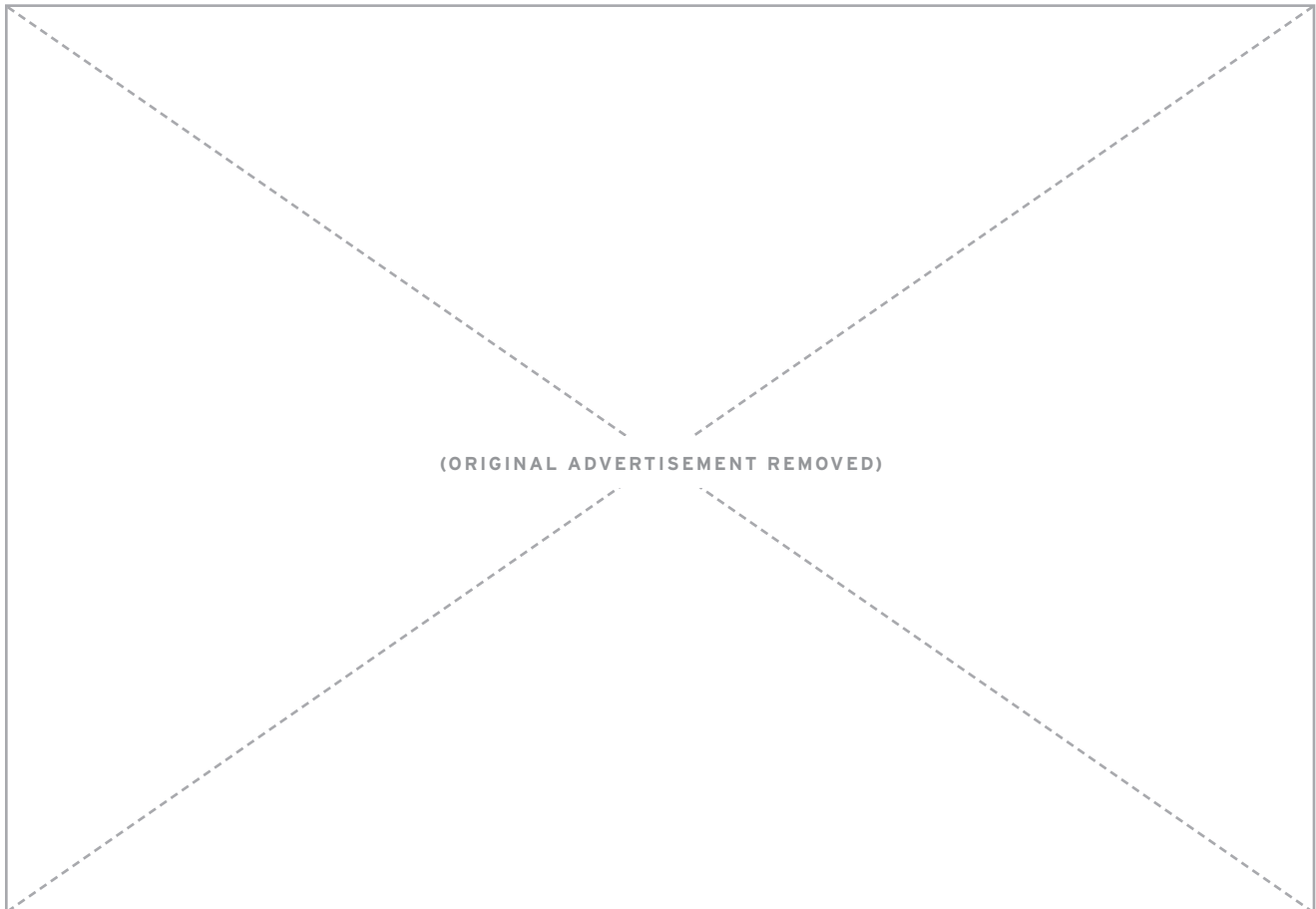
ress that is measurable progress. And we're building tools along with Nick Hillman's shop at University of Wisconsin to be able to set goals and to hold institutions accountable for progress.

Tremblay: That sounds like incredible work. Tell me more about the college access work of the center.

Lucido: We also founded the USC College Advising Corps in the center. It is a remarkable program that places near-peer advisers in high-needs high schools across Los Angeles. This program now serves more than 10,000 seniors annually in 41 schools and eight districts. The near-peers have not only served students, but they themselves have gone on to admissions and other professional careers in higher education.

Those are the kinds of things I was able to do once I became a faculty member.

Tremblay: What would you say if you had to describe your North Star, if anything was possible for enrollment?



Lucido: This ‘great American experiment’ is going to continue. I think we’re going to play a very important role in it. That said, I’m going to turn your question around a little bit because I think with the Supreme Court decision on affirmative action, with the relentless political attacks on diversity in the academy, this can be very discouraging, but for me, I would love to see somehow that the work we do in the center and elsewhere (not just us) results in a broader vision, a new covenant for higher education with the future of this nation. That includes what we do institutionally, but what we also do cooperatively as a higher education industry for the benefit of the country and as an industry that receives enormous support in tax subsidies, in direct funding, that we be able to educate a broader swath of society and that we form a new covenant.

I wrote a chapter in a book that’s coming out soon that talks about ways to do this or how to think about that collective action in the face of how much we really have to compete. And we can’t do it alone. The chapter asks us to move toward a new relationship between higher education and government sources that help to fund both public and private higher education and that frees us to pursue educational means across the full spectrum of society.

This work is done by thousands of people in our profession. And so what we try to do in the center is put a mirror image on it, try to provide greater insights to it, try to provide ideas and suggestions about how we can do better, how we can broaden our definitions of merit, for example, to include a broader group of society. Unfortunately, the financial model is broken. I can ask for a new covenant. I can say, “We have to figure this out. We can’t continue to provide the huge financial aid gaps for low- and middle-income students that we’re currently doing that make it unaffordable and unachievable for them ultimately, even if we admit them.”

Tremblay: Tell us more about this book you’re going to be in.

Lucido: Steve Burd at New America is publishing a book with the Harvard Education Press tentatively titled *Lifting the Veil on the Enrollment Management*

Industry. It’s looking at public policy and enrollment management, and it takes a pretty critical look at enrollment management. My chapter tries to say, “Yes, there are all these criticisms, and we need some kind of a plan.”

And I’m going to unapologetically put out a very bold set of plans that includes a new covenant between higher education and government entities. That includes a code of ethics for college admissions and greater transparency about what we do.

Tremblay: I want to get inside a little bit more of your career journey. I believe that you started your first role in higher education in admissions at Kent State. Tell us a little bit about how you ended up there and why admissions?

Lucido: Well, I graduated from college with a degree in business administration, and I worked in business and industry for a little while. I worked for the Federal Reserve Bank, the federal government, and in a marketing role for a business and industry. And after about five years of bouncing around through those kinds of jobs, I got frustrated because I just felt like the work I was doing was being done by a thousand other people putting their products in different colored packages. And it didn’t matter to the society if I did that work or not, frankly.

And I happened to be living close to Kent State University, as my territory had to do with Cleveland, Akron, Canton, Youngstown, and Pittsburgh, so I networked a little bit at Kent State saying, ‘What else is there? Are there master’s programs?’ Kent was still reeling from the 1970 shootings and trying to recover their enrollment and their reputation, and they had three admissions jobs there, and two of them were temporary, and one of them was permanent. I managed to get the third of these jobs because I had the desire to contribute.

And they immediately put me in charge of opening the inner city of Cleveland to Kent State and seeing what I could do with Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 90 miles away. So that’s where I started. And it was absolutely exhilarating to go into the schools where I grew up in the city of Cleveland and go into the schools to talk, as a first-generation student,

with other first-generation students about their lives, about their aspirations and going to an institution that was interested in serving them as a regional public.

After six years at Kent, I was able to move to associate director, and I had a master's degree and then went on to the University of Arizona as director of admissions.

Tremblay: So Arizona was your first director role?

Lucido: My first director role was at the University of Arizona in Tucson. And that was at the time when marketing was coming to the forefront in higher education. I helped to build an enrollment organization at Arizona and became assistant vice president for enrollment management. And then it included everything from early outreach to admissions, financial aid, registrar, all the way through career services at one point.

And then I moved to Chapel Hill, where there was a national voice so close to Washington D.C. and one of the commonly-recognized top five public universities in the country. So that felt really good to me to move there. And it was a place that was proudly public, and I really enjoyed that. My first private university was at the University of Southern California.

Tremblay: As you think back to all of these decades of work that you've done, for you professionally, what's been most rewarding and why?

Lucido: Well, first of all, I want to give a shout-out to the profession. Every time I found myself discouraged or tired or felt like the institution wasn't understanding our work or the odds were stacked against us doing well for society, I'd go to an event or a conference, and I'd run into all my colleagues and get instantaneously reenergized.

I think there's a group of people who are high-minded about what they want to accomplish on behalf of their institutions, on behalf of the education of students, who are fairly open about the way that they compete. Sometimes it gets a little too competitive, but I think those conditions have been created by policies that suggest we've got to go after the dollars because they're not provided, as higher educa-

tion is less viewed as a public good these days than it was when I started.

One of the most satisfying things is being regenerated by the profession and believing that it's really good, important work done by well-meaning very able educators. And I call them educators on purpose. We can be called marketers. We can be called salespeople in this world. But I really think if you're going to do it right, if you're going to do it well, you have to be an educator.

The opportunity to create a master's program and a center to study the work of a profession has enabled me to take a step back and look and make contributions I wouldn't have ordinarily made. Early on, my contributions were at large institutions. My impact was on the student body, my ability to create what was happening there to move an institution forward.

I think it's been the national voice that I've most appreciated, and I feel so blessed to have done that and to have moved forward, to come in as someone without an educational background and end up creating a research center that does this research and has created a program in the field. Our services projects have 48 college advisors in 41 Los Angeles inner city schools to do full-time college counseling, 10,000 seniors every year. I just feel like I've been extraordinarily blessed to be able to, in some ways, provide impact and to have some control over my career direction.

Tremblay: Speaking of college access, why is access critical to the future of higher education enrollment?

Lucido: It's absolutely critical to our future. I mean, if you're in this work for only a few years, you begin to understand the impact of who's coming through the pipeline. If you're at the graduate level, you understand who's coming through the undergraduate pipeline. If you're in the undergraduate level, you understand who's coming through the K-12 pipeline. And those demographics are changing dramatically. At the time I began in admissions, there was a pretty recognized middle class that was able to move their children into higher education due to very favorable public policy and lower prices on the

campuses. And we've lost that. That has changed, and we've seen greater income inequality occur over the last 20 years. And this is to the point where our flagship institutions and those institutions that provide most of the Supreme Court justices, business leaders, and all of the rest are seeing much more of a lopsided student population that doesn't come from the broad swath of society. We've created almost an educational aristocracy.

We have to change that. And I think the only way to change that is to become truly access focused and to really understand at all the levels what's happening with low-income students, what's happening with students of color, what's happening with students who bring all kinds of differences. It may be methods of learning how they learn, but our current system doesn't recognize their abilities as much as it should; we tend to have a deficit view of those who have had to overcome obstacles in their lives. How do we fix them rather than how do we celebrate what they have and bring? We have got to do that in society if we want to have healthy business leadership, a healthy judiciary system, a healthy political system, a healthy economic system. We need more participants. I worry about the future of the democracy if we continue to have this sort of aristocracy going through all of the selective institutions in America.

Tremblay: As you look ahead to the future, what gives you hope and optimism, especially since you're going to be stepping away from the center in the near future?

Lucido: Well, I believe in the young people of this country, and that always gives me hope. As I moved into a professorship, I moved away from my daily contact with students who were undergraduates or younger to more interaction with graduate students. But the College Advising Corps in our center has kept me in contact with what's going on in the schools, particularly under-resourced schools. And you see the ambition in the students. You see the talent and the ability. You see this genuineness of purpose and how they want to better their lives and their neighborhoods and communities. And you

see the huge obstacles in front of them, which we have to break down. They're too good for this. They deserve it. That gives me huge optimism.

I'm also optimistic about the reaction I'm seeing in an observer's role at what our institutions are doing in the face of affirmative action, the SFFA decision, and seeing a rededication to diversity and equity and to finding ways to fight through the political attacks on that. And frankly, that's a project that I hope to be joining in with Art Coleman and Jamie Keith of Education Counsel. We believe there needs to be an extensive training and development program that provides the latest technical legal advice, research, and best practices on how to maintain diversity, be legal and defensible, and still use all the tools that remain to us because the decision itself was restrictive, but only restrictive in certain ways.

Tremblay: As you think back, do you have a favorite class that you've taught and why?

Lucido: I had two favorite classes, if I'm allowed to say that.

One of them was about how admissions decisions are made, where I really got to go deeply behind the philosophical underpinnings of admissions policy, but then also to challenge people about how they would admit, how we define merit, how the context of a student's upbringing and educational background contributes to campus, and what they bring to the campus admissions policy. So I think the course on admissions policy and practice was really fun.

And I also really enjoyed teaching the class on organizations in enrollment management because it looked at organizational theory and practice. One of the real skills that enrollment leaders need now is they have to be good institutional leaders. They have to be an institutional voice. They have special expertise that is critically needed right now from both the development of the student body that comes to the campus as well as from the financial model and the institutional goal setting. How do we translate the equity portions of our mission into how we actually fulfill and manifest that in the students we bring to campus? I think that's a huge skill.

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The class studied how organizations behave, how you build coalitions, how you can build influence, and how you demonstrate your effectiveness as an equity-minded institutional leader. It was really, really a fun class for me.

Tremblay: What kind of things do you do personally to not think about all of the problems you're trying to solve in our worlds? What else keeps you going?

Lucido: Well, I have a pretty substantial hobby that keeps me very engaged. Right outside my door there is a two-acre vineyard, and I have moved to Northern Santa Barbara County. I do most of my work remotely these days. We cultivate two acres of Pinot Noir, and we make Pinot Noir wine, and we are now working on a small personal label for our wine. So I have an avocation, and having a little wine helps you unwind.

Tremblay: That's incredible that you have that. Was there any backstory on your interest or passion for wine?

Lucido: My wife and I would escape to wine country frequently, and the lifestyle here with the grapes growing with farm-to-table sensibilities and just a more tranquil lifestyle that tries to do everything as sustainably as possible, really appealed to us. We both have a background where our families would have wine at the table, and as we began to say, let's

move toward wine country for our retirement, we found a place that had a space to plant some vines. And so we just jumped into it, and we found the community unbelievably open and receptive to teaching new people.

Tremblay: As a wine lover myself, I appreciate your hobby. Is there anything that we did not talk about that you want to make sure to share?

Lucido: If I learned anything from doing this, it's that investing in your expertise as a professional is really critical for a career. And I want to put a finer point on it, that the center is devoted toward equitable policy and practice. And I think the more we learn, the more expertise we gather, the more equitable we can become, because we can ask more questions; we can interrogate more data sets; we can understand how what we do impacts people; and we can understand who those people are and how we can bring their benefits to our campuses. I think this notion of doing research, of building your professional expertise—whether it's through a master's program, a doctoral program, or certificate program—and really diving in substantively makes you better, makes you more equitable. I think that's the lesson that I took away from this work and that I really, really believe.

And once you find that work that speaks to you, you can put your foot on the accelerator.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

*Interested in becoming involved with the work of the USC Center?
Reach out to Jerry Lucido at jlucido@rossier.usc.edu*

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