STRATEGIC INSIGHTS & OUTSIDE PRESSURE: UNPACKING THE COMPLEXITY OF CREATING ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT DIVISIONS

by

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(Under the Direction of Amy Stich)

ABSTRACT

The creation of enrollment management divisions in higher education has become more prevalent than in the last decade. Enrollment management as a term was coined in 1976, but the use of the work associated with the term continues to expand the role of enrollment managers on college campuses.

This multiple case study sought to answer the question, why are institutions creating an enrollment management division. Guided by the institutional theory, resource dependency theory, and principal-agent theory, four propositions are presented:

Proposition 1: *Enrollment management divisions are created out of a belief that formal structure will allow for more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities.*

Proposition 2: *Enrollment management divisions are created due to isomorphic pressures originating from a desire to be seen as legitimate, and to avoid internal analysis.*

Proposition 3*: Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success.*

Proposition 4: *Enrollment management divisions are created to meet the performance goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding.*

The purpose of the propositions was not to serve as an exhaustive list of possibilities for why an enrollment management division is created, but to acknowledge existing research in enrollment management and consider the theories undergirding the research.

The cases are three newly created enrollment management divisions, having been established within the last decade. The three enrollment management units' function within three differently classified institutions, but they are located in the same state higher education system. Using multiple case study research methods, administrators were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol. After transcribing and coding the data, cross-case and unique themes made themselves known.

I found that the decision to create enrollment management divisions on college campuses is more complex than I thought. In every case, there were multiple interconnected justifications for creating the new division. Retention and graduation rates, as opposed to recruitment efforts, were the focus of the interviews. The institutions faced different challenges, but the reasons for deciding to create a new division were more similar than different.

INDEX WORDS: Enrollment management, organizational structure, institutional theory, isomorphism, resource dependency

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B.A., Mercer University, 2016

M.Ed., University of Georgia, 2018

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2025

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DEDICATION

To my classmate, turned best friend and husband, Dr. Matthew Ryan Grandstaff. My inspiration, encourager, and editor, this one is for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to start off by thanking Dr. Amy Stich for her presence in my academic journey over the last five years. From professor and advisor to friend and mentor, there is no way I would have been able to produce this piece of work without her constant support. My research interests could not be more different today than they were when I began my time in the Institute, and Dr. Stich welcomed my shifting interests without hesitation. When the imposter syndrome set in, Dr. Stich fought the negativity and encouraged me to trust in my own abilities and her belief in me. The timeline in which I wanted to finish this work was rigorous, but Dr. Stich's willingness to review my work thoroughly and in the timeliest of manners, helped make this vision a reality.

To my committee members, both past and present, Jim Hearn, Greg Wolniak, Erik Ness, Tim Cain, and Andy Borst, thank you. Thank you for your priceless insights, your honest feedback, and your interest in my work. Without your guidance in this process, or in the preceding three years of coursework, this study would not be the point of pride it is for me today.

I cannot continue without thanking the countless mentors who have shaped my academic career up to this point. Falling in love with higher education through my own collegiate experience at Mercer University, to the supervisors and cohort members who turned into best friends during my Master's program at the University of Georgia, every person in my corner propelled me further towards accomplishing this achievement.

The confidence my family has in me will always amaze me and continues to push me to reach new heights I never believed possible. When I decided to change my entire career as a sophomore at Mercer University, I was met with trust and support. Though they may not fully understand what it is I am doing, their continual interest in my educational pursuits, and the certainty that I am capable of exceeding my own dreams, fuels my work every day.

Five years ago, when I started my PhD coursework, I believed I was there to get my degree and then I'd be leaving Athens. Looking back, I can only laugh at this narrowminded outlook. I sure am glad I did not let it keep me from embracing all the McBee Institute for Higher Education would bring into my life. Namely, my classmate, turned tutor, best friend, and husband, Matthew. There is simply not a world in which I would be where I am today without you. You challenged me to fully commit to the PhD, a conversation that truly set me on a trajectory for success. Thank you for letting me interrupt any part of your day to run an idea by you, for improving my work in the most graceful way, and for redefining my preconceived notions about how I should navigate this arduous journey. We did it, my love.

Finally, I must thank the one who sat with me for hours and hours over the last two years as we wrote every word of the pages that follow. Jack, my four-legged best friend, you will never know how much peace your daily presence brings me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of institution type, size, or location, there is no denying the importance of tuition money in the success of a higher education entity, though this has historically varied between private and public institutions. This factor is heavily connected to the number of students enrolled at any given institution. Thus, the importance of student enrollment, persistence, and graduation cannot be understated across the contemporary landscape of higher education in the United States. Furthermore, as the cost of a degree increases along with trends that indicate a rise in the numbers of jobs that do not require a college degree, public perception of higher education has also shifted (Perna, 2024; Wood, 2024). Recent public opinion surveys show an increasing number of people asking whether college—particularly a four-year degree—is worth the investment (Fry, et al., 2024).

Additionally, as institutions continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for the impending "enrollment cliff," the focus on driving consistent enrollment numbers has intensified as a means for institutional financial stability (Bastedo, et al., 2023; Kamssu & Koaum, 2021; Penn, 1999; Phillips & Jones, 2024; Schultz & Lucido, 2011; Wellen 2004). In what could be considered the perfect storm, institutions look to enrollment management as a critical and necessary focus for survival (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015; Penn, 1999; Schultz & Lucido, 2011). As such, the purpose of this study is to explore the justifications and decision-making factors administrators

are using to create new enrollment management divisions. Using a multicase study research design, I employ qualitative methods to determine why these units are becoming more common, situated within the challenges faced by higher education today.

Today, the oversaturated marketplace of higher education also means institutions are attempting to thrive in a competitive environment wherein there are more open spots to enroll than students to fill an institution's classrooms. Further, students who are heavily recruited by higher education institutions are considered most likely to enroll, persist, and graduate, all at a relatively low cost to the institution, as the amount of public funding decreases, and "the shifting of the burden for paying for higher education from governmental support to students and their families" (Hossler & Bontrager, p, 233, 2015; Schultz & Lucido, 2011; State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2013). Many schools cast a very wide marketing net in hopes of enrolling enough students but still fail to recruit students who might be considered "right fit" students, thereby forcing themselves into competition with more resource-rich institutions. Much of this conundrum has to do with an institution's desire to be seen as the best in all categories instead of leaning into their identity. This is exacerbated by the fact that pressure placed on them by external entities such as governing boards or state legislatures is only increasing (Hossler, 2004; Hossler & Bontrager, 2015; Johnson, 2016; Penn, 1999; Schultz & Lucido, 2011).

To be viewed as legitimate by their peers, and in the eyes of prospective students, institutions often avoid putting their resources into recruiting students who would be the "right fit" for fear of not enrolling enough students (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015). Given significant decreases in public funding, institutions are becoming "increasingly dependent

upon student tuition, and thus student enrollment" (Hossler & Bontrager, p. 12, 2015). Furthermore, though there are criticisms of ranking systems like *US News and World Report,* several of the metrics institutions are measured on each year relate to "admissions yield rates, average SAT/ACT scores, and first-year retention rates" (Hossler & Bontrager, p. 12, 2015). Therefore, university administrators are now placing a greater investment on the work done under the umbrella of strategic enrollment management (SEM), simply defined here, but defined in greater detail in chapter 2:

> Enrollment management is both an organization concept as well as a systematic set of activities designed to enable education institutions to exert more influence over their student enrollments and total net tuition revenue derived from enrolled students (revised in 2011 from Hossler, Bean, & Associates, 1990, p. 5).

In the latter half of the 20th century, intrigue around the benefits of attending a university increased, but there was a growing concern over the post-baby boom decrease in the number of college-aged students (Mumper, et al., 2016). Enrollment management, as a discipline within higher education, sought to fill the gap after beginning in the world of private postsecondary institutions due to the changing landscape of both the United States and higher education as a whole (Maguire, 1976). At the time, the focus was primarily on student recruitment strategies and the use of new marketing efforts to attract students. Once the students were on campus, it was understood that the work of enrollment management was complete.

However, even as early as the late 1970s, various practitioners understood the all-encompassing work of enrollment management to include marketing, institutional research, market predictions, financial aid, and retention efforts (Maguire, 1976). Over

the last five decades, the definition of enrollment management and how it shows up in various institutions across the country continues to evolve. Now, somehow, enrollment management often includes even more functional areas than originally defined (Bontrager, 2004; Hossler, 1984; Pollock, 1987). Multiple practitioners and researchers have widened the scope of enrollment management, increasing the presence of enrollment-guided decisions. A more thorough analysis of the evolution of the term "enrollment management" is included in the succeeding section, but today, the work of enrollment management touches every aspect of higher education and is intertwined with the success of both students and their universities.

Enrollment management is present on practically every college campus, functioning a bit differently in different places. Therefore, the way enrollment entities work together will also vary greatly. According to previously completed research, a structured version of enrollment management exists in four distinct ways (Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, 1982). Each option provides various benefits and there are typically justifiable reasons for the implementation of each, even if the justification is related to the inability to implement a more powerful structure. For institutions that implement a less powerful type of structure or do not have an enrollment management structure at all, the use of SEM could be implemented as a concept wherein administrators concerned with enrollment make a concerted effort to get institutional buy-in for the idea that enrollment is everyone's job (Dolence, 1993; Hossler, 1984; Hossler, 1986). Due to the often-siloed nature of higher education organizations, using SEM as a concept presents a challenge for university leadership to gain buy-in from faculty, boards, and other important stakeholders.

With humans at the helm of all organizations, change is inevitable for reasons that have great merit and for those that may lack support. Since most public institutions of higher education are increasingly dependent upon enrollment numbers, changing federal policies, and the constantly changing economy, it would not be surprising if strategy was not heavily considered when making decisions to quickly save a college or university. Administrators are put under immense pressure to keep the lights on, at times leading one to wonder if decisions are always strategic or if they possibly come from a more reactionary place. While the term "enrollment management" is commonly preceded by the word "strategic," the development of a division dialed in to all enrollment work is not always supported by strategic reasoning (Johnson, 2016). The institutions that have successfully implemented SEM as either a structure or a concept are those who keep their long-term goals and institutional mission in mind (Dolence, 1993; Hossler, 1986). Many of the more modern definitions of strategic enrollment management emphasize the importance of keeping in mind the problem SEM is trying to solve and the longevity of the institution. Without a focus on goals, the support from necessary groups such as boards or faculty members will affect the success of SEM measures, thus greatly affecting overall enrollment.

To explore the creation of enrollment management divisions on college campuses, I developed a strong theoretical framework to ground this study. Higher education institutions are falling victim to the concepts of isomorphism out of a desire to thrive without reinventing the wheel (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The scarcity of resources, in the form of governmental financial support and students, introduces resource dependency theory, something which originated in the business field, which attempts to understand

organizational decision-making in the context of a finite pool of resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Finally, the close connection between higher education and state or federal governing policies, in the form of a principal-agent relationship, necessitates the consideration of policy and its impact on enrollment management divisions. Each of these theories and their relationship to the study at hand assisted in the development of a set of guiding research propositions.

There does not appear to be an end in sight to the growing concern over the value of higher education or the ever-increasing cost of a college degree. Additionally, as the world around them continues to evolve, so too will the students recruited by institutions. Thus, the landscape and environment within which higher education exists is going to continue changing, meaning the work of those focused on enrollment management will likely only become more complex. SEM has been around for decades, but with the constant resource constraint placed on institutional administrators, dedication to a solid understanding, much less implementation of SEM practices has been widely absent. As such, there is great value in research focusing on SEM to expose university leaders to the many ways their institution can begin placing enrollment work on a higher pedestal wherein the health of their organization will only benefit.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to learn more about *why* enrollment management offices were developed on college campuses. While the term strategic enrollment management has been around for decades, the shift within the organization of higher education institutions to place each of the enrollment management entities under one umbrella is more recent, and all signs point to this becoming a more common practice.

Even with the decades of conversation around enrollment management, there is a lack of literature on the topic because the landscape of higher education enrollment is constantly changing. Throughout this dissertation, many scholarly sources will be called upon to provide support for arguments made. However, I also supplement these sources with more recent literature in the form of news articles due to the constant evolution of enrollment management and the inability for scholars to keep up with such an environment.

As a main goal of this research, I hope to determine the influences and decisions which went into the development of an enrollment division. It is common practice to believe the decision to create such a division was "strategic" and made sense according to institutional goals and missions. However, external pressure, internal disorganization, institutional panic, and a myriad of other factors could be cited as part of the decision-making process for many administrators. It is my hope that the data collected, and subsequent analysis presented here will be useful as other higher education institutions make choices around SEM and set their university on a path towards success. While this will not be demonstrative of every institutional type or experience, the lessons gleaned from inquiring into the conversations and implementation of a new enrollment division should enhance the work done by future enrollment administrators.

Research Questions and Propositions

The foundation of this research was deeply informed by existing literature and theory in the field of organizational studies that led to the development of four propositions. The propositions provide possible explanations for the larger question

answered by this study: Why are enrollment management offices being created on college campuses? The propositions include:

> Proposition 1: *Enrollment management divisions are created out of a belief that formal structure will allow for more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities.*
>
> Proposition 2: *Enrollment management divisions are created due to isomorphic pressures originating from a desire to be seen as legitimate, and to avoid internal analysis.*
>
> Proposition 3*: Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success.*
>
> Proposition 4: *Enrollment management divisions are created to meet the performance goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding.*

Based on the four propositions, this research is also guided by a second primary research question: Which, if any, of the theoretical propositions provide support for the reasons institutions create enrollment management divisions?

The development of enrollment management divisions is still a relatively new phenomenon in higher education, meaning the research on the *why* behind such decisions is extremely scarce. Rooted in a deep understanding of the functioning of higher education and an in-depth review of the existing literature, the propositions highlight possible reasons for the creation of a new enrollment management unit with the organizational structure of an institution. As this research shows, it is also important to

note that the propositions are not mutually exclusive, in that they hypothetically can all be true within the context of one case.

Significance of Study

There are many institutions across the country that have already made the decision to create a division dedicated to what leadership considers to be strategic enrollment management, but there are still numerous colleges or universities wondering if the creation of a centralized unit would assist in solving their overarching enrollment challenges. Institutions with established strategic enrollment management decision making processes have shared their success in getting an entire university on the same page and meeting goals which are strongly connected to institutional mission and goals (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015; Kalsbeek & McGrath, 2004; Pollock, 2004). While there are currently four ways a more structured version of enrollment management shows up within the organizational makeup of a college or university, this study focuses on the most powerful and autonomous setup, the enrollment division. Analyzing the way three different institutions made the decision to create an enrollment management division serves multiple purposes. Primarily, the research and subsequent report could function as a roadmap for administrators who foresee a necessary change in their organizational chart. With a reliance on a strong conceptual framework, the study hopes to provide support to those who are attempting to make the case for an enrollment management division with both scholarly and lived experience. A secondary goal is to demonstrate to the critics of enrollment management, those who argue it is a money-making ploy, that there is great merit in an enrollment management division if plans are made with data and the student experience in mind (Bontrager, 2004; Henderson, 2005).

The focus of this study is to report the findings from a case study completed on three institutions that have fully-developed enrollment management divisions. However, it can be easily argued that such a division cannot exist without the concept of SEM. SEM is a concept that involves far more than just communicating with prospective students. There is a significant amount of work that needs to be done prior to the beginning of recruitment communications, and if those steps are ignored, the success of future enrollment efforts will be negatively affected. Doing the market and institutional analysis prior to making enrollment-focused decisions, if done strategically, will make best use of an institution's ever-decreasing resource pool (Kalsbeek & McGrath, 2004). Understanding the desired student population is an essential factor to include alongside the market and institutional analysis to keep marketing efforts from being unsuccessful (McGee, 2015). Without recognizing the shared vision and overarching responsibility that every office has in the implementation of SEM, the concept will quickly fail (Henderson, 2005; Johnson, 2016). Therefore, another peripheral goal of this study is to explain the relationship between various functional units in light of an organizational change.

By the conclusion of this study, I will gain enough data to know if the four propositions will be supported, primarily from interviewing campus administrators. Each of the four propositions were in some way portrayed through the findings, though they make up a different piece of the puzzle at the three different institutions. The way the propositions came up during the decision-making process are unique to each institution and will be explored in much greater detail. The individual reasons for creating an enrollment management division cannot be easily separated from the other reasons cited

by the leadership members I interviewed during my case study. With this in mind, the interconnected nature of the justifications for creating a new enrollment management division demonstrate the complexities within which campus administrators are making organizational change on their campuses.

The next chapter of this work focuses on the literature surrounding enrollment management in higher education. Though there is little to no significant research on the creation of enrollment management divisions, there is literature available on the development of enrollment management as a term, a concept, and a structure. This review helps to contextualize the current understanding of enrollment management and lead to the inclusion of a theoretical framework, developed through my understanding of both higher education and enrollment management. After defining higher education as an institution and recognizing isomorphic pressures and the effect of a governing agency, as the principal, on an institution, the agent, I conclude Chapter 2 by exploring the social ramifications of the homogeneity of higher education. Next, I define the methodological approach and research design decisions made throughout the course of the study, including the justification for the data included and the methods used. Chapter 4 lays out the major findings, both cross-case findings unique institutional findings, while analyzing the findings to define their effect on the creation of an enrollment management division. Finally, I conclude the study by refining my understanding of why enrollment management divisions are created, connecting them to the proposed hypotheses, and sharing implications of the study and future research opportunities.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Enrollment management as a term is relatively new, though, of course, the process of admitting students into higher education institutions dates back hundreds of years. With a reliance on historical, peer-reviewed research, this chapter presents a detailed, yet not exhaustive history of admissions and enrollment work within the last four-hundred years in which higher education has existed in the United States. Well-known works on strategic enrollment management from scholars who have both a career in enrollment management and experience in researching the work of enrollment managers was called upon to form the literature review portion of this study. The history of enrollment management is pertinent to this work to situate the problem at hand in today's modern higher education world, why enrollment management divisions are created.

Combined with the historical research presented, the theories presented in this chapter serve to support the propositions defined:

> Proposition 1: *Enrollment management divisions are created out of a belief that formal structure will allow for more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities.*
>
> Proposition 2: *Enrollment management divisions are created due to isomorphic pressures originating from a desire to be seen as legitimate, and to avoid internal analysis.*

Proposition 3*: Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success.*

Proposition 4: *Enrollment management divisions are created to meet the performance goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding.*

Existing theories, whether they come directly from previous higher education research or from other industries, help the reader see the relevance of the propositions, and subsequent findings. With reinforcement from institutional theory, demonstrating the way higher education has become institutionalized and the view of higher education as a business within a competitive market through resource dependency theory, the pressure and expectations on higher education administrators can be better understood across fields. Giving voice to the relationship between a government agency and an institution through the use of principal-agent theory starts to shine light on how the state system and institutions in this case relate to one another.

Enrollment Management Defined

With its genesis at private institutions, enrollment management first gained traction as a means for providing a larger and more profitable incoming class by considering new demographic and societal trends in the 1970s (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015; Huddleston, 2000; Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982). The concept that made "enrollment management" new was not the idea of considering these trends or that new marketing techniques were necessary. Instead, "it was the organizational integration of functions such as academic advising, admissions, financial aid, and orientation into a comprehensive institutional approach" which made the term revolutionary (Hossler &

Bontrager, p. 7-8, 2015). As private colleges started being affected by demographic shifts, such as the end of the baby boomer generation of high school graduates, the focus began to shift from getting students through the door to "organizational change that would build enrollment demand and provide more focus on the students' collegiate experience" (Bontrager, 2004; Huddleston, 2000, p. 66). While there were events throughout the early and mid 1900s that are tangentially responsible for the beginning of enrollment management as a term, it was not officially coined until 1976.

Jack Maguire, the then Dean of Admissions, Records and Freshman Financial Aid at Boston College, first used "enrollment management" in the Fall 1976 Boston College alumni magazine to describe the tactics used to attract and retain students (Hossler, et al., 2015). Maguire's (1976) original definition read:

> Enrollment management is a process that brings together the often-disparate functions having to do with recruiting, funding, tracking, retaining, and replacing students as they move toward, within, and away from the university.

This definition brings together functions from across the institution, many of which were not well integrated on most campuses. As will be discussed in more detail below, institutions, especially private schools, were facing similar challenges in 1976 as those being seen in the 21st century: decreasing birth rates, tuition dependence, and growing questions around the worth of a college degree (Maguire, 1976; McGee, 2015; Pollock, 1987).

Once the term was more widely used and it was understood that many siloed offices were working towards a similar mission, more comprehensive definitions were

written by new, and existing enrollment scholars (Kalsbeek, 2013). In 1982, Kemerer, Baldridge, and Green defined enrollment management as a concept and a procedure:

> As a concept, enrollment management implies an assertive approach to ensuring the steady supply of qualified students required to maintain institutional vitality. As a procedure, enrollment management is a set of activities to help institutions interact more successfully with their potential students.

This is the beginning of enrollment management being considered an organizational structure and not just a set of practices to ensure successful admissions cycles. Kemerer, Baldridge, and Green (1982) emphasized institutional mission as an important foundation for enrollment management strategies. They further stressed the need to avoid a "quick fix" mentality, instead urging institutions to realize they can take control of their enrollment challenges, but "ill-conceived efforts [are] not likely to product many new applicants, but why also make the institution appear foolish" (Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, 1982, p, 22).

As the definition continued to evolve, higher education staff were beginning to understand that enrollment management was going to encompass all the operations of an admissions office, plus many other essential institutional tasks (Hossler, 1986). Though the concept of enrollment management as a campus-wide effort had been suggested in previous definitions, Don Hossler's (1986) definition was the first to fully define the effect of strategic enrollment management:

> A process or an activity that influences the size, the shape, and the characteristics of a student body by directing institutional efforts in marketing, recruitment, and admissions, as well as pricing and financial aid. In addition, the process exerts a

> significant influence on academic advising, the institutional research agenda, orientation, retention studies, and student services.

Hossler's (1986) definition is far more encompassing and emphasizes the important work happening under the enrollment management umbrella. He argues that enrollment management is not just an administrative process, but a structure, process, and activity that should include the entire campus by emphasizing the value in strong research efforts in enrollment decisions. Previously, Kemerer, Baldridge, and Green (1982) encouraged the use of research in enrollment work and argued "data collected is a critical yet often ignored component of enrollment management efforts" (p. 25-26). It quickly became evident that understanding student choice, pricing, and retention efforts were the only way to effectively manage enrollment, creating a thriving institution.

By focusing heavily on the economic aspects of enrollment management, Dolence (1993) provided simple equations for calculating the optimum enrollment. This magic number would be different for every institution and was based on the desire to provide the best learning and teaching environment possible. To arrive at the optimum enrollment, institutional leaders would need to combine the efforts outlined in previous definitions and be strategic in their future endeavors to ensure the stability of their institution. As such, Dolence (1993) defined enrollment management as:

> A comprehensive process designed to help an institution achieve and maintain the optimum recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of students, where "optimum" is defined within the academic context of the word. As such, SEM is an institution-wide process that embraces virtually every aspect of an institution's function and culture.

The term “optimal” comes up in definitions written by other enrollment scholars such as David Kalsbeek (2013), who twenty years after Dolence (1993) wrote that strategic enrollment management is “a comprehensive approach to integrating all of the University’s programs, practices, policies, and planning related to achieving the optimal recruitment, retention, and graduation of students.”

Each of these definitions provides a glimpse into how enrollment management transformed in the first few decades of its existence within higher education. While the following definition is both lengthy and extremely detailed, it is demonstrative of the overarching significance of enrollment management in the world of higher education. The definition will be used as the basis for much of the research in the following study:

> “Enrollment management is both an organization concept as well as a systematic set of activities designed to enable education institutions to exert more influence over their student enrollments and total net tuition revenue derived from enrolled students. Organized by strategic planning and supported by institutional research, enrollment management activities concern student choice, transition to college, student attrition and retention, and student outcomes. These processes are studied to guide institutional practices in the areas of new student recruitment and financial aid, student support services, curriculum development and other academic areas that affect enrollments, student persistence, and student outcomes from college (revised in 2011 from Hossler, Bean, & Associates, 1990, p. 5).

Regardless of the exact definition used, enrollment management is a highly integrative process of faculty and staff who use social science research along with strategic planning and evaluation processes to ensure educational goals are being met, the

public is appeased, and the institution retains financial health (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013; Huddleston 2000; Penn, 1999). Though it is not a universally accepted belief, enrollment management is the work of every office across campus because without the cooperation and integration of admissions, student life, academics, marketing, research, etc., a piece of the puzzle would be adversely affected and could result in the entire system going off course (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015; Dolence 1983; Hossler, 1984).

The Evolution of Enrollment Management

Over one hundred years prior to the creation of the first public institution of higher education, private institutions enrolled a very small number of students and were struggling to attract a greater number of interested students–a challenge amplified by the exclusivity of those considered for admission (Thelin, 2004). When there was an increase in college enrollment levels, it had less to do with recruiting efforts and more to do with the expansion of the United States westward and mandates that new townships were required to provide land for educational entities (Coomes, 2000). The earliest college students were male, almost completely White, primarily Protestant, and they were expected to know both Latin and Greek (Bastedo, et al., 2016; Rudolph & Thelin, 1991). However, with the passing of the two Morrill Acts in 1862 and 1890, college was no longer just for the sons of the wealthy, but also for the sons of farmers, and with the 1890 act, newly freed slaves were given the chance to attend "separate but equal" institutions (Coomes, 2000). Though these two acts did not have the impact on racial equality that was expected, they did create a "college-building boom" (Coomes, 2000), with the number of colleges increasing from 467 in 1866 to 811 by 1880 (Snyder et al., 1996). Apart from four very short periods of time, higher education enrollment in the United

States did not face a decline but instead saw decades of dramatic enrollment increases due in large part to demographic shifts, getting closer to equal access, and financial aid policies (Pollock, 1987).

An Early Need for Enrollment Management

Both the increase in the number of students attending college, and the prevalence of academic institutions meant the administrative tasks once split between just a few people expanded greatly (VanOverbeke, 2008). Those charged with admissions decisions were no longer university presidents or faculty members, but instead committees working together to review interested applicants. Admissions expectations expanded to include the satisfactory completion of both English and Mathematics, the passing of the College Entrance Exam, or "certificate" arrangements made between secondary schools and the institutions. Each of these options represent a piece of the admissions policy still around today (Bastedo, et al., 2016; The Columbia University Press, 1904). These admissions policies were made possible due to the increase in student interest in a college degree and the expansion of curricula. Throughout the late 1800s, the curriculum shifted to become more expansive and less focused on only educating future clergymen. This began at the University of Vermont where students were given the choice between four departments from which to earn a degree (Rudolph & Thelin, 1991).

By 1900, high schools in the United States realized the number of students attending college was going to continue increasing. Throughout the late 1800s, women were given the opportunity to attend all-women institutions, and there were more than fifty established (Parker, 2015). Though some private institutions allowed women access in the 1800s, most women attending college were at one of the fifty all-women

institutions until the mid-1900s. At the conclusion of World War II, the GI Bill increased the number of veterans interested and able to attend a postsecondary education–leading to the need for new admissions processes to gauge their level of college readiness (Mumper, et al., 2016). President Truman's commission on higher education recommended every barrier to higher education be removed and a national scholarship program be made available (Zook, 1947). This commission also determined the need for community colleges to provide an alternative to the ever-increasing cost and expectations of attending a four-year institution. Community colleges would prove to be an invaluable vocational training opportunity that would thrive throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Through both the Educational Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965, new financial aid programs were made available to students, meaning more were given the opportunity to consider college as their next step after high school (Thelin, 2004). Each of these changes helped enrollment administrators realize more effort would need to be put forth to attract any students, much less the ones they deemed qualified for their institution (Coomes, 2000).

The Beginning of "Enrollment Management" as a Term

With the increase in governmental focus on college during the 1960s, more focus was being paid to keeping students enrolled and the desire to understand the benefit to students was heightened. Couple this with a growing concern over the shrinking number of college-aged students, the increased cost of higher education, and the questioning of the positive outcomes associated with a college degree in the 1970s and 1980s and it is easy to see the need for more strategic enrollment management efforts (Maguire, 1976; Rudolph & Thelin, 1991). Data was released showing the return on investment in a

college education was lower than it had ever been and more than 20% of college educated employees were underemployed, causing high school graduates to question the worth in a degree (Pollock, 1987).

As mentioned above, Jack Maguire (1976) placed the work of marketing, institutional research, market prediction, financial aid, and retention in the enrollment management category from the outset. Early additions to the definition included specific offices who should be included along with an emphasis on cross-campus coordination and the implication that there are unique procedures associated with strategically managing enrollment (Bontrager, 2004; Hossler, 1984; Pollock, 1987). Once institutions started understanding the value in integrating enrollment efforts, conversations between institutions, including conferences and articles in major higher education journals began referencing the term (Pollock, 1987). Enrollment management cemented itself as a staple in the collegiate sphere when administrative titles and units began to be established (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015). In 1983, *US News and World Report* released its first set of college rankings and it is a publication which continues today and greatly affects admissions and enrollment efforts because of how students and their families weigh the value of the ranking system (Russo & Coomes, 2000).

"Strategic" Enrollment Management

Throughout this work, the words "strategy" and "strategic" are used to describe the way enrollment is managed, and the decisions that are made to manage university enrollment. As the term enrollment management continued to expand, it was difficult to find the term without "strategic" closely attached, first being included in the Hossler (2015) definition to be analyzed below. With the prevalence of such a term, it is

important to provide a comprehensive definition to then appropriately apply the term within the context of enrollment management. Many of the definitions of the words "strategy" or "strategic" are not from the world of higher education, but they can easily be applied across disciplines to understand the why and how organizations change. A simple Google search produced multiple definitions of the word "strategy." Beginning with Merriam-Webster, a "strategy" is "a careful plan or method" or "the art of devising or employing plans or stratagems towards a goal."

Early scholarly work on the definition of the word strategy by Chandler argued it was best to define strategy as "the determination of the basic long-term goals and objectives of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources for carrying out these goals" (p. 13). In a more corporate use of the word "strategy", Andrews, a professor at Harvard, put forward an extremely comprehensive definition: strategy is "the pattern of decisions in a company that determines and reveals its objectives, purposes or goals, produces the principal policies and plans for achieving those goals, and defines the range of businesses the company is to pursue, the kind of economic and human organization it is or intends to be, and the nature of the economic and non-economic contribution it intended to make to its shareholders, employees, customers, and communities" (p. 18). A description of the word strategy also considered the competitive nature of the word: "[it is] a board formula for how a business is going to compete, what its goals should be, and what policies will be needed to carry out those goals" (Porter, 1986, p. 12).

To put these definitions into more of a higher education lens, a company represents the institution, the resources can be considered tuition dollars and government

support money, and the competitive marketplace is the oversaturation of postsecondary options available today. Andrews (1980) incorporated the idea of both economic and non-economic contributions to be made across various stakeholders within the accomplishment of organizational goals. This is extremely relevant to higher education as the expectation of postsecondary outcomes continues to increase beyond higher economic earnings for graduates to include social, emotional, and mental outcomes. With this in mind, it is easy to see how the word "strategy" should be included in the way enrollment is managed. Further, the term "strategic" indicates something is of great importance and should be considered to affect both short and long-term goals of the organization. Enrollment management is openly considered one of the most important components of an institution's success. Therefore, the goals related to enrollment should be strategic and take far more than a simple decision-making process to define.

The Enrollment Management Landscape Today

Today, enrollment management encompasses far more than simply the act of offering admission to an incoming class of students. The process to yield a student begins years before they graduate high school and will continue until they cross the stage at graduation. It is now understood that enrollment management can be considered both a strategic approach to meet enrollment goals and a best practice for how to structure enrollment entities (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015; Kraatz, et al., 2010). While the focus of enrollment management remains an increase in overall student population, other benefits include "improved efficiency of the units within an enrollment model, expanded marketing capabilities, enhanced quality of new students, and stronger internal and external communication of student information" (Huddleston, 2000; p.6). Academic

capitalism argues higher education has become more business-like in its approach to the recruitment of students and the marketization of the services provided (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). Students and their families view higher education as a good to be consumed, in the form of a credential (Wellen, 2004). College is an economic decision today, more than ever before, as families are determining where they can gain the greatest return on their investment. They want the most affordable cost while also receiving a prestigious degree (McGee, 2015; Wellen, 2004). Therefore, the way offices such as admissions, marketing, and financial aid are appealing to potential students and their families has become increasingly strategic and collaborative (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015).

Competition between institutions has only increased in the last couple of decades. Many institutions refuse to choose a specific type of student to recruit for fear of not recruiting enough students, meaning the competition is not only between similar institutions, but between opposite types as well (Schultz & Lucido, 2011). The prestige race, caused in part by the *US New and World Report* and other ranking systems, force every school to set their sights on enrolling the top academic students as to avoid the question of why they are not as highly ranked by prospective students and faculty (Hossler, 2004; Hossler & Bontrager, 2015). Monies toward higher education from state entities is often decreasing, meaning the public institutions who previously did not have to be tuition dependent are being forced to place a heavier emphasis on guaranteeing students will enroll and retain (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015; Penn, 1999; Schultz & Lucido, 2011). The prevalence of state agencies and the increase in their power has put pressure on institutions to show consistently impressive enrollment, retention, and

graduation rates (Johnson, 2016; Penn, 1999). While there are plenty of high school graduates and others capable of attending college, the attitude towards earning a college degree continues to be questioned. In combination with rising costs, slow modernization, and a workforce willing to pay satisfactory salaries to those not college-educated, colleges are not only competing with themselves, but with public opinion and the bottom line of the average citizen's budget (Penn, 1999; Schultz & Lucido, 2011; Wellen 2004).

Though the term "enrollment management" has not been around since the inception of higher education in the United States, the work of enrollment managers today was, at least in part, being done in the 1600s. However, it would take the first sharp decline in college attendance to truly turn the work of enrollment management into a widely accepted phenomenon and heavily relied upon structure. Interestingly, the same issues facing higher education for which enrollment management was coined to solve are highly prevalent today, leading to the creation of new enrollment management offices, regardless of the institution type.

Enrollment Management as a Concept

Since the term was first coined, enrollment management as a concept, mindset, or set of guiding principles has taken hold in higher education (Henderson, 2005). Fundamental elements of SEM include the idea that it is a shared responsibility, part of the long-term institutional planning process, focused on service, research, and key performance indicators (Henderson, 2005). Institutions do not need to have an enrollment management structure to be a healthy, functional, and thriving business. However, there is great research that the concept of strategic enrollment management, as described in this section, leads to a successful present and future for higher education. The main operative

of an enrollment management framework is to "alter the frame of reference that college and university administrators use to view the students as well as the institution" (Hossler, 1986, p.11). Each entity—admissions, faculty, student life—tend to view the student experience from their own lens, failing to consider the way their actions or decisions affect the overall functioning of the institution. Enrollment management procedures force these groups to work together to form a full view of student life, serving as the impetus for administrators and faculty to face harsh realities about the vitality of individual academic programs or their institution (Dolence, 1993; Hossler, 1984; Hossler, 1986). Institutions who use strategic enrollment management well are those that begin with research and use their mission as the backbone for all enrollment decisions (Dolence, 1993; Hossler, 1986). The challenge arises when institutional mission and enrollment goals do not align, a factor often at play because those deciding upon mission and enrollment goals are boards that lack an understanding of strategic enrollment principles (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013).

In 1976, when Jack Maguire first used "enrollment management" as a term, he was calling upon higher education to use research regarding its current student population and the external market. Internally, institutions must consider who they are, what they offer to students, and how they are retaining and assisting students through graduation. Externally, higher education must know their market to be able to recruit and retain a strong enrollment (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015; Dolence, 1993; Hossler, 1986; Maguire, 1976). Once research is gathered, the institutional mission and goals should be discussed as the objective of enrollment management is to find the "optimal" way to ensure institutional stability through strategic decisions (Dolence, 1993). Institutions utilizing

enrollment management as a set of guidelines will also need to consider the vital nature that marketing, financial aid strategy, student services, and faculty support will play in the larger picture (Hossler, 1984; Maguire, 1976). There is simply no way to separate the work being done by each office. Admissions offices use marketing efforts to promise a certain experience provided by the academic opportunities in the form of faculty prestige, academic support, and career guidance. Recruiters often point to the programs put on by student affairs, residence life, and athletics to differentiate themselves from their competition. Finally, financial aid plays an early and important role in the college decision process as it can make an institution's cost shrink (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015; Hossler, 1984; Hossler, 2000; Huddleston, 2000; Maguire, 1976;).

Research and Marketing as a Strategy

One of the earliest changes higher education institutions made when adopting enrollment management practices was creating advanced marketing practices. Prior to even mentioning the value in conducting market research, Maguire (1976) invokes a sense of urgency to lean into innovative marketing strategies. Pieces of the marketing strategy considered outdated today, publication materials, targeted mailing strategies, and telemarketing campaigns began to take hold (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015). Marketing is also the first time Maguire (1976) emphasized the need for outstanding faculty, staff, and programs. Offices of admission are the most outward facing entities at any institution, therefore, it is imperative there are programmatic benefits they can directly market to recruit students, pointing directly towards the interconnectedness between offices on campus (Maguire, 1976). Since then, the focus on marketing tactics in the context of

enrollment management has expanded beyond simple strategies without research backing up the chosen methods (Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, 1982).

Market research is paramount to determining the correct marketing strategies and appropriate audience (Dolence, 1993; Hossler, 1984). Institutions must first view themselves as part of an industry offering a service, they must have a great understanding of the demand for their "product", and they must determine what sets their "product" apart from what is being offered by their competitors, other institutions (Dolence, 1993; Hossler, 1984; Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, 1982). A strategic enrollment management mindset demands an awareness of the demographics an institution's recruiting efforts are pointed towards, as recruiting students by promising experiences which cannot be delivered upon will greatly impact both retention and graduation rates, closely connected aspects of enrollment management (Dolence, 1993). For the next decade or more, enrollment marketing has become one of the most analyzed, pressurized, and valued pieces of an institution's strategic planning, leading to an increase in the use of outside agencies and expanded staff hired for the sole purpose of enhancing enrollment marketing plans (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015; Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, 1982).

Financial Aid as a Strategy

In much of the scholarly work on enrollment management, marketing is listed as the most important piece of the puzzle; however, financial aid and pricing strategy is typically a close second (Hossler, 1984; Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013; Huddleston, 2000). Early research on the college choice of students indicated students did not consider cost nearly as heavily as institutions thought, as students were rarely afforded the option to have more than one school from which to choose from (Hossler, 1984). However, as the

research around the effect of financial aid on enrollment increases, the impact of such policies is becoming more significant. For example, the HOPE scholarship, state financial aid awarded based on academic merit to Georgia students, increased the number of in-state students attending 4-year public colleges by 9% and 4-year private schools by 13% in the 1990s (Cornwell, et al., 2006).

The research today shows that college is almost a completely economic decision for students and their families due to the high cost (McGee, 2015). Research done to look at the effect of higher levels of institutional aid on low-income student enrollment showed a positive relationship between increasing all forms of aid, including loans, grants, and scholarships and low-income student enrollment (Lassila, 2011). A part of the research which has not changed is the confusion surrounding sticker price versus the net cost of a college education (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015; Hossler, 1984; McGee, 2015). For many institutions, "discounting" tuition costs is a strategic recruitment tool, but it can cause great confusion for students when they see the gross cost of a degree listed and are unaware of the aid available (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015; Hossler, 1984; Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). Many institutions have attempted to offset this confusion by detailing aid possibilities in their marketing materials and on their websites. The federal government acknowledges the oftentimes misleading information and requires institutions to provide a net price calculator for students to project their net cost (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015).

Other uses of financial aid strategy in the enrollment process are centered around broadening access, providing equity, and redistributing income (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015). The goal is to allow students to make their college choice regardless of their

family's financial situation, but what this led to was the private, wealthy, selective schools being able to attract the top students without the fear that their less competitive peers would be able to yield them (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015). As several studies have indicated, financial aid award packaging coming directly from an institution does have a significant impact on a student's decision to attend (Hossler, 2000). Though financial aid does make a great impact and can assist an institution in their efforts to provide further access and equity, there are criticisms against using financial aid in enrollment management strategy. For example, institutions may discount the tuition of students who will increase their academic profile at the detriment of the money available to students who are in financial need (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). Further, some institutions are forced to raise their tuition costs to offset a lack in state or federal funding. This leads to them needing to give scholarships to students who can afford to pay more, but refuse to (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015; Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). The full impact that financial aid strategy has on the enrollment management framework is beyond the scope of this paper, however, it would be negligent not to define the basic relationship as a means for contextualizing the interconnectedness of admissions and financial aid.

Student Services and Faculty as a Strategy

It has been established that enrollment management affects and is affected by every aspect of the institution, not excluding student services and faculty. For the purposes of this study, student services includes any work done with a student while enrolled: academic and career advising, student affairs programming, and retention efforts. In many settings, enrollment managers will not have direct influence over each of the offices, but without well-functioning support mechanisms in place, there is little for

admissions offices to call on when recruiting students (Hossler, 1984). Institutions need to know the offerings which set them apart and be ready to lean into their correct market audience to not work hard to recruit the wrong set of students (Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, 1982).

Beyond the need to have exciting and supportive programs to call upon, student retention and persistence are completely intertwined with enrollment issues. According to Bontrager and Hossler (2015), the student outcomes landscape is changing. Previously, institutional and student outcomes were tightly coupled; however, the "traditional" student path is only one of many that students can take. Institutions are being forced to rely on other types of students, such as those who may transfer in and "lifelong" or adult learners; these are new demographics to learn how to recruit and retain (Penn, 1999). An institution wants to see a student persist through to graduation at their institution. However, higher education professionals need to be adaptive to the new path students may take and be ready to assist them, regardless of how that may affect their institutional outcomes (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015).

The idea of being content with a student's decision to transfer is in complete opposition to many of the institutional goals to impress their state operating agencies, who are often determining funding based on institutional performance around retention, persistence, and graduation rates (Huddleston, 2000; Penn, 1999). Student services, including social programming, academic support, and career planning all assist in the goal of seeing students graduate from the institution in which they first matriculated. Even in 1976, when Jack Maguire first mentioned enrollment management, he called upon institutions to research and adjust to solve the problems arising for students who are

transferring out. These efforts are strengthened by a variety of theories related to sense of belonging, cultural awareness, and organizational structure (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015). Efforts to increase retention, persistence, and graduation rates are not going to end any time soon as the accountability measures are taking a greater hold but the creativity of enrollment managers to meet the goals set forth by policymakers will need to shift greatly (Penn, 1999).

The connection between faculty and enrollment management officers can be challenging as faculty are given great freedom inside their classrooms. However, many faculty are eager to be part of the enrollment management process, but as it is not their main focus, they often lack the knowledge to fully contribute (Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, 1982). Once faculty are given an insight into the goals and enrollment needs of the institution, they often take pride in furthering the quality of the education they provide (Penn, 1999). Buy-in from faculty can lead to the adjustment of academic curriculum to be more aligned with the market realities and shifting demographics in higher education (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013).

Further, research exists to show a strong connection between student interaction with faculty and their desire to attend an institution and an optimum learning environment, created by faculty involvement, impressive academic programs, and detailed procedures, is paramount to recruiting and retaining the right student population (Dolence, 1993; Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, 1982; McGee, 2015). The challenge for enrollment management professionals is the lack of control they have over what happens inside the classroom due to the tenured status of many faculty and the concept of academic freedom (Penn, 1999). The lack of sway over faculty decisions makes the buy-

in of faculty into enrollment goals even more important (Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, 1982). Institutions have found success in developing a stronger relationship between enrollment efforts and academic units by creating a liaison system where faculty members represent their individual departments during admissions focused conversations. In some scenarios, the apathy faculty previously felt towards enrollment work dwindles and academic entities are more willing to lend financial, human, or intellectual resources towards improving the enrollment situation (Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982).

The intertwined nature of enrollment efforts with all other work happening on a college campus cannot and should not be ignored. In many cases, there is a great chasm between these units, and it often falls to the enrollment team to fill in the gaps to create a mutually beneficial relationship for all involved. Each of the offices is doing important work, but it is easy to get caught up in a narrow section of the inner workings of the institution. With strategic enrollment management in place, these offices should be better able to work together with a greater understanding of their interconnectedness.

Enrollment Management as a Structure

Many institutions use strategic enrollment management to meet goals, further their financial health, and plan by leaning on the concepts outlined in enrollment management research.Mmany institutions have created more structured systems for the purposes of enrollment management (Huddleston & Rumbough, 1997). Within the field, there are four widely accepted models for how to organize enrollment management structures: committee, coordinator, matrix, and division (Black, 2004; Bontrager & Hossler, 2015; Hossler, 1986; Huddleston & Rumbough, 1997; Kemerer, Baldrigdge, &

Green 1982; Penn, 1999; Schee, 2007). These four models are not considered all encompassing. In some instances, two or more can be combined to create the correct structure for an individual institution (Hossler, 1986; Huddleston & Rumbough, 1997). The correct model for any institution should be determined by organizational goals, financial needs, challenges, and culture, but it also must be responsive and flexible as the market is constantly changing (Schee, 2007).

Traditionally, higher education institutions are "loosely coupled" (Weick, 1976), but the introduction of an enrollment management structure can lead to a far more tightly coupled system in which faculty and staff more fully comprehend how their work plays into the overall functioning of the institution (Hossler, 1986; Huddleston & Rumbough, 1997; Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, 1982). Both structural format and titles within such a structure can vary. Enrollment management research clearly shows that when a chief enrollment officer can advocate for enrollment issues to presidents, academic and financial officers, and any governing boards, enrollment remains a constant priority (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013; Huddleston & Rumbough, 1997).

The Enrollment Committee

As the name suggests, an enrollment committee, first described as a marketing committee, combines a group of influencers from across campus who directly touch admissions, marketing, research, retention, academics, etc. (Black, 2004; Hossler, 1986; Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982). First coined in 1980 by Roger Campbell at the 1980 American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), the marketing committee should be focused on analysis, research, programming, and communication. Before determining how to recruit students, Campbell

(1980) argued the committee should know who the primary and secondary markets are by looking at historical data and conducting market research. The committee should then focus on the student experience both socially and academically to decide what type of student to recruit.

Finally, a marketing committee can be helpful in evaluating of messages coming from each of the offices to avoid external confusion (Campbell, 1980). Oftentimes, after identifying an enrollment related issue, this is the first route taken by institutions due to its relative ease in implementation and the low-level of authority (Penn, 1999; Schee, 2007). However, this option also requires the least amount of commitment and institutional support, meaning it is considered the least likely to succeed as it lacks decision making power and has been traditionally viewed as a means for bringing forth primarily research and assessment findings (Bontrager, 2004; Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, & 1982).

The Staff Coordinator

Instead of bringing together staff and faculty from across campus, the staff coordinator model argues for one person to be charged with coordinating all enrollment management efforts (Bontrager, 2004; Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982; Penn, 1999). While this model does not call for the creation of an entire enrollment management office, many institutions will place this person in an important spot in the organizational chart, such as in the president or provost's office (Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982). The benefit to this approach is twofold: there is no need for a complicated reorganization of the staff structure. Offices that previously were disjointed would be better coordinated under one staff member (Hossler, 1986; Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982; Penn,

1999). According to multiple scholars, the person in such a role would need to be able to work well with others and not be afraid to speak up for enrollment needs. Even though the position may be placed near the president or provost, these leaders have several competing priorities for the enrollment coordinator to deal with (Hossler, 1986; Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982). Like the committee model, the coordinator model of enrollment management lacks great influence due to a lack of authority assigned to a coordinator and the offices not being under any direct supervision by a singular staff member, meaning this person typically is only held accountable for being knowledgeable on the enrollment work happening across campus (Penn, 1999).

The Matrix

The third model for implementing an enrollment management structure on campus is known as the matrix system. Also requiring little campus reorganization, this model places functions such as marketing, enrollment, retention, and research under the jurisdiction of one senior-level administrator (Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982; Penn, 1999). These offices do not report directly to senior administrators, but since the person charged with coordinating the groups is known to have more power on campus, institutions have found this model to be more effective than the coordinating model (Hossler, 1986). This model highlights the importance of faculty members as part of the enrollment conversation. Having a senior administrator coordinate efforts to become more tightly coupled forces faculty to give more of their time towards enrollment management topics (Black, 2004; Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982). It is key for there to be a top administrator fully entrenched in enrollment management work and instituting the matrix system requires at least one senior administrator to know a great deal about the

challenges facing institutional enrollment (Black, 2004; Hossler, 1986). Alternatively, this senior level administrator will have a myriad of other responsibilities, meaning they may not have the extra time or motivation to fully give enrollment the attention it needs (Black 2004).

The Enrollment Management Division

The final and most robust model for developing an enrollment management structure at an institution would be the creation of an entire division. Though this model requires the most restructuring, it also allows enrollment needs to be brought to the forefront when considering institutional needs and priorities (Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982). Institutions that have historically been able to quickly create such divisions are those that are perceived to be in great enrollment crises (Hossler, 1986). Black (2004) believes the greatest issue with the creation of a division is that it is done with haste by simply combining offices such as marketing, admissions, and financial aid and lacking the full shift towards an enrollment management mindset.

Further, creating an enrollment division without proper planning could result in additional budget constraints and pushback due to another layer of administrative authority being added (Black, 2004). The benefit, which sets this model apart, includes the enrollment offices being organized under one administrator, someone to be held accountable for the success of the institutional enrollment priorities. Typically, the administrator sits on the cabinet has the ear of the president, and any board charged with setting goals, therefore, placing a high level of importance on the work being done in such a division (Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982). While this option is considered the most radical change for an institution, it is also the one most responsive to enrollment

challenges and can provide the greatest level of stability for enrollment-related offices (Penn, 1999).

As the models become more structured, they hold more decision-making power and have a louder voice at the administrative table. It will not always be possible to fully restructure in the wake of an enrollment crisis but bringing together enrollment efforts in some manner is going to create a more tightly coupled system in which staff and faculty will be more united in either solving a problem or furthering their institutional goals.

The work of enrollment management in the United States has been around since the beginning of higher education. When higher education became more widely available to people, a boom in enrollment numbers, a focus from the government on access and equity, and more stiff competition created the need for a more strategic approach to managing admission, retention, and graduation rates. Research on enrollment management practices calls for the coupling of offices previously separated, leaning into market research and innovative marketing strategies, and educating entire campuses on the value in a highly focused enrollment environment. As each of these happen, some institutions are choosing to combine separated units into one overarching division for more control over enrollment needs.

Theoretical Framework

To examine the nature of strategic enrollment management, specifically the creation of enrollment management divisions within higher education, I discuss theories related to institutional and organizational structure. The pressure to be viewed as legitimate and couple with a desire to avoid internal reflection, institutions often mimic their aspirant institutions. Examining the environment surrounding higher education and

the resources needed to survive show the challenges associated with high levels of competition and an inconsistent resource supply, leading to a necessary change in organizational structure. Further, a conversation regarding the effect of policy implementation on the decision to create an enrollment division will dissect how government accountability measures seemingly force institutions to restructure around enrollment management work. Governing bodies dictate many of the organizational decisions made within higher education, directly and indirectly. Institutions may need to restructure offices to meet the requirements placed on them by governing boards, resulting in a dramatic change to the inner workings of the university.

After analysis of these frameworks I will share four hypotheses as to why institutions create enrollment management divisions. Each of these theories help explain why institutions may make an adjustment to restructure their enrollment management work, but the implications of this decision could be far reaching and detrimental to the students these universities attempt to serve. As institutions become more similar, they lose the ability to serve certain groups and uphold inequality in the educational system by serving the majority to meet their own needs. By leaning into market competition, the prestige chase, and homogeneous admissions requirements, institutions are reproducing inequality and are continuing to be gatekeepers to the benefits provided by education.

Institutional Theory

Prior to diving into institutional theory, it is important to provide a definition of the word "institution." Although there is ongoing debate about what constitutes an institution, for the purposes of this research, an institution "represents a social order or pattern that has attained a certain state or property" (Jepperson & Meyer, 2021, p. 39).

Institutions rely upon reproductive processes that produce constraint and freedom. By providing frameworks and rules within which to operate, actors are given a script for how to function, however, this can limit the behavior of those within the institution as well (Jepperson, 1991; Manning, 2013). Actors within an institution are going to perform in a way they interpret as aligning with the desired behavior, making change a difficult idea to convey (Manning, 2013). When actions that go against the reproduced pattern, or script, are counteracted by "some set of regards and sanctions" (Jepperson, 1991, p. 145), the institution and the patterns associated are considered institutionalized. Institutionalization does not require the actors or the situations to be identical, but the pattern of behavior must remain intact for an organization to become institutionalized, as there must be a set of perceived rules to frustrate (Zucker, 1987). As "social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule like status in social thought and action" (Meyer & Rowan, 1976, p. 42), institutionalization begins occurring.

Institutional theory attempts to explain how structures, rules, norms, and routines become common social behavior by addressing the effect that actors within the institution and environmental factors, such as social pressures and non-governmental entities have on the organization of an institution (Meyer, 2008). The argument is that there must be some sort of fundamental principle in place before actors are able to effectively operate, and institutions of higher education serve as a strong example of an institution functioning on centuries worth of created norms. (Meyer, et al., 2007). Formal structures of institutions call for a blueprint of operating procedures including processes to follow, departmental design, and programmatic decisions (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). These created systems are useful in coordinating and controlling activities, but they can also

decrease efficiency as organizations attempt to keep up with highly institutionalized social rules instead of placing productivity as a top priority.

As organizations become more complex, formal structure is becoming endemic within modern society, prescribing myths of rationalization as strict rules (Meyer & Rowan, 1976). Formal structure can often lead to the elements being "loosely linked to each other and to activities, rules are often violated, decisions are often unimplemented, or if implemented have uncertain consequences, technologies are of problematic efficiency, and evaluation and inspection systems are subverted or rendered so vague as to provide little coordination" (Meyer & Rowan, 1976, p. 43). However, as the societal landscape and social expectations shift in any given field, a rational organization becomes more necessary to avoid illegitimacy. The complexity of modern society is forcing rationality to permeate organizations due to highly relational networks and the prevalence of myths in the form of institutional rules that encourage a formal structure to meet certain goals (Meyer & Rowan, 1976).

It can be argued that institutional theory fails to consider the power of personal gain and interest of agents in the process of institutionalization (Meyer & Rowan, 1976, p. 42). The interests of the agent could cause variation in organizational structure, practice, or forms and they should be treated as "a product of the political efforts of actors to accomplish their ends" (DiMaggio, 1988, p. 13). The theory does not identify the conditions for which actors may choose to go against the grain and create alternative arrangements (Robert, et al., 2019). Meyer and Rowan (1977) say that organizations often attempt to separate institutionalized structures from daily activities when they do not align with efficiency. This suggests that decision-makers are strategic–not aligning

with institutional theory's view that individuals act in correspondence with their environment (Robert, 2019).

Higher Education as an Institution

An explanation of higher education as both an institution and institutionalized connects institutional theory to the creation of enrollment management divisions. The impact of universities and the work they have been producing for nearly a millennium cannot be understated. Organizations of higher education are considered to be institutions that are slow to change, are heavily affected by the environment, and dependent on highly sought-after resources: tuition dollars and government funding (Manning, 2013; Simsek & Louis, 1994). Higher education has permeated almost every piece of first, the Western world, and now the entire globe, by defining progressive models for excellence and justice, thus creating patterns of accepted behavior, though not always in the form of formalized rules (Meyer, et al., 2007). Widely accepted certification mechanisms, social movements, and upholding the value of academia make it simple to consider higher education an institution.

Universities are considered to be organized anarchies with loosely coupled systems meaning there can be a decentralized decision-making process. They are considered institutionalized due to years of functioning in favor of creating a stable environment and ignoring opportunities for higher levels of efficiency due to avoidance of change. Many institutions are hundreds of years old and having seen their success, administrators are often hesitant to make changes over a fear of institutional legitimacy (Manning, 2013; Meyer & Rowan, 1976; Simsek & Louis, 1994). Higher education practices themselves are institutionalized through the presence of national and

international organizations that spread common structural models, faculty expectations, and student outcome goals. Institutional theory posits that organizations embody wider models and function within "formal conformity to wider rules" (Meyer, et al., 2007, p. 192), meaning that while the rules may not be allowing for the greatest success, institutions of higher education are likely to stand firm in the rules being followed by their peers. This idea, also referred to as isomorphism, is widely considered the largest implication of institutional theory.

Isomorphism

A major tenant of institutional theory is the idea of isomorphism, or the tendency of organizations to become more similar in structure and functioning to their counterparts out of a necessary reaction to environmental conditions (van Vught, 1996). Isomorphism can be broken down into two types: competitive and institutional (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Competitive isomorphism, explained in detail by Hannan and Freeman (1977) focuses on optimization to maximize profit, emphasizing both an open market and a system of rationality. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argued for a more institutional view of isomorphism where organizations are forced to consider other organizations out of a need "for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic benefit" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 66). Institutional isomorphism helps to explain the political and ceremonial aspects of modern organizations.

There are three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphic change can take place: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Coercive isomorphism acknowledges the pressures occurring from within and outside of

the organization. There are extreme pressures placed on organizations to align with legal requirements and socially accepted performance standards, informally imposed upon groups (Cardona Mejia, et al., 2020; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Mimetic isomorphism occurs out of an uncertain place and an attempt to solve difficult problems. The modeling behavior can happen indirectly when a new member of the organization enters or a member leaves, but it can also happen more directly, such as when a consulting firm recommends a similar structure to multiple organizations (Cardona Majia, et al., 2020; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; March & Olsen, 1976). Finally, normative isomorphism arises out of a desire to professionalize an occupation. Members of the occupation have a desire to control the methods of their work and legitimize themselves as having expertise (Cardona Majia, et al., 2020; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Many researchers have looked at the predictors of isomorphic change and divided the hypotheses for change into two different categories: organizational and field level predictors (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Hypotheses predicting isomorphic change at the organizational level consider the dependent nature of organizations on a larger entity. Uncertainty plays a large role in organizational-level change predictors in that without set goals, and the tools to meet those goals, isomorphism will begin taking place because there is a strong connection between "legitimated external practices and internal organizational behavior" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 75; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Organizations lacking in clear goals or objectives are likely going to be "dependent upon appearances for legitimacy" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 75) and find it easier to rely on the successful practices of external groups than to disrupt harmony by calling on internal analysis.

Field-level predictors of isomorphic change also refer to a lack of tangible goals and dependency but consider a field's reliance on specific environmental resources a significant reason for homogenization. If a field is heavily dependent on similar, finite resources, there is also a finite means for organizing the field to increase their impact. This often leads to homogenization, an idea closely related to resource dependency theory, to be discussed later. Organizations in a field heavily connected to state agencies are likely to face isomorphic pressures to align with various policies or industry standards (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Though there are further hypotheses related to isomorphic change predictors, the ones highlighted here demonstrate change occurring in higher education, specifically enrollment management.

Isomorphism in Higher Education

To better understand the change occurring in the organizational structure of enrollment management efforts, both coercive and mimetic isomorphism will be the focus. Organizations, and in the case of this study, higher education institutions, begin out of a desire to provide diversity or a different approach to an already established organizational field. From the introduction of public institutions to provide a more affordable experience, to community colleges created to meet a vocational need, many institutions were designed with a specific goal in mind. However, DiMaggio & Powell (1983) argue homogenization occurs quickly, leading to less diversity in approach and form.

The isomorphism in higher education can be attributed to a myriad of factors, not limited to "uniform governmental policies and the predominance of academic norms" (van Vught, 1996, p. 56). Isomorphism across higher education institutions is attractive

because of the stability it provides, the way it avoids turbulence, and, "can enable an organization to remain successful by social definition, buffering it from failure" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 49). Organizations are becoming more similar out of a desire to become more efficient, due to high levels of competition and a desire to be aligned with state agency rules (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Higher education becomes highly homogenized primarily for the desire to be seen as a legitimate institution and to have a steady flow of resources: students (Meyer, et al., 2007; van Vught, 1996).

The lack of diversity in higher education organizational structures is heavily influenced by the prestige race in which institutions of lower ranking work to gain status by imitating institutions of higher ranking (Riesman, 1956). Oftentimes, this lack in differentiation between institutional types and functioning affects the level of diversity within a student body as well. By structuring all universities in a similar fashion, students who do not fit the mold will find it challenging to traverse higher education and the needs of the labor market may not always be met if complete homogenization takes over (van Vught, 1996). However, as higher education becomes more transnational and the world continues to function in a global era, it will be challenging to provide much diversity, even in areas of education that are not inextricably linked with industries (Meyer, 2007). Universities are going to remain model driven if success is still being achieved within said models and the world remains as interconnected as it is today.

Resource Dependency Theory in Higher Education

Isomorphism and the concept of resource dependency are very closely linked and directly connected to change efforts in higher education. Resource dependency theory argues that organizations are themselves interconnected and part of social relationships,

but institutions are also linked to the environment within which they live (Powell & Ray, 2015). Being resource dependent means there is a need for not just physical and financial resources, but also informational resources obtained from an external entity (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Resource dependency theory "posits that organizations respond to changes in the external environment by shifting time, energy, and resources to protect or acquire scarce resources that are central to the health and vitality of the organization" (Hossler, et al., 2015). While resource dependency theory does consider the response of institutions to environmental constraints, it also considers the way said constraints affect the organizational dynamics (Powell & Ray, 2015). The institutional structure utilized by an organization and the constraints to which the organization adheres to influences structural arrangements.

Additionally, the concept of competition is key to understanding resource dependency. According to Hannan & Freeman's (1977) ecological approach, "finite and fixed" resources lead to an inevitable level of competition. Within higher education, there are two resources that are both considered scarce: government funding and student tuition money (Bennett & Law, 2021). Therefore, when either, or in the case of today's higher education landscape, both resources become limited, institutions are forced to respond appropriately or risk a financial crisis.

Institutions dependent upon similar resources and facing analogous environmental constraints will often begin to look similarly in administrative order, formal policies, etc. (Tolbert, 1985). This shift away from differentiation has much to do with van Vught's (1996) assumptions that higher education organizations must have a continuous supply of resources to survive. Logically, a high level of competition will exist if institutions are

reliant upon the same environmental inputs. Institutions who fail to build a constant, steady, and sufficient stream of resources will not be able to withstand the competition posed by those who restructure their organization to face the environmental factors at play (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Since institutions are operating under the same environmental factors and competing for the identical resources, restructuring in the face of resource constraints often lacks in variety. Differentiation in higher education is risky in that it could lead to public backlash or not meeting state government standards. Such restrictions on change and desire to be seen as legitimate keep institutions from being able to hone their offerings to meet the needs of specific students, causing high levels of competition between every institution for every type of student (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; van Vught, 1996).

This challenge is heightened by a shrinking number of traditional aged students and many calling into question the worth of higher education. Questions around the worth of higher education are hard to avoid when tuition is continuing to increase, graduation rates are decreasing, and the unemployment rate is higher than it has ever been for recent college graduates (Kirschner, 2012). As was alluded to above, to survive the environmental constraints for higher education, institutions need to begin asking themselves what sets them apart from others in the same market (Powell & Rey, 2015). With many institutions focused on keeping their doors open, they fail to ensure they are recruiting students who can be well supported by their university resources, ultimately leading to an overall enrollment challenge when retention rates decrease. Once institutions are honest about who they are and which segment of the market they are

meant to serve, they can make strategic changes to academic offerings, programmatic design, and even organizational structure (Powell & Rey, 2015).

Critics of resource dependency theory identify issues with the empirical evidence, or lack of consistency within the findings. Some studies show that resource dependencies result in the creation of new interorganizational structures, but other research is in direct opposition to these findings. Organizational performance is directly linked to the rationale and intended outcomes. If there is not a defined rationale and the intended outcomes are not clear, organizations who restructure will not see the desired effect (Drees, et al., 2013). Further critiques challenge the compounding of two different types of interdependence: the dependency of two organizations on each other and the power imbalance between organizations (Emerson, 1962). Finally, there is not significant quantitative research on resource dependency theory meaning the narrative reviews are left to interpretation and misunderstanding (Drees, et al., 2013).

Principal Agent Theory

The effect of government funding and the control exerted over higher education by governmental agencies greatly influences the decisions made by administrators. Though the level of control varies based on type and power of a state governing organization, the control of these groups will affect the choices made by enrollment management professionals. The control exerted over higher education institutions is often explained by the principal-agent theory (PAT), a concept which started in the field of economics "as a contractual relationship in that a principal contracts with an agent to engage in certain functions" (Lane & Kivisto, 2008, p. 144). The principal-agent theory was born out of the neo-institutionalism (or new institutionalism) movement, which

"developed as a way to incorporate theories about the power of institutional structures with theories about the power of individuals" (Lane & Kivisto, 2008, p. 147). It was developed in reaction to the neo-classical (or "old institutionalism") picture of organizations where the "entrepreneur, or primary leader, makes all decisions for the firm and is endowed with a range of idealized properties defining his knowledge, goals, and computational skills and transaction costs" as it fails to consider that there is a group presiding in power providing both direction and resources to agents to complete detailed goals (Moe, 1984). There are hundreds of examples in society where PAT can be seen. Simple agreements demonstrating PAT include the relationship between an employee and the employer, the patient and the doctor, and the client and the lawyer.

In higher education, state agencies use PAT to create accountability measures through performance-based funding (PBF). PBF is a movement, mandated by the state governing agency, which makes "performance a priority, where colleges would be expected to set performance goals, measure results, and be accountable for reaching certain outcomes" (Hillman et al., 2015, p. 502). To ensure progress towards the mandated goal is being accomplished, states tie funding to performance measures. Advocates of the model believe the combination of both short-term and long-term goals give institutions the chance to change course when they determine where barriers are to their students' success. Many also argued PBF would require schools to provide more results-oriented data demonstrating real change (Hillman et al, 2015). By incentivizing institutions with money, they are more likely to pursue the objectives of the state agencies and provide more accurate information.

However, many institutions argue PBF ignores "the realities faced by the complex, diverse goals inherent in most public organizations" (Hillman et al., 2015, p. 506). This incongruence between the principal and the agent can lead to the shirking of responsibilities by the agent. When the principal, the state governing agency does not understand the goals or priorities of the individual agent, institutions, the agent might choose to avoid accomplishing the mandates set by the principal to meet their own established goals (Lane & Kivisto, 2008). As such, shirking often arises from either goal conflict or information asymmetry, or both. Goal conflict is when the agent, an institution, has different goals in mind than those chosen by the principal, the state governing agency, for them to focus on. Information asymmetry arises when one of the groups have more or different information from the other group, leading to conflicts of interest or the desire of the agent to not feel the need to meet the requirements of the principal (Lane & Kivisto, 2008).

As described above, state agencies and the policies or goals they set for institutions often lead to isomorphism and homogenization within higher education, ignoring the diversity of students for whom public education should be designed. All public institutions are dependent upon state funding to function; thus, they are going to work hard to meet the objectives set forth by government agencies, even when they are not in line with what university administrators believe is needed for their individual community (Lane & Kivisto, 2008). PAT, and specifically PBF, connects the concepts of isomorphism within institutional theory and resource dependency theory by calling out the reliance of institutions on state funding, their need to adapt based on government

agencies, and the decreasing level of homogenization within the structure of higher education.

While PAT is widely used and accepted as policymaking theory, it also comes with a list of critiques and leaves some with questions regarding its usefulness. Interestingly, critiques of PAT are connected to resource dependency theory. It is often argued that PAT is more useful as a framework than a theory due to its inability to explain the full relationship between any principal and the agent. While it is helpful to explain the interactions between the two, it is impossible to explain every motive or action through PAT (Lane & Kivisto, 2008). For example, the theory accounts for agent opportunism as a reason for shirking (where the agent does the minimum work to appease the principal) or low performance but does not consider other reasons, such as donor authority, student forces, and other external powers. This means disconnecting resource dependency theory from PAT should not be considered useful for attempting to explain the reasoning behind the creation of enrollment management divisions.

Propositions

In an attempt to explain why higher education institutions create enrollment management divisions, the theories explored above and content research on enrollment practices are combined to define four propositions. These hypotheses are not exhaustive; however, the purpose of this study is to determine if there is merit to the following understandings of the development of enrollment management divisions.

Institutional theory undergirds the first two propositions because it demonstrates the institutionalization which has occurred within higher education. It is not difficult to see how higher education can be defined as an institutionalized organization when you

consider the formal structures by which universities function, the ceremonial aspects defining everyday activities, and the complex environment within which they live. As modern society becomes more complicated through technological advancements, increased expectations on the outcome of higher education, and the changing enrollment landscape, many leaders believe a formal structure will assist in the navigation of such challenges.

> Proposition 1: *Enrollment management divisions are created out of a belief that formal structure will allow for more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities.*

All institutions desire to be seen as legitimate, especially when seemingly arbitrary rankings carry a significant amount of weight in the field today. When lower ranked institutions see the success taking place at higher ranked institutions, they are more likely to mimic the strategies, in hopes of becoming seen as more prestigious. Furthermore, imitating the organizational structure of successful institutions allows universities to avoid the time, effort, and possible embarrassment that comes from analyzing their own issues, leading to the influence of isomorphic pressures on institutional organization.

> Proposition 2: *Enrollment management divisions are created due to isomorphic pressures originating from a desire to be seen as legitimate, and to avoid internal analysis.*

Resource dependency theory clearly defines the relationship between the external environment and the success of an institution of higher education. Universities will be forced to adjust their response to the ever-changing environment to remain competitive for a steady stream of resources: students. Higher education leaders are hesitant to

differentiate themselves out of a fear that they will lose their stronghold in the market, causing all institutions to be in competition with each other, instead of just similar institutional types competing for specific students. When all institutions are competing within the same market and for the same students, enrollment management divisions are often created to strategize the most efficient way to create a solid resource flow.

Proposition 3: *Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success.*

Similarly, public funding, often set by education governing agencies, is a necessary resource for most institutions of higher education. Therefore, when enrollment goals, across the spectrum from deposit to graduation, are attached to levels of funding, universities may deem it necessary to create a division solely focused on ensuring performance metrics are met.

Proposition 4: *Enrollment management divisions are created to meet the performance goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding.*

In conclusion, institutional theory, resource dependency theory, and principal-agent theory help to explain possible reasons for the creation of enrollment management divisions in higher education. These theories each informed the propositions written. Each of the theories included shed a light on higher education and the way that institutions function. They relate to the necessity higher education institutions to restructure based on both internal and external pressures, along with the environment in which the institutions all live. The propositions presented are connected to one, or multiple, of the theories and are predictions as to what future research will show. Because

of the creation of enrollment management divisions, diversity in higher education decreases because institutions believe the best course of action is to follow the example set by others in the industry. As I move into the design of the research, these theories and the propositions, or assumptions, made about why higher education institutions are creating an enrollment management division assist with the development of an interview protocol and the way the data is analyzed. However, I purposefully leave space for reasons outside the realm of these propositions to be shared from interview participants.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

The goal of this chapter is to outline and detail all methodological decisions made for the research study. The four aforementioned propositions undergird the methodological elements of this study. Importantly, the propositions should not be read as hypotheses presented in quantitative or postpositivist research. Instead, this interpretive study provided flexibility and space for organic, subjective interpretations of findings to guide discussions and claims as to why these divisions are created. Again, this research attempted to answer why institutions of higher education create enrollment management divisions and whether the noted propositions help to explain their creation. Though defined in the previous chapter, the propositions include:

> Proposition 1: *Enrollment management divisions are created out of a belief that formal structure will allow for more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities.*
>
> Proposition 2: *Enrollment management divisions are created due to isomorphic pressures originating from a desire to be seen as legitimate, and to avoid internal analysis.*
>
> Proposition 3*: Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success.*
>
> Proposition 4: *Enrollment management divisions are created to meet the performance goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding.*

Before describing how the study was completed, an overview of qualitative case study research will be shared. Qualitative researchers have cemented best practices for organizing case studies and this study will follow said practices. Next, I will share a analysis of the decisions being made at this early stage of the research will be shared. From site selection to data collection and analysis, I critically thought about the decisions made, each of which is justifiable based on an understanding of qualitative research, enrollment management, and the supporting theories.

Qualitative Case Study Research

The heavily qualitative nature of most case study research provides flexibility to use multiple perspectives, a variety of data collection tools, and multiple analysis strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Importantly, case studies examine the relationship between cases and the contexts or environments and allows for a deep dive into a specific scenario, group, or individual experiences (Flyvberg, 2011). The purpose of case study research is to "enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how [an organization] functions in their ordinary pursuits" (Stake, 1995, p. 1). Due to the flexibility provided by case study research in allowing for both qualitative and quantitative research, the distinction should be made here that I have only used qualitative research methods to collect data to answer my questions. Qualitative research requires the investigator to be "in the field, making observations, exercising subjective judgment, analyzing and synthesizing, all the while realizing their own consciousness" (Stake, 1995, p. 41).

While there are multiple researchers who dedicated their time and energy to defining, describing, and emphasizing the importance of case study research, I chose to

ground this study in the case study design of Robert E. Stake, which best aligns with my constructivist approach to research. My research is an example of what Stake (1995) defined as an "instrumental study," or the use of a case to gain a more general understanding of a larger phenomenon. When using more than one case, as is the situation for my work, a collective case study, or the analysis of several cases in one study, is also present (Stake, 1995). Thus, my research constitutes a collective, instrumental case study. According to Stake (2006), collective case study research is focused on better understanding a phenomenon or condition to be studied. Stake uses the word "quintain" to describe the "functions or conditions of which we might seek examples to study" (Stake, 2006, p. 6). For this dissertation, the quintain is defined as the creation of enrollment management divisions.

The distinction Stake (2006) makes that "the power of case study is its attention to the local situation, not in how it represents other cases in general" (p.8) is important. It demonstrates the challenge researchers using a multicase study may face when attempting to learn more about the quintain while also trying to understand the specificity of each case. Due to the instrumental nature of my study, as opposed to a more intrinsic, or focus on the individual case my goal was to produce transferrable information that can be applied to cases outside of those included (Stake, 2006). For Stake, case study research is designed around at least one research question, related to the binding characteristic that holds the cases together (the quintain). On the surface, the question(s) could seem to be answered in a few simple phrases, but it is up to the researcher to be prepared to determine what more can be learned, even from simple answers (Stake, 2006). Although this research is guided by specific questions and propositions, I was

careful and intentional in leaving room for new issues and unexpected explanations as they emerged. As Stake (2006) reminded us, the researcher must always balance between the anticipated and unanticipated results of the study to fully appreciate the findings.

Case Study Decisions

In the use of multiple case study design, the primary focus should be on the "characterization of the program of phenomenon" (Stake, 2006, p. 27), meaning a desire to have a better understanding of the quintain. Mutlicase studies also require the realization that all activities are going to be influenced by the context in which the case sits, something the researcher cannot ignore. For this study, each case is a different enrollment management division within a college campus; however, contextual information regarding the larger campus culture, structure, and organization are important to understanding each case.

Case Selection

Though Stake (2006) argued for no fewer than four cases because of the inability to show "the interactivity between programs and their situations" (p. 22), he also recognized there are many constraints which could keep this from being a reality. For this research, the largest constraint I faced was the low number of institutions within the state higher education system that have recently (in the last decade) created an enrollment management division. During the process of deciding which cases should be included, Stake (2006) suggested considering three questions:

- Is the case relevant to the quintain?
- Do the cases provide diversity across contexts?

- Do the cases provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts? (p. 23)

The cases chosen for this study, I made sure they each had a relationship to the phenomenon being studied and provide diversity across contexts, leading to the opportunity to learn about complexity. The three cases, new enrollment management divisions, have recently (in the last decade) been created. They are each classified in a different category in the structure of their state higher education system, and they each exist to serve a slightly different institutional mission.

Additionally, I only included public institutions of higher education, a decision made due to the close connection between public policy and public universities. The first mention of "enrollment management" as a term was in an alumni newsletter for a small, private institution in 1976. Since that time, many definitions, oftentimes focused on the survival of small private universities have been written (Dolence, 1993; Hossler & Bontrager, 1986; Kemerer, Baldridge, & Green, 1982; Maguire, 1976). Therefore, I made the decision to avoid this type of institution as the research, though not abundant, is more widely available. Instead, the focus was on public schools that are not considered the flagship in their state, serve a more regional population, and are governed by a state agency body. Related to the four propositions guiding the research, institutions that have a reliance upon scarce resources and desire to be seen as more legitimate are not often large, well-known institutions. For this research, I studied three institutions including, Greene College, classified as a state college, Foothills University, classified as a public liberal arts institution, and Magnolia University, a comprehensive university.

Data Collection

In case study research, it is common for researchers to use multiple methods for data collection, including observations, interviews, and document analysis (Stake, 1995, 2006). When thinking about how data collection in qualitative research happens, it is a fair statement that it often "capitalizes on ordinary ways of getting acquainted with things" (Stake, 1905, p. 49). The researcher is expected to rely heavily on their own experience and to pay attention to the data points they believe are worth of attention. For this work, my experience in enrollment management and within higher education as a whole qualified as experiential knowledge that shaped the collection and analysis of data.

Importantly, I started the data collection process as soon as the sites were identified or can even begin prior to the selection of cases. Early observations are often refined or later replaced with updated information, but they are part of the final data pool (Stake, 1995). A detailed data-gathering plan is a necessity with qualitative research as questions will be asked when requesting permission to the site and by those who are critiquing the findings later, but such a plan should not be too detailed as to constrain the ability to collect data outside of the established boundaries (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Stake, 1995; Stake, 2006). Prior to beginning the data gathering process, I worked through the IRB process at the University of Georgia. After determining my research does not qualify as human subjects research, I was cleared to reach out to gatekeepers at the three institutions I hoped would serve as my sites. When they each agreed, I was able to begin scheduling meetings with similar positions across all three cases.

Observations

There are two general types of observations often used in a case study: non-participant and participant. Participant observation requires the investigator to join the community they wish to study—to be a fully engaged participant. In contrast, non-participant observation is utilized when the researcher is more on the outside looking in to observe the behaviors or environmental factors of the case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For my research, since the enrollment divisions being studied had already been created, I used non-participant observations to collect field notes that help to contextualize the case.

When conducting observations for this study, I visited each institution for an entire day. While on each campus, I also participated in formal campus tours. This allowed me to incorporate observations regarding how the division is physically structured in relation to the rest of campus. As is described later, the observations also provided support for various points made during the interviews with participants, functioning as a form of triangulation. Overall, campus visits provided a stronger understanding of the structure and feel of each campus in order to better contextualize each case.

Interviews and Participants

To study each enrollment management division, interviews and document analysis constituted the primary methods for data collection. The people I interviewed for this study were those working in the current enrollment management division. Typical of case study research, sampling was purposive, and interviews were conducted with key individuals that provided the most insight into the case (Stake, 2006). More specifically, at each institution, I interviewed the leader of each division, along with other campus administrators. Since at least three staff members were interviewed at each institution, I

was also able to speak with members who were in mid-level manager roles as well. At each of the institutions, the folks I interviewed had served in more than one position at the institution, providing a great deal of historical context as well.

The enrollment management division at each institution have different offices included in the organizational structure, with Greene College arguably most unique in that the enrollment management division includes the Office of Institutional Research. Foothills University is unique in comparison to the other two units in that the chief enrollment officer reports to the provost as opposed to the president. Magnolia University has a more hierarchical structure as there are only two positions which report directly to the chief enrollment officer. The institutions have a varying number of positions considered to be leaders within their enrollment management division and unique offices reporting up through enrollment management.

At Foothills University, I was granted access to and interviewed the provost, the registrar, and the chief enrollment officer. These are the three highest ranking administrators within the enrollment management division at Foothills. During interviews at Greene College, I interviewed five staff members, including the chief enrollment officer, both the executive director for financial aid and for registration services, the associate vice president for enrollment management, and the director of admissions. Having the chance to speak with these five individuals meant I gathered data from half the administrators who report directly to the VPEM. Finally, at Magnolia University, I interviewed the president, the chief enrollment officer, and the vice president for student affairs (VPSA). This group of participants was a bit different due to the VPSA having a greater historical context, as the VPSA previously jointly held the role of VPEM and

VPSA. Though the participant numbers may appear small, my goal was to gather in-depth, participant-driven information from those most knowledgeable of the case.

Before completing the interviews, it was helpful to review various documents, including websites and blogs, prior to talking with a participant as this helped make the conversation flow more seamlessly (Roulston, 2010). In the case of this study, I was already familiar with the institutions included, but I did visit institutional websites to gain insight into the organizational structure as it stands today. I also determined who would be best to reach out to via website information, leading to the successful scheduling of interviews at all three case institutions. Further, blogs and news articles served as resources early on in the course of this research.

When crafting the questions to be used in these interviews, I focused on drafting open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are those that leave the parameters broad so that "interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning topics specified by the interviewer" (Roulston, 2010, p. 12). According to Roulston (2010), interviews can be completely unstructured, in which an interviewer enters into the conversation with no formal questions. Fully structured interviews are those when only the predetermined questions are asked, leaving little room for follow-up conversation. Finally, semi-structured interviews are when a mix of structured questions and probing questions from the conversation can be formed. For this study, a semi-structured interview experience was designed. This type of interview takes great listening skills on behalf of the researcher, along with ensuring the participant is comfortable and sure of the topic at hand (Roulston, 2010). Recording the interviews for transcription and analysis was a very useful task at two of the three institutions. The administrators at one school, Foothills

University, did not permit the interviews to be recorded. In really all three cases, note taking was incredibly valuable for the findings and discussion chapter of this work.

A full list of the questions originally designed for this study is included in Appendix A. However, due to the semi-structured nature of these interviews, not all questions will be in the interview protocol. Each of the interviews took a conversational approach as to not miss valuable data. Questions related to the individual's experience during the transition to an enrollment management division and their perceived understanding of the effect of the office creation were asked. With a goal of understanding the "culture–broadly constructed–from the participants' perspectives and through firsthand encounters" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 152), ethnographic interviewing strategies were employed. Spradley (1979) indicated there are three main types of questions to ask in an ethnographic interview: descriptive, structural, and contrast. To better understand the context within which enrollment divisions were created, descriptive questions related to enrollment goals and institutional structure were included. Structural questions dove further into the participants' understanding of the creation of an enrollment management unit, including why and how. Finally, contrast questions allow the interviewer to become knowledgeable on unknown terms, which in the case of this research could be university specific, such as the names of certain programs unique to the institution (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Document Analysis

Documentation, in the form of meticulously gathered notes and transcripts during the interview and on-campus portion of data collection is relevant in every case study research topic, and this study was no exception (Stake, 2006). Much of the data collected

throughout this study are from the in-depth conversations I had with campus administrators. However, documents such as institutional and unit websites provided deeper information and context about each case, from minor clarification on how to spell titles or names mentioned in other pieces of data, to providing clues about topics to be studied further or questions to ask in interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The archival records that were helpful in the study of the development of enrollment management divisions were organizational records about how the institution was previously organized, prior to the shift towards a new unit.

Through public documents such as news articles and blog posts information around why and how universities create enrollment management divisions, about the development of the office, and the effects of the new office were gathered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, the way archival records most studied in this research were pieces of data provided by institutional research offices. To gather additional context for each case, I referred to basic data points regarding the size, location, and classification information, almost wholly found in fact books annually published by the schools. As is shared in the remaining sections of this work, the interview participants discussed the relationship between student outcome metrics, such as retention and graduation rates and the development of an enrollment management division. Therefore, archival records also proved valuable in demonstrating the change in these benchmarks over a defined period of time.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research analysis begins prior to a study even being finalized, and throughout the entire data collection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake, 1995).

New meanings through case study research are reached through both direct interpretation of individual cases and through the aggregation of the multiple cases in the study (Stake, 2006). The theories guiding this study are closely associated with the four propositions being considered leading to the research questions, the types of literature reviewed, and the collection of data. When completing cross-case analysis, the aggregate findings are almost always most dominate; however, Stake (2006) warns against focusing too much on the similarities between the cases and not paying attention to the differences. As the analysis in this research began, I was intentional in keeping the quintain in mind, knowing that the combination of the research questions, the themes, and the findings are what helps to gain a better understanding of the quintain.

As data was collected, primarily through interviews and document analysis, I also started the analysis process via re-listening to interviews, creating and cleaning transcripts, and memoing. This process not only allowed me to begin organizing the findings into themes, but it helped me to connect the data back to both the grounding theoretical framework and the propositions. Some of the patterns I found emerged from the research questions, or in this case, the propositions, but others were more unexpected (Stake, 1995). To code the data, and ultimately determine the findings described in future sections, I started with a two-cycle coding approach. I started with a flexible code list based on my memory of the interviews, and being engrossed in the data through notetaking and transcription editing (Miles, et al., 2014). After completing the first cycle of coding, I moved into more cumulative coding methods by creating more complex categories or themes, multiple of which applied across the three institutions (Miles, et al.,

2014). I also implemented interpretative coding methods in order to define implications of the findings presented through the data (Miles, et al., 2014).

During the interpretation period, I made multiple analytic memos which served as a helpful tool to refer back to at the conclusion of transcription (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Continuous writing is useful in a multiple case study because it allows for cross-case analysis as it makes it easier to see the differences in context and relationship to the "quintain" between the cases (Stake, 2006). The insights were "invaluable for generating the unusual insights that move the analysis from the mundane and obvious to the creative" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 221). Throughout the memo creation, I also searched for alternative understandings, challenged my own interpretations, and produced my assertions based on the data, understanding that these are not meant to be beyond dispute, but persuasive (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Stake, 2006). These memos around methods, themes, or connections to theory were incredibly useful when I began writing up the final findings and analysis sections.

Enhancing Trustworthiness

There is great debate around creating what Roulston (2010) refers to as "quality" qualitative work, but for the purposes of this study, I worked to enhance trustworthiness by following Lincoln & Guba's (1985) recommendations regarding credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were implemented. To begin, multiple forms of triangulation assisted in producing higher quality research findings. First, data triangulation was evident in the use more than one site to gather data. The inclusion of multiple cases helped to corroborate patterns across cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, theoretical triangulation enhanced the trustworthiness through the use of more than

one theory. Finally, methodological triangulation is present with the inclusion of several types of data in the analysis (Roulston, 2010).

Including a detailed subjectivity statement within the research report is necessary in qualitative research (Roulston, 2010). Due to the high level of subjectivity present in qualitative research methods, the subjectivity statement gives the investigator the chance to be up front and honest with the reader as to their connection and possible bias towards the case at hand. In this case, researcher bias exists as I, the researcher, worked, and continue to work, in the enrollment management field. Having worked for and with institutions with and without enrollment management divisions, I have opinions as to the benefits and challenges. After completing the research necessary to write a literature review, multiple term papers on the topic, and to develop the four propositions tested in this piece of work, I formed a deep knowledge of strategic enrollment management. I acknowledge that this worldview shaped my design, collection of data, and analysis but aimed to practice reflexivity via memoing to challenging assumptions along the way.

I also aimed to provide transparency relative to the decisions made during the design, data collection, and analysis to increase the credibility of the results with fellow scholars, readers, or practitioners (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Roulston, 2010). Explaining the methods used during collection and analysis of the data allow similar research to be completed by other investigators in the future (Roulston, 2010). Member checks were completed when I shared the final report with participants, fellow research scholars, and enrollment management professionals to ensure the two align and they are understood to be reasonable findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Roulston, 2010).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This dissertation set out with the goal of explaining the reasons various types of higher education institutions would choose to create an enrollment management division. Whether the division is created for the first time, or there was a reorganization of a previously used enrollment management structure, this multiple case study was designed to gain insights into why administrators would decide that a formal enrollment management division is the best institutional fit to solve the myriad challenges facing higher education today. With this goal in mind, the overarching research question is: Why are enrollment management divisions created at various types of institutions of higher education? In this chapter, the result of collecting and analyzing data from interviews at the three different case institutions will be presented. This section outlines the findings, draws similarities and acknowledges differences between the cases, and makes inferences regarding the decision to create an enrollment management unit in order to analyze the accuracy of the original guiding propositions. Therefore, a secondary research question for this work was: Which of the selected propositions, if any, provide support for the reasons institutions create enrollment management divisions?

> Proposition 1: *Enrollment management divisions are created out of a belief that formal structure will allow for more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities.*
>
> Proposition 2: *Enrollment management divisions are created due to isomorphic pressures originating from a desire to be seen as legitimate, and to avoid internal analysis.*

Proposition 3*: Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success.*

Proposition 4: *Enrollment management divisions are created to meet the performance goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding.*

Along with the presentation of findings, this chapter will provide an interpretation and analysis of these discoveries within the broader context of existing research. Based on the review of literature included in Chapter 1, and the theoretical grounding in Chapter 2, the following analysis will draw conclusions and make educated deductions as to why an enrollment management division is created on college campuses. The data analyzed will give other institutions considering the creation of an enrollment management division greater insight into how other institutions made such a decision. Though not every institution type is included in this study, the diverse nature of the three schools will give most institutional classifications new information not previously understood.

Case Profiles

Pseudonyms are used for the for the three institutions and for some of the positions at the institution, for the purpose of anonymity. Because of the sensitive nature of strategic enrollment planning, anonymity ensured a level of comfort for interview participants. A profile of each case and the system within which it is situated are provided below to give in-depth context for the research findings. Each institution is located within the same system, yet each has individual characteristics which make it different from the others. In each of the following profiles, I include details regarding the type of institutions (representing three different classifications), the student population attending

the institution, the enrollment challenges facing the schools, and a summary of how they came to the realization that a division of enrollment management was necessary. These profiles are not meant to be an exhaustive explanation of the institution but, instead, include information related to the research at hand.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the classifications, population, and student outcome data each institution was reporting prior to the creation of an enrollment management division. This demonstrates the differences between the contexts in which each case is situated and helps to shed light on the descriptions shared in the case profiles. While the institutions are located within the same higher education governing system, meaning they are guided by the same policies, they are vastly different. Beyond just the differences in classification according to their state governing system, the institutions within which the cases exist, they are different in terms of size, degrees granted, and most notably their geographical location.

Institution Name	Institution Type	Student Population	Degrees Awarded	Geographic Location
Greene College	Public College	10,000 – 15,000	Undergraduate	Metropolitan
Foothills University	Public University	<8,000	Undergraduate & Graduate	Small Town
Magnolia University	Public University	<15,000	Undergraduate & Graduate	Metropolitan Adjacent

Figure 1. Institutional Profiles.

State System

As mentioned above, each of the institutions within this study is situated within the same state higher education system. The decision to include three institutions from three different state-level classifications and Carnegie classifications was intentional. Choosing institutions in the same system allows for a comparison of the relationships between the three and the larger governmental body. Organizationally, the state system is led by a Chancellor who oversees a Board of Regents, all of whom are appointed by the Governor of the state. Many of the regents represent the districts of the state and the others are members at-large, not charged with representing a certain state district. Since the Governor has the authority to appoint members to the board and to choose the system chancellor, politics often play a role in the governing of the state public higher education system, even inadvertently.

The state higher education system is made up of more than 20 institutions and serves more than 300,000 students every year. The system confers more than 70,000 degrees per year, across every level of secondary education. Every institution with the system is a 4-year public school, meaning they are state funded. Some are bachelor-degree granting, others offer master's level degrees, while others are consistently ranked as some of the top research universities in the country, graduating terminal degrees each semester. The system aims to serve as much of the state as possible and demonstrates such a mission by having institutions spread across every region and with wide-ranging academic requirements for admission.

Greene College

Greene College is located in a large metropolitan area. An undergraduate-only institution with a medium-sized student population of around 10,000 – 15,000 students and minimal on-campus housing, Greene College is primarily a commuter school. The institution is open access, serving a wide range of students in the region. Greene College accepts students with GPAs significantly lower than most other schools within the same system, and their affordable cost makes them an option for many students. As a state college and a teaching institution, faculty members are teaching-focused and without a heavy emphasis on research, they have greater opportunities to form impactful relationships with students. Majors offered at the institution are those with direct career paths, or those the state and national economy are showing to be in-demand. These include business, healthcare, and education, as many students are looking for employment and are not in immediate pursuit of a graduate degree.

Greene College also offers a racially diverse community for students, with Black and Hispanic students representing the largest percentage of the population. Further, Greene College has been considered one of the most ethnically diverse institutions in the region by various rating systems for the last decade. Due to the number of high-performing athletic teams and the location of campus, the international student population continues to grow. However, the county in which the institution is situated is still where most of its students call home. The institution is designed for traditionally-aged college students and most of their students are within this age range. While there is a system-wide effort towards recruiting more adult learners, the infrastructure of Greene College is not currently moving towards creating an experience designed for that population.

During my research, I had the chance to take a campus tour and get a feel for the student experience. Greene College is situated close to a main highway, but feels like its own little world with greenery, impressive student facilities, and growing athletic complexes. Enrollment management is in the oldest building on campus, but the newly renovated space is at the entrance of campus. The interior of the building was designed by members of the enrollment management staff and is a bright, open, and large area, making collaboration amongst enrollment management offices both easy and common. Within the division, Admissions, the Financial Aid office, the Registrar, Veteran Affairs, Institutional Research, Testing Services, and College Strategic Planning all report to the chief enrollment officer. However, when first established, there were far fewer offices within the division.

As a relatively young institution in the larger landscape of US higher education, Greene College has experienced extreme growth in enrollment in the last few decades. From an enrollment management perspective, this often seen as a positive, but it does present its own set of challenges. Through conversations with senior administrators, it was made apparent that a growing number of students means more variety in the type of needs students will have and the processes and experiences in place to meet those needs will need to evolve quickly as to not slow down the progress towards graduation or frustrate students, thus causing a stop-gap or transfer. Students choosing to either stop out of college, pausing their enrollment indefinitely, or transferring to another institution presents a great enrollment challenge for Greene College. Both retention (under 60%) and 6-year graduation rates (around 12%) remained much lower than desired, though the

institution has seen a recent increase. Retention rates from first to second-year hover around 70% and 6-year graduation rates getting close to 20%.

Roughly five years ago, an associate vice president enrollment management, not a member of cabinet, was reporting up through the provost, who also had the Division of Student Affairs, and all academic units reporting within their purview. While this model may have been sustainable when Greene College was a smaller institution, as the population grew, so did the vast responsibility under the provost. Through the interviews conducted with enrollment management staff, I learned that the steep increase in student population meant the need to quickly improve processes to enhance the student experience demonstrated to the president that a staff member focused on enrollment management at the cabinet-level was necessary. This chief enrollment officer reports directly to the president and is responsible for the myriad of offices listed above. Most interesting is institutional research, an office included in the division of enrollment management due to the importance placed on the work by the chief enrollment officer and the president.

Beyond the challenges directly related to enrollment, retention and graduation rates, Greene College still faces a brand awareness challenge due to the misconception that the institution is a community college. Since the campus is located on land that once gave commuters from multiple institutions the chance to take courses closer to home, students believe Greene College is meant to be a place to transfer from after two years. This misconception has wide-ranging consequences, not limited to retention rates being low and thus graduation rates needing a dramatic increase. Additionally, with more than one top public institution in the system, many students view Greene College as a

steppingstone before even getting to campus and possibly loving their experience too much to transfer.

Foothills University

Foothills University is a small institution with fewer than 8,000 undergraduate students, located almost two hours from the largest metropolitan city in the state. The town surrounding Foothills University is small, historic, and deeply connected to the institution. Foothills University is a public university, with an acceptance rate of almost 90% and according to their admissions team, serves students who want the small school "vibe" at a public-school price. From a recruitment perspective, adhering to the liberal arts feel is paramount as they often attract students who are transplants to the state and want an experience similar to what they could get in the northeast, but closer to their recently relocated family. While the institution does have graduate programs and more than 1,000 graduate students as of 2023, they predominately serve undergraduate students and support a heavily residential campus.

Foothills is almost entirely composed of students from the state and does not have high levels of racial diversity, with less than 10% of their undergraduate students identifying as students of color in the fall 2022 semester. Furthermore, most of these students are traditional-aged college students with close to 100% of the student population calling the state within which Foothills is located home. Though this is the current reality for Foothills, they do have a goal of expanding the numbers of states and even countries represented as they hope to provide students with a well-rounded education, including exposure to various types of people. Foothills faces a few recruitment challenges such as a need to increase the racial diversity present in their

student population. Similar to many other institutions in the US, pressure to increase their academic profile continues from both internal and external entities. Foothills University has a number of athletic teams, which attempts to use to increase both the retention rate of those students involved in sports and overall pride in the university.

I also had the opportunity to take a campus tour while at Foothills University. As expected, the campus is beautiful with pristine brick buildings throughout and the feeling of a small private institution. Complete with expansive green spaces and stunning water features, Foothills University offers the small campus oasis students in search of such a school want. Facilities are updated and provide students with access to the most up-to-date technology, coffee shops, and other commodities. The welcome center and undergraduate admissions are located across from a large quad, the perfect place to begin a prospective student campus tour. Other offices within the division, to be listed below, are spread out throughout the rest of campus, a notable difference from the physical organization of Greene College. Due to the academic nature of many offices within the enrollment management division at Foothills, some offices are located more centrally or near the provost's office. Multiple university-owned buildings, formerly homes, are now inhabited by campus organizations, staff offices, and student housing. This setup helps campus spread into the local community, something which has a positive impact on town and gown relations.

As is a theme discussed in the findings portion further, Foothills University was facing a number of retention issues when the decision to reorganize the previous enrollment management structure was made. With a goal of 90% first to second-year retention rates, the institution became frustrated when they hovered around 80% for

years. Retention rates were being affected by a lack of certain academic programs. For example, Foothills previously did not have a particulars major within their college of business. Once the program was implemented, fewer students were transferring out to find their desired major. Additionally, students often view Foothills as a place to improve their academic credentials so they can transfer to a larger state school after two years. This creates a large challenge for the institution as the experience students are seeking at the larger institutions cannot be replicated at Foothills. The retention challenge bleeds into graduation rates as students are not graduating from the institution. In conversations with campus administrators, another graduation challenge was revealed. Foothills offers multiple humanities degrees, which are beneficial for students in that they allow them to explore multiple avenues and career possibilities, however, these degrees also could prolong time to graduation.

Though a version of a division of enrollment management has been around at Foothills University since the early 2000s, the version which exists today was created less than five years ago. The impetus to begin the development of a reorganized division of enrollment management began when the previous enrollment leader retired from the institution. Further, an external audit indicated retention rates could be significantly increased if focus was placed on the enrollment beyond just recruitment efforts. The combination of these two events prompted the provost to propose a higher-ranking position, chief enrollment officer, to lead the division of enrollment management. When the president agreed, the position was filled and now oversees offices such as the Welcome Center, Undergraduate Admissions, the Registrar, Financial Aid, the Career Center, the Testing Center, First-Year Experience, New Student Programs, and Advising.

Magnolia University

Magnolia University is a public, mid-size institution with just under 15,000 students. The majority of the students are undergraduates; however, the institution does have graduate programs as well, as Magnolia is classified as a doctoral/professional university. It is considered a residential campus with many students living on campus in residence halls or Greek houses. Similar to Foothills University, the main Magnolia campus is situated in a small town with under 30,000 people, but it is significantly closer to the largest metropolitan city in the state. According to campus administrators, the surrounding community takes great pride in being home to Magnolia University due to the positive economic impact the institution and the alumni have, as well as the experience provided by having a higher education institution nearby. There are two other locations of Magnolia University which provide access to college for other parts of the state, contributing to the goal of the state system to provide education to the entire state.

Students at Magnolia are mostly majoring in programs such as psychology, biology, or business, though education and nursing both hold a significant portion of the student population. Like both Greene College and Foothills University, Magnolia boasts both men and women athletics increasing the level of pride students take in their institution. While Magnolia has the highest percentage of out-of-state students when compared to the other institutions in this study, more than 90% of students are residents of the state in which the institution is located. Racially, Magnolia University has a far higher number of students of color when compared to many of the other institutions in the state system with more than 30% of their student population identifying as Black or African American.

During my campus tour at Magnolia University, I had the chance to see both beautiful, historic buildings which have been around for more than 100 years, and newly built or recently renovated spaces to keep up with technological developments and current student needs. I found it both unique and interesting how easily accessible the division of student affairs is on campus, located right inside the first set of doors of the main student center. Throughout conversations with campus leaders, I heard how closely certain cabinet members worked, namely the president, the provost, and the chief enrollment officer, and this was physically demonstrated in that the each of their officer of are located on the same floor of the same building. Departments that report to the chief enrollment officer are throughout campus, but the associate vice presidents are close by and easily accessible for collaboration.

On the surface, the raw number of students attending Magnolia University did not seem to be suffering as the incoming class each year was holding relatively steady. The same could not be said for the number of students returning year over year. With retention rates 10 points lower than the national average, the president of Magnolia was not satisfied with the view that enrollment management was only admissions. Since Magnolia University is a public institution, the lag in graduation rates also has economic impacts, not to mention the increase in debt for students, a note made by more than one campus leader. According to campus administrators, many of the students who were being retained were still not considered successes because they did not reflect positively on their Magnolia University experience, a massive problem for any institution. Beyond just the retention rate challenge, dual enrollment participation from local high school

students, often viewed as an enrollment pipeline, was practically non-existent and graduate student enrollment was average at best.

Prior to the creation of an individual enrollment management division, one administrator, a vice president, was charged with heading both student affairs and all enrollment management. Though the vice president did have experience in both functional areas, a determination was made based on conversations between the president of Magnolia University and the vice president to split the two divisions and to bring in a cabinet-level position solely focused on enrollment management functions just a few years ago. The vice president, now just for student affairs, was functioning well in charge of both units, however, the president knew there was a severe need to increase the student engagement opportunities to positively affect retention rates. This charge, coupled with the enrollment challenges discussed above, made a cabinet-level administrator focused completely on enrollment management a necessity. An external audit was conducted around the same period of time which presented multiple personnel issues. While the audit did not directly call for the splitting of enrollment management and student affairs, it confirmed theories of mediocrity being partially to blame for low student retention and graduation rates.

Originally, the division of enrollment management consisted of admissions (both Undergraduate and Graduate), Financial Aid, and International Admissions. However, the division has greatly expanded to include the Registrar's Office, Education Abroad, the one-stop shop, including the call center, and Student Success. Within the organizational structure of the division, there are two associate vice presidents. One is responsible for the recruitment and admissions side of the house and the other is

responsible for the student success measures designed to retain and graduate students at a higher rate. As both the chief enrollment officer and the president emphasized during my respective conversations with them, the institution is not content with any process that appears to be broken. They believe in the idea that enrollment management is everyone's responsibility and if someone or something is not working to improve the student experience, and thus improve recruitment, retention, and graduation rates, change will need to happen.

Cross-Case Thematic Findings

As demonstrated by the individual case profiles, the institutions chosen for this dissertation, Greene College, Foothills University, and Magnolia University, have many unique characteristics that distinguish them from other universities. With the exception of their location under one state higher education system and their status as public schools, these three institutions are rather distinct from each other. However, throughout the data collection and analysis processes, multiple similarities were brought to light related to the reasons for the creation of an enrollment management division. Although some of the findings are unique to only one of the institutions in the study, those will be further explored in subsequent sections. First, I share the five most prominent cross-case thematic findings: (1) the creation of an enrollment management division to be held responsible for institutional outcomes, (2) the heavy focus on retention and graduation rates over recruitment efforts, (3) data-driven decision making in enrollment management divisions, (4) the prevalence of personnel challenges in decision making, and (5) the institutional recognition of a need to diversify target populations. Cross-case findings help to connect the institutional reasons for creating enrollment management divisions to

the propositions laid out in this study. Support for the propositions were shared throughout the conversations I had with enrollment management staff members on each campus, as described in these cross-case thematic findings.

Benchmark Accountability: Improving Student Outcomes

When taking into consideration the many challenges facing higher education today, it would have been predictable to hear how the development of an enrollment management division was created to increase the number of new students enrolling each year. It would be expected that enrollment management units, almost uniformly including the admissions office, would be held accountable for enrolling the desired number of students in any given incoming class (McGee, 2015; Kalsbeek & McGrath, 2004). By leaning on the research done for the literature review and current events in higher education, I was expecting participants from at least one, if not more than one of the institutions to indicate that their enrollment management division was created primarily to recruit first-time enrollees. In the competitive landscape of higher education where the ramifications of COVID-19 continue to plague enrollment numbers, the enrollment cliff is beginning to take hold, and the questioning of the worth of higher education is quickly spreading, it was surprising the lack of discussion around enrolling students for the first time (Bastedo, et al., 2023). With that said, it is not as if the idea of recruitment and admissions did not come up at all during my conversations with campus leaders. As is shared below, there were multiple instances in which participants discussed the need to think through recruitment plans as part of strategic enrollment, but these mentions were not directly tied to a recruitment problem needing to be solved through the development of an enrollment management division.

Still, student success metrics beyond first-time enrollment, such as retention, persistence, and graduate rates, were overwhelmingly used in the process of justifying an enrollment management division. In the interviews, it was clear that the expectations of an enrollment management division go far beyond just how many students are in an entering class. As the president at Magnolia University succinctly said, “we are in the graduation business, not the enrollment business.” After the conclusion of either an external review or an internal committee focused on improving a certain outcome metric, the conversation around creating an enrollment management division seemed to get louder at each of the three institutions. The student outcomes discussed in the interviews for this study were almost exclusively related to retention and graduation rates. It is important to note that at each of the three institutions included in this case, the graduation and retention rates were below what administrators were hoping to see, and even below national averages for similar institutional types.

Once it was determined that an improvement needed to be made to these metrics, it became the job of enrollment management staff members to positively affect both benchmarks. Administrators at each of the institutions talked about processes, program improvements, or organizational structure changes aimed at improving the benchmarks being touted by their institution. In particular, the enrollment leaders, and even the president at Magnolia University, and the provost at Foothills University, talked about the impetus placed on those working in the enrollment management division to increase both the retention and graduation rates. For example, the position of chief enrollment officer was separated from the vice president for student affairs at Magnolia University out of a

realization that the admissions experience and the current student experience needed more individualized attention.

Regardless of the position held by the interviewee, metrics—specifically the first-to second-year retention rate and the six-year graduation rate—were referred to as part of the rationalization behind creating a new or restructured enrollment management division. As described in the case profile section, many of the offices, such as admissions, financial aid, and the registrar, that are perceived to have a direct effect on student outcomes, such as retention and graduation rates, are placed within enrollment management divisions. At Magnolia University, this decision resulted in the creation of an entirely separate office and the hiring of multiple associate vice presidents along with a chief enrollment officer, all of which culminated in an increase of nine percentage points in retention rates in less than three academic years. The decision, which meant the need to make a dramatic organizational shift and the need to find budget for new staff members, was considered to be necessary when university leaders looked at the "abysmal" retention and graduation rates and the results of an external audit (President, Magnolia University). Therefore, the creation of divisions of enrollment management was born out of a desire to see an increase in outcomes data.

The complexities facing higher education today mean campus leaders are being expected to solve new problems in real time (Bastedo, et al., 2023). Whether they are being asked to respond to a global pandemic, prepare for the enrollment cliff, or make a case for the value of a college degree, campus decisionmakers in this study decided it was best to create more formal structure around the enrollment management work (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Interestingly, each of the three institutions in this study chose to create a

division, as opposed to creating a less powerful structure such as the development of an enrollment committee, the assigning of an enrollment coordinator, or simply having enrollment staff members report to one senior-level administrator (Kemerer, Baldridge, Green, 1982l; Penn, 1999).

At both Greene College and Foothills University, enrollment-focused staff were reporting to the provost previously. While the provost is a position on campus with great power, they were also responsible for the supervision of many other units, thus not giving the appropriate attention to enrollment management work. Enrollment management at Magnolia University fell under the vice president for student affairs and this meant the needs of prospective and current students were often at odds. To see real increases to student outcome metrics, the three sets of campus administrators realized they would need to implement the structure which requires the most organizational upheaval but has the potential to generate the most positive results.

The shift to an enrollment management division in the wake of the multiple challenges faced by higher education today is directly aligned with proposition 1, *Enrollment management divisions are created out of a belief that formal structure will allow for more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities.* Successfully navigating the complexities present in higher education cannot be accomplished with the typical slow-moving change seen at most institutions (Schultz & Lucido, 2011). However, according to Hossler (1986), the institutions that can make quick, effective change are those that are willing to properly plan and reorganize. The work done on each campus to restructure enrollment work to be in one division has been paramount to the increases seen in student outcome data. Greene College has seen a 5% increase in

retention rates since the division was created in 2018. In just three years, Magnolia University has seen an 8% increase in retention rates while Foothills University faced declining retention rates during the COVID-19 pandemic but has seen an increase of two percentage points since 2021 with the new enrollment management division.

The need to navigate complex challenges is a common reason campus administrators gave for the creation of enrollment management divisions, a group of offices to be held accountable for an increase in student outcome metrics. Yet, the campus administrators at the three institutions in this study pointed to other justifications related to a need for legitimacy, as well. In my conversation with the provost at Foothills University, the school's graduation rate rankings within the state system came up multiple times. Alongside this comment, they commented on family income level and where the institution fell in comparison to other public institutions was provided: "the only ranking we are second in within the state system, and not third, is family income level" (Provost, Foothills University). Although the institution has lower graduation rates than some of the other public schools in the state, its students come from a higher socioeconomic status. Participants inferred that by attracting students with a higher income level, graduation rates should increase (Perna, 2006; Rowan-Kenyon, et al., 2008). These metrics, including family income level, are considered important statistics in the eyes of the institution and the state higher education system considering the state system is reporting this metric annually. Each of the interview participants at Foothills University fully recognized the improvement of these metrics as a defining responsibility of the enrollment management division.

The need to hold someone accountable for the improvement of benchmarks such as student outcomes arguably stems from a desire to compete in a higher education environment where institutional legitimacy is greatly affected by student outcome data. Collecting and sharing certain statistics such as acceptance, retention, and graduation rates primarily for first-time, full-time students is often widely distributed to organizations even beyond just governing agencies. Several ranking systems exist in the United States, each contributing to a prestige race amongst institutions (Russo & Coomes, 2000). Most notably, *US News & World Report* releases yearly rankings, for which institutions across the country hope to find themselves on because students place great value in seeing their prospective college listed high on one of these lists. *US News & World Report* ranks institutions in numerous categories from "Best Liberal Arts Colleges" to "Best National University" and "Best Online Colleges." While there are dozens of data points collected through the methodology used by groups such as *US News & World Report,* many of them touch on enrollment management and the work being done to accept, enroll, retain, and graduate certain populations of students.

As such, the second proposition laid out in Chapter 1, *Enrollment management divisions are created due to isomorphic pressures originating from a desire to be seen as legitimate, and to avoid internal analysis,* is evident in situations where the state system expects continuous improvement and the responsibility for the increase of student outcome metrics falls on an enrollment management division. Additionally, as more enrollment management divisions continue to emerge at institutions across the country, the pressure to follow suit is increasing (Lips, 2021). Institutions across the country are constantly stacking themselves up against each other, oftentimes, without considering the

nuanced differences between their institutional makeup and that of other schools. Therefore, the creation of an enrollment management division happens in an effort to force institutional focus towards statistics such as retention and graduation rates, two of the most important factors in the often-considered arbitrary ranking system.

For right or for wrong, students and their families are oftentimes making decisions on where they choose to enroll with the rankings in mind (McGee, 2015). Thus, administrators at most institutions value strong institutional research work, whether within enrollment management, or located somewhere else on campus. Churning out increasingly impressive metrics is the goal, in hopes of attracting prospective students and finding their way into the media limelight for the marketing benefits. Organizationally, Greene College decided to place institutional research in the newly created enrollment management division as the chief enrollment officer could not overstate the value of having daily access to multiple dashboards of data. While this is not a "normal" structure, in that institutional research offices do not typically fall under enrollment management, it does strengthen the argument that enrollment managers are responsible for the data at Greene College.

Retention Rates

As is demonstrated through this section, none of the cases in this dissertation are immune to retention rate issues. Notably, all three of the institutions cite consistent reasons for the below average retention rates. For Foothills University, retention has been part of the enrollment management conversation for decades, and, as the university registrar pointed out, "retention is an initiative for everyone." However, the responsibility for desirable retention rates has shifted throughout the years until the provost identified

that a change was needed when an external consultant reported that, given their academic programs, student population, and support staff, Foothills' retention rate had the potential to be at least seven percentage points higher. An audit followed an initial attempt to increase retention rates through a centralized academic advising office. The combination of the audit report and a mostly failed attempt to increase both retention and graduation rates through centralized advising gave the provost the necessary evidence to make a larger change. This resulted in the hiring of a chief enrollment officer, the first and only of its type at Foothills University, and an overall restructuring of the enrollment management work on campus, both of which were viewed as paramount to the future success of students.

For Foothills, the retention challenge was considered two-fold: students were transferring to the larger, more academically prestigious institutions within the state and the institution was not offering widely desired academic programs. The missing academic programs have since been corrected with the creation of two new programs at the institution. The Provost at Foothills did not identify enrolling students as an issue, but the SAVP, who directly oversees all of the recruitment work, did identify a need to create more stability in the admissions funnel by becoming more selective, "expanding beyond the state lines," and reaching students in rural communities. With these goals, retention is a concern for university administrators who point out the "need to be able to support and adjust to serving different types of students" (Registrar at Foothills University).

The need for businesses to adjust to new generations and expand their hold on the market by providing more relevant options for different populations of consumers is not new, and certainly not exclusive to higher education (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For

colleges and universities, their market is exclusively students and with the number of students who were previously considered "traditional" college students shrinking, campus leaders are being forced to think beyond the status quo. Resource dependency theory argues that institutions will need to change the way they have always functioned in order to avoid the financial risk involved with not meeting enrollment goals in a market steeped with heavy competition (Hossler, et al., 2015). Foothills University combatted the low retention rates by reorganizing its academic advising offices and by creating new academic programs to encourage students to continue their college experience without transferring. Additionally, the provost at Foothills talked about the initiative to increase the number of students part of the honors college in an effort to keep up with the more academically rigorous institutions in the state. However, as explained by the chief enrollment officer at Foothills, creating a more stable enrollment funnel with out-of-state students and students from rural communities within the state would take the focus of an entire division. These reactions to the resource challenge faced by higher education are explained by proposition 3, *Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success.*

At Magnolia University, retention rates presented a similar challenge in that they were far lower than the national average and lower than what the president felt the institution could achieve. The president stated, "You don't have retention rates that are ten points below the national average and say you have expertise in enrollment management." These below-average retention rates caught the attention of the administrators at Magnolia and combined with an external audit not unlike the one completed at Foothills University, the decision to separate the position of vice president

for student affairs and chief enrollment officer was made. Once separated, the new chief enrollment officer began emphasizing the importance of retention rates for all students, not just those considered a cohort by IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System). In our interview, the chief enrollment officer stated:

> There's retention as defined by IPEDS, which is first time, full time, the cohort, but there are freshmen that come in that aren't part of that. We've gone from 69% to 78% by this fall. That's unheard [of]. It's huge. And we've done a lot of great things. However, that's of the cohort. As an enrollment manager, there are a lot of students that aren't in that cohort a lot. In fact, you've got transfer, you have non-direct, whatever. If you look at that group, are they performing at or under that rate? Your issue might be your non-cohort students. And a lot of people put [effort] into there (the cohort) because it may be part of the funding model, right? It is what's out there as national benchmarks. So, people put a lot of energy there, but if you're doing that, you've increased that issue maybe, but then how are you looking at the others, which is progression in retention, your first or second, whatever…it's not a cohort. So, you cannot, can't have 'univision' when it comes to retention and progression.

As demonstrated by the chief enrollment officer's quote, a greater emphasis on retention rates for all students, regardless of being part of a specific cohort of incoming students or not, has dramatically increased overall undergraduate retention rates. Administrators at Magnolia University give credit for this increase to the new version of enrollment management as its own division, and the inclusion of offices focused on student success, the first-year experience, and the registrar being within the division.

Though not directly said, there is an underlying desire for more impressive retention rates demonstrated through the quote from the VPEM at Magnolia. While they were referring to the students who do not fall neatly into the IPEDS cohorts, the end result of increasing overall retention rates, which can be reported to IPEDS and other organization, was the goal. IPEDS is not the only entity exclusively taking cohort students into consideration. Ranking systems like *US News & World Report* also only use data related to students who fit into a cohort model associated with a specific start year and semester. More importantly, the students who are part of a cohort are also those tied to funding received from the state government, according to the VPEM at Magnolia. The state higher education system governing the three institutions in this study does not currently use performance-based funding (PBF) as part of its funding formula, but pieces of the funding model do consider the number of students enrolled in any given academic year (Ortagus, et al., 2020). Therefore, the focus on cohort students is not likely to change even though the original goal of the institution may have been to serve students who both do and do not fit into today's neatly defined cohorts (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; van Vught, 1996).

To see an increase in the overall retention numbers is something I truly believe the administrators at Magnolia University want to see. However, I also believe they, like many other institutions, have a desire to be seen as legitimate by their governing agency, their peers, and their future consumers, leading to the adjustment of their structure to meet the ever-increasing student outcome expectations. The focus on seeing an increase in retention rates specifically for students who are part of the IPEDS cohort supports

proposition 3, *Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success.*

Eventually, this need to churn out impressive metrics leads to the homogenization of higher education as all institutions are competing for the top spot in all of the same ranking systems (Meyer, et al., 1977; van Vught, 1996). From creating new academic programs in the case of Foothills University to creating a new enrollment management division like their counterparts, institutions are falling prey to the isomorphic pressures around them. Furthermore, Magnolia University administrators realize the somewhat challenging truth that public funding is tied to a specific group of students which excludes students who are not full-time first-time degree-seeking. Thus, proposition 4, *Enrollment management divisions are created to meet the performance goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding* rings true when thinking through the conversation around the importance of seeing the student outcome data for cohort students increase.

Though Greene College faced retention rate challenges when the decision was made to create an enrollment management division, the young age of the institution presented a different type of obstacle. In seeking growth in enrollment since the early 2000s, the school was admitting students who would most likely no longer meet today's academic criteria, obviously hurting the retention rates. The Director of Admissions reflected on this phenomenon below:

> So, if you're bringing in students that have a 2.0 GPA, they're going to be very fragile. It is going to be hard for them to be successful. They weren't really strong students to begin with. That hurt our retention. So, at the time when we were first

> establishing the college, if you had a pulse, they used to say you could get in. That wasn't necessarily true. You still had to have your 2.0. But that's one of the reasons a lot of those students not only transfer out, but they also do a stop gap. Funding's not there. They're first generation. So that is why I think our retention numbers and our graduation numbers have been traditionally low.

Though enrollment management as a concept was discussed at Greene College in the early days, the work being done resembled an admissions office only, in that the staff was less focused on students being retained and more focused on getting students through the door for the first time. That is until the first VPEM was hired. This philosophy of focusing on first time enrollment makes perfect sense when funding is partially enrollment dependent, and was further supplemented by the fact that Greene needed to meet the access mission originally given by their state agency:

> Well, they've always been in a growth mode here, so there's never enough growth. Even though we've had good growth. Retention rates when I first got here were poor. First to second year retention hovered around 65% (Greene College, chief enrollment officer)

Further, Greene College continues to face a brand issue due to its location on the site of a previous satellite campus and their status as a college instead of a university, leading students to believe it is a community college and they should plan to transfer out after two years. As mentioned above, Foothills University faces a high rate of students transferring out once they have the academic credentials to attend the more challenging public flagship. Greene College faces this issue at an even more extreme rate. The

Associate Vice President (AVP) for Enrollment Management at Greene College details this obstacle:

> But everyone has always considered us a community college. And so, trying to establish ourselves in the marketplace as a four-year institution has been a challenge. So, I think that's part of it. And then because we were looked at as a community college, what are the most students [going to] do, they go to community college for a couple of years, they transfer out. And so, we have been finding that retention from that aspect, not because of our degrees or anything of that nature, we have been perceived as a community college. 'I'll go there for two years, get my gen ed courses out of the way, and then I'm going to transfer.' And a lot of our students transfer to [the large public school] because it's a great pathway to [the large public school]. Now, interestingly, we've had a lot of students who have transferred to [the large public school] and they've come back to us within after that first semester or within that first year because they have this strong connection with [Greene College] is what they have told us in the past.

Establishing a widely recognized brand and overcoming the community college stigma will not happen overnight for Greene College. Though the enrollment management division does not include marketing in its portfolio, the unit has been tasked with affecting student outcomes. For example, the admissions office is expected to admit students they are more likely to retain, a challenge when they do not control the message being shared to prospective students and their families. These students present a recruitment challenge because they are the more academically capable students who are typically looking at other, more competitive, state institutions. While the admissions

office does fall within enrollment management, other departments around campus also are responsible for creating an environment ready to help see these students persist and graduate (Johnson, 2016).

While an institution's desire to be seen as legitimate may be linked to the ranking systems or funding models as I explored above, it can also be connected to the development of their brand and frustration around the misconception of who they are as an institution. As the youngest school in this study, Greene College is still making a name for itself and working to overcome the confusion surrounding its location. The interesting twist for Greene College is the lack of control their division has over marketing materials. According to the VPEM, all marketing materials, including emails to prospective students and their families, have to go through the central marketing unit on campus. Early enrollment practitioners called attention to the value in strategic marketing decisions and believed in the positive effect they could have on enrollment, retention, and graduation (Bontrager, 2004; Hossler, 1984; Maguire, 1976; Pollock, 1987). Without the ability to complete an internal analysis or make any significant change to the marketing efforts, enrollment management administrators at Greene College are working together to improve the pieces of the student experience over which they do have control. For Greene, and other similarly organized schools, this is quite ironic. As has been described throughout this section, enrollment management divisions are often held responsible for improvements in student outcomes but not having control over a key aspect of recruitment, creates a roadblock to their success. Nevertheless, by increasing its academic profile, improving processes for students, and focusing on growing their likely to retain

population, the enrollment management division at Greene College is hopeful others, primarily future enrollees, will see them as more legitimate.

Graduation Rates

Like retention rates, the task of improving graduation rates is increasingly assigned to enrollment management units. Across the three institutions in this study, a large percentage of students are choosing to transfer after one or two years on campus or need to take a break for personal or financial reasons, leading to less-than-desirable retention rates. The two metrics, retention and graduation rates, are technically separated for reporting purposes but until there is an increase in the number of students retained each year, there will not be an increase in graduation rates. Unsurprisingly, this connection between the two metrics meant the newly created enrollment management divisions were strongly focused on the student experience and the ways to retain students. Administrators looked at the student experience from every angle—prospective, current, and graduate—to determine how processes could better ensure the retention and therefore, graduation of their student population.

For each of the three cases in this study, graduating students affect not only the individual student's economic success but the success of the state within which the institution lives. Public institutions across the country are expected to have an underlying mission of providing an educated workforce to increase the economic opportunities for citizens and to ensure stability for the state. There is not a specific metric associated with this expectation, but proposition 4, *Enrollment management divisions are created to meet the performance goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding,* points to the idea that enrollment management divisions are created to meet the expectations of state

governing systems. Principal-agent theory (PAT) allows us to see the power state governing boards have in the functioning of individual institutions (Hillman et al., 2015; Lane & Kivisto, 2008). It is perhaps clearest in cases of performance based funding (PBF), wherein governing boards hold institutions accountable by making funding contingent upon certain outcome measures, is often tied to PAT. While PBF was not explicitly part of the state governing agency I studied, it was still a constant threat to the minds of administrators as they made decisions on campus.

The participants in the interviews conducted for this study mentioned the focus on graduating students in relation to either their own economic gains or the effect of graduating students on the greater state or nation in multiple instances, an expectation placed on insitutions by their governing board. For example, the President at Magnolia University shared:

> A lot of people graduated from [other state school], but this is their university now because they live here. This is where they get their talent for their businesses. This is where their neighbors went to school. And we can't miss that. Most students who graduate from a university like [other state school] spend the rest of their lives living within 320 or 330 miles. I forget the data point. Maybe it's 400 miles of that institution, but from a regional comprehensive university, it's like 170.

These data point to the creation of enrollment management divisions to meet the needs of state governing boards, one of which being to provide an education workforce that wants to live locally after graduation. This is a large responsibility to place on one unit, regardless of the size of institution, which is why many of the participants in this study

emphasized the idea that improving student outcome metrics is the job of all faculty and staff on campus.

In the case of Greene College, many factors are to blame for the graduation rates being lower than desired. If a school is struggling to retain students, it's unlikely to report desirable graduation rates (Dolence, 1993). With a mission of being an access institution for the state, many students come into Greene College underprepared for college-level work, according to the interview participants. Further, a majority of the students enrolling are first-generation, meaning their families were less equipped to support them through all that college brings (Perna, 2006; Rowan-Kenyon, et al., 2008). When the current VPEM started at the institution, graduation rates were somewhere between 10 – 12% While graduation and retention rates measure very different outcomes, they are closely related, and it is nearly impossible to affect one without positively affecting the other. Therefore, instead of focusing on how to get students to graduate, the chief enrollment officer and President focused on giving students reasons to stay enrolled.

> So, this new president, what we've really focused on is trying to provide options for students to stay. We will help them transfer if that's what they want, but that's not really our goal. So, we got that freshman to sophomore retention rate up to 70% last year. That's an all-time high for the college. And more importantly, we've got the second to third year rate up to 55%. So, 55% of the students come in as freshmen or first year students are now moving on to their junior year. That is an all-time high. So that's going to eventually hit the graduation rates. So that's a lot of different work to go into it beyond this office. But this office has certainly been part of it (VPEM, Greene College)

This quotation demonstrates the job of an enrollment management division to increase retention rates through providing a greater experience for students, making them want to persist through to graduation. In the current landscape of higher education, specifically in the case of Greene College, an institution without great brand recognition and being located in a state with impressive public schools, the market is incredibly competitive. Even though Greene College is different from any other institution in the state, it is competing for students with far more well-known and sought after institutions due to the nature of higher education (Schultz & Lucido, 2011).

Beyond just recruiting students to start their college experience at Greene, administrators have to be creative in how they convince students to finish their time with Greene College instead of transferring out. Proposition 3, *Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success,* identifies the need to create an enrollment management division as a response to compete in a highly competitive market, such as the one in which Greene College is located. There is a finite number of consumers for higher education each year leading to the need for institutions to "respond to changes in the external environment by shifting time, energy, and resources to protect or acquire scarce resources that are central to the health and vitality of the organization" (Hossler, et al., 2015). Sometimes, this means a structural change will be necessary to place internal resources in an organization most likely to acquire the consumer or student (Powell & Ray, 2015). That is exactly what Greene College decided to do when campus administrators restructured their organization to increase the focus placed on retaining

and graduating students who previously might have chosen to transfer to a different institution.

As expected, each of the interviews at Greene College brought up how the development of an enrollment management division is spearheading the push to improve graduation rates. The Registrar talked about the hiring of a Graduation Specialist to make graduation a more seamless experience for students so that a complicated bureaucratic process would not keep them from reaching such an important milestone. The AVP for Admissions emphasized the divisional, and even campus-wide attention on graduation when talking about collaboration and how individual offices cannot work in silos if these rates are to improve. From the beginning of the Greene College student experience through graduation, faculty and staff are aware of how their interaction with a student can impact both retention and graduation rates.

Although graduation rates at Foothills University were not quite as low as the graduation rates at Greene College, they have implemented a goal of continuous improvement and are seemingly unsatisfied until a new goal is set and reached. As discussed in the retention rate section above, Foothills faces an issue of many students transferring to the larger state institution or stopping out for a myriad of reasons. Thus, similar to Greene College, much of the institutional effort has been more focused on increasing retention rates with an understanding that the trickle-down effect will affect graduation rates significantly. As another example of proposition 3 (*Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success)*, Foothills University created the centralized advising office, part of the enrollment management division, with both

retention and graduation rates in mind. According to the Registrar, when the students had four years of centralized advising, the institution saw their highest graduation rate in years. This restructuring towards both a new division for enrollment management and centralized advising resulted in the increased success of students and the ability for Foothills University to retain more of their students, meaning more tuition dollars were flowing in.

At Magnolia University, both the four-year and six-year graduation rates were declining when the enrollment management division was established at Magnolia University. The chief enrollment officer at Magnolia University put into perspective the value placed on graduation when they said, “we’re not for retention, we’re for graduation and student success.” While the “we’re” in that sentence most likely referred to the overall campus attitude, Magnolia University is no different from the other two institutions in that student success is a primary responsibility of enrollment management, with the university administration going so far as to create a new office for student success and placing it under the VPEM. The creation and placement of an office focused on student success strongly supports the idea that the enrollment management administrators will be held accountable for retention and graduation metric improvements. This accountability is even more apparent when the VPEM at Magnolia University described how they view their responsibilities and skills needed for the job:

> You kind of have to know a little bit about budgets and finance and auxiliaries and economics and behavior management and psychology, sociology. There's so much you have to know, analytics, you have to know all those kinds of things and how they interplay and impact. That's why a student comes. You have to

> understand price points and stuff, market analysis, marketing, all of those things. And so, what influences a student to come? What influences a student to stay and graduate? Then working with [that] foundation about keeping them engaged and it's just a cycle. Yeah, it's a cycle and so forth. So simplistically complex is what I call it, right?

Enrollment managers are responsible for far more than just enrolling a class of students every year. After a student enrolls for the first time, the staff working in the enrollment management division at each of the three institutions in this study are responsible for a majority of the student's lifecycle. Across the three institutions included in this study, the expectation that enrollment management divisions move the needle on student outcome metrics was clearly articulated. Whether the need to increase graduation rates came from a desire to compete in an overly saturated market, impress the ranking systems, or meet the requirements of the governing agency, the institutions included believed the creation of an enrollment management division would make the greatest impact. Each school also mentioned the importance of having the entire campus community moving in the same direction towards increasing retention and graduation rates. Ultimately, however, it was clear that enrollment management will be held accountable for the improvements, or lack thereof, for these benchmarks.

Data-Driven Decision-Making

With the expectation that enrollment management offices are responsible for improving important student outcome metrics, being "intentional with data" and using a "data-informed approach" (VPEM, Magnolia University), is paramount to the success of each enrollment management division in this study. It was not surprising to hear that the

enrollment management units at each of the schools included in this case study contain offices that produce a large amount of data. Since offices like admissions, financial aid, and the registrar fall under the enrollment management umbrella at each institution, there are hundreds, maybe even thousands, of data points available to campus administrators. The data points collected in these offices are focused on student success, all of which have the goal of providing insight into how outcome metrics can improve. Though the enrollment management divisions might have "about 100 different variables in all" (VPEM, Greene College), the enrollment, retention, and graduation of students are what leaders are focused on.

For all institutions, but especially public institutions, making data-informed decisions is extremely important (Bontrager, 2004; Henderson, 2005). Having data to back up the decisions made by administrators is useful when choices are questioned by executive leadership, a governing board, or even state taxpayers. Making decisions with data as the primary driver also allows institutions to point to successes when they consider where they once measured on various benchmarks. Data plays a major role when departments are attempting to justify a need for a budget increase, the hiring of new faculty or staff, and the rearrangement of the organizational structure. Where the data are produced, and which office(s) store the data, is a conversation that came up at each of the case institutions in this study.

At Greene College, the VPEM's title and portfolio uniquely includes institutional research as a unit. This is a great benefit according to the VPEM because of how closely the two typically work on a college campus and the vast number of data points at their fingertips. There has been, and continues to be, exponential growth in the use of data

within the division of enrollment management now that the VPEM is responsible for institutional research:

> It kind of depends on the time of year, but every day I compare four years of real-time data on, as you can imagine, applications. And then I look at various types of applications. I'll look at ethnicities, I'll look at different things like that. Acceptances, registrations, and registrations are for the entire college, not just new students. The other two are new. This is all the same data I give the cabinet, by the way. I look at class capacities to make sure we have room for the next orientation coming in. I look at orientation numbers compared to the previous four years. So, I have all these dashboards built.

This quote sheds light on the way institutions, especially enrollment managers, rely on data to both make and justify decisions. Most notably, the VPEM at Greene College talked about how much data they provide to the cabinet. The cabinet at Greene reports to the state higher education system, thus the data produced by enrollment management is almost always tied to goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding as explained in proposition 4.

The VPEM at Magnolia University does not supervise institutional research, however, they do have a position within the enrollment management division focused solely on data. The data analyst. This person is responsible for producing data related to enrollment management so that the division can analyze the "interplay of those [data points] and what matters to student success, and then what do you have on campus that then wraps around that to help them be successful" (VPEM, Magnolia University). As new, complex challenges appear every day in higher education, campus administrators

necessarily need to remain in touch with the data to determine how to improve the student experience of an ever-changing population. Data at Magnolia has been used to create new academic programs, better the on-campus student experience, and decide which population of students should be recruited. Retention and graduation rates, as well as other key points of data, were strong drivers when the president made the decision to create an enrollment management division. After seeing that these rates needed improvement, the president hired an external auditor to help justify the creation a new unit. Without having access to such a robust data set, Magnolia would not have been so keenly aware of an issue that needed to be swiftly solved. Having a division for enrollment management that houses a data analyst demonstrates the idea that enrollment management divisions are created to navigate challenges brought on by modern complexities (proposition 1).

Much like some of the discussions at Magnolia University, the conversation with the provost at Foothills University was primarily focused on data. The provost mentioned data that is connected to benchmarks such as the amount of scholarship money students earn, family income levels, and institutional budget composition. Such data points are not going to affect student retention and graduation all on their own, but they are environmental factors affecting the success of Foothills students. These outcome measures are complicated by variables such as scholarship money, family income levels, and budget, none of which are not completely controlled by Foothills. Aligning with my third proposition, Foothills was then forced to reorganize towards an enrollment management division out of a response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success. The impressive nature of these pieces of data

were brought up as justifications for why the provost felt metrics like retention and graduation rates should be higher. Within the division of enrollment management at Foothills, there is no lack of data being generated on an annual basis. For offices such as Undergraduate Admissions, Financial Aid, the Career Center, and others in enrollment management, there is an expectation to produce and store immense amounts of data to demonstrate success and alignment with the goals set by the state higher education system. While there is not a data analyst in the division and institutional research is a separate office, enrollment management at Foothills University produces and distributes data across campus to gain institutional buy-in for decisions made.

Decisions that are data-driven are oftentimes more like to gain institutional buy-in for extreme change on a college campus. For the institutions in this study, having an office dedicated to the generation and distribution of data related to student outcome metrics was central to the develop of an enrollment management division. Out of a need to adjust to environmental factors or to provide data to senior-level administrators and the state governing agency, all three institutions decided a new division would be best suited for data storage and to produce the data necessary for an intentional decision-making process.

Expanding the Student Population

In the first section of this chapter, I explained that recruiting and admissions work rarely came up as a topic of conversation during the interviews I conducted with campus administrators, with one exception: the realization that there is a need to recruit a less traditional student population. For each institution, the definition of a less traditional student population is different. In general, less traditional means the institutions in this

study needed to look beyond students who are coming right out of high school, are geographically close to their campus, or those who met their historical academic expectations. The rare conversation about admissions may have been regarding prospective student recruitment, but the enrollment managers still connected the recruitment work back to increasing retention and graduation rates on their campus. Discussions about how the recruitment strategies of students affect the retention and graduation rates of the institution were absent during interviews with the participants. Although I do believe the administrators interviewed understand the connection between recruitment and student outcomes, it was interesting that beginning the student lifecycle with the end in mind was not a common association.

Participants representing the institutions believe that expanding the student population being recruited will create more enrollment stability throughout the entire student lifecycle. Without explicitly saying so, the assumption is that they hoped to bolster the recruiting pipelines and enroll more students with a higher likelihood of retention and graduation. Before I move much further into a section regarding the expansion of the student population, I think it is important to acknowledge that the enrollment managers in this study barely, if at all, referred to racial or ethnic diversification. This is unusual in that, oftentimes, the need to expand or diversify a student population at a PWI, in particular, relates to the institutional desire to have a more racially diverse campus (Elliott, et al., 2024). However, when it came to the conversations I had with administrators on all three campuses in this study, race was not a major focus when in creating a more stable enrollment pipeline. I find this fascinating

considering the large number of Hispanic and Black students living in the surrounding areas of each institution.

I would argue that the discussion regarding an expansion of the student population is the finding most closely aligned proposition 1, *Enrollment management divisions are created out of a belief that formal structure will allow for more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities,* and proposition 3, *Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success*. When analyzing the way higher education is becoming more complex, there is no greater shift than the one created by the increasing diversity in student types, including race and ethnicity diversity, socioeconomic diversity, age diversity, and the emergence of first-generation students (Huisman, et al., 2007). The presence of this wide array of students in the market does not automatically mean they will be interested in your institution. Instead, institutions will be expected to adjust to become a campus that is part of the conversation for this diverse student population in order to compete in such a marketplace.

Though the administrators in this study pointed to a need to diversify their student population in an attempt to rectify poor retention and graduation rates, they are still expected to serve their institutional mission. Since all three schools are public and governed by the state higher education system, admission is to remain attainable by a large portion of the state. For Greene College, this goes further as they were created to be an access institution where even more of the state's college-going population can enroll. At the same time, enrollment management units are facing pressure from their leadership and even the state system to improve student outcomes. Oftentimes, these two pressures,

the need to improve student outcome rates and to meet the needs of their state, are in direct opposition to one another. The staff members interviewed cited the creation of an enrollment management division as foundational in the effort to accomplish the two opposing goals. Enrollment management divisions gave these institutions the focus to diversify the recruited student population while also staying aligned with their institutional mission.

A great example of diversifying the student population comes from Greene College. Historically, the institution has relied heavily on the populous county within which it is located. Though this has traditionally worked well, many other institutions within the state are also recruiting in this county due to the high volume of students. Therefore, Greene College, with the development of an enrollment management unit, began focusing on recruiting students from other regions of the state. Additionally, with the chief enrollment officer having a seat in the president's cabinet and forming relationships at the state higher education office, the institution is now able to offer in-state tuition rates for students coming from a border state. Recruiting students from other regions of the state and those outside its border's points to a deeper focus on creating long-term enrollment stability by developing a pipeline that increases the number and type of student in the admissions funnel.

In conversation with the AVP for Enrollment Management and the Director of Admissions at Greene College, increasing the academic profile of incoming students is also a goal for the division. Though they still hope to be a place for students who did not think their academics could get them into college, they are increasingly marketing their honors program and research opportunities. Attracting higher achieving students will

increase the likelihood of those students persisting all the way through to graduation, ultimately the goal for the administrators at Greene College. The Director of Admissions at Greene gave insight into how this is achieved through the recruitment process and the thought process behind it affecting future retention rates:

> In my [office] how I've trained my team, [is] you never know who walks up to your table what their GPA is in high school, you don't want to insult. I mean, sometimes they could look like they have a 2.0 and they're a 4.0 student. So, I always told them one of my recruitment strategies is we're a four-year institution. We're part of the [state system]. A regular admit is a 2.0, honors admit is a 3.5. And you just say both… Yes, we're there for those 2.0 students, but we're also trying to get the higher achievers. At one time, and I think it's still very accurate, our average GPA was a 2.8 or 2.9, so they just missed that [removed] scholarship, but there was still a really good place for them. I feel like that's kind of still where we are. But then our retention rate, when you've got half of the admits maybe in that lower range, that's going to affect it.

Although increasing the academic credentials needed to be admitted to Greene will likely increase both retention and graduation rates, increasing the academic profile of the incoming student population may have a negative effect on the institution's access mission (Chu, 2021). As this shift occurs, Greene College will be pleased to see their student outcome metrics better measure up to other institutions in the state. However, this effort will mean Greene will simultaneously become more like the schools across the state without an access mission, thus failing to reach the students they were originally

intended to serve. This isomorphic move can be blamed on the desire to see more impressive benchmark data and to compete in the prestige race in higher education.

Consequently, the social reproduction of inequality (SRT) is perpetuated by higher education with institutions looking to serve only those who are academically, socially, culturally, and economically prepared for the status quo college experience (Byrd, 2017; Cardona Mejia, et al., 2020; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; van Vught, 1996). Many colleges across the country are taking the same approach—falling to the isomorphic pressures in the wake of enrollment challenges (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; van Vught, 1996). For many campus administrators, the ability to organize and function like the schools that have successfully navigated the modern complexities of higher education is easier than doing the work to determine how they can both continue aligning with their mission and solving enrollment problems. The desire to increase the academic profile at Greene continues to drive home the point that enrollment management divisions are created in "response to a competitive marketplace" (proposition 3), but oftentimes, when a division is created in some part to diversify a population, institutions are seceding to "isomorphic pressures originating from a desire to be seen as legitimate, and to avoid internal analysis" (proposition 2).

Another population of students that Greene College, and many other institutions across the country, are beginning to place a heavier emphasis on is adult learners. The adult learning population is very successful according to the Director of Admissions at Greene who also shared:

> So, we have an Assistant Director now who is going to focus on that population of transfer, adult learner population. Those are the ones that are going to graduate.

> So that's been a big focus this year. We've had that position in place, but we've got to really get out there and get after those adult learners.

Within the state system where all of these three institutions are located, adult learners have recently gained great attention as a population to begin recruiting more heavily. The VPEM at Greene College argued that their institution is not designed for adult learners, but it is a focus of the state system and will become a greater portion of the population at Greene. Adult learners do not seem to be becoming a large focus for the enrollment managers at Greene, but since the state system is expecting institutions to become more apt to serve this population, the enrollment management will be home to a position dedicated to serving adults. An increase in the number of adult learners enrolling at Greene College is likely to create a challenge because according to the VPEM,

> I mean, we are not really equipped for adult students. We don't have evening classes. I mean, we have some online, but not a lot. So, until we start really focusing on adult students, I'm not going to go out and recruit. We're actually a very traditional age campus. We're getting younger. We've gotten younger the last three years the president and I were just talking about that.

So even though the leaders at Greene College know they are not suited to support adult learners, they will be focusing more heavily on this population due to the expectations of their governing agency (proposition 4). By creating an enrollment management division at Greene College, they are able to meet the requirements of the state governing agency that dictates a need to recruit more adult learners, seemingly without any focus on the ability of the institution to adequately serve these students. Though an enrollment management can help to increase the number of adult learners enrolling at the institution

and can put support in place for this group, to make an institution truly able to serve adult learners, assistance from faculty to develop courses will also be needed.

In the interview with the VPEM at Magnolia University, the impending enrollment cliff was discussed, as its impact will soon be felt across the state:

> And then on the news side, we know the cliff, even though [state]'s got one year, but here's the thing. There are populations that we haven't necessarily gone after in the past that if we strategically go after them that's a population even in a declining population.

The shrinking number of college-aged students will mean institutions need to begin learning how to recruit, retain, and graduate new populations of students who have previously not been considered in the enrollment process (Phillips & Jones, 2024). However, there is more to recruiting these students than just getting them through the doors, just as there is more to enrollment management than the admissions office. For example, Magnolia University is looking to become a place for Latino students, one of the fastest-growing populations in the state. To do that, the VPEM shared some of the considerations they are working through:

> It's a whole different mindset. You have to be engaged in the community. They have to trust you. It's a family decision. Are you bilingual in everything that you have? So, you have to do groundwork to be able then to get that population. It just doesn't arrive because you say you're going to go after it…So, you have to pre-work, right? Yeah. And that's a retention issue. So again, we're not for retention, we're for graduation and success, student success.

The VPEM continued by emphasizing that the job of becoming an institution with a more diversified student population belongs to the entire campus, not just enrollment management.

In the case of Magnolia University, the position of vice president for enrollment management and student affairs was split to focus on the student experience, something that diversifying a student population requires. According to the administrators at Magnolia, it takes technology, programming, athletics, and academic and social engagement to develop pride and the desire to remain a student through to graduation. Thus, it is not as simple as it may appear on the surface to diversify the makeup of a student population—it is far more complex. It is true that the ability to enroll and successfully graduate a new population, such as Latinx students will take more than just an enrollment management office, but without such a division to shift institutional focus towards a new group of prospective students, this effort is likely to fall flat. For Magnolia University administrators, to both efficiently navigate modern social complexities, and to adapt based on a "competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors" (propositions 1 & 2), an enrollment management division would be necessary.

A similar sentiment was shared by both the VPEM and President at Magnolia University who said, "So again, there are populations within a declining population that can help you increase your enrollment. What do you know about that in your vision? And looking at data to understand. And then you have to get your partners across campus to start to build some foundations to be able to realize that enrollment." These populations previously not taken into consideration could help to make a large difference in creating a denser enrollment funnel, but what the VPEM at Magnolia is saying is that the rest of

your institution must be prepared as well otherwise the trickle-down effect from enrollment through to graduation will not be felt by the institution or the students.

For Foothills University, the desire to diversify the student population has a great deal to do with providing its students with exposure to people from all over the country. As a public, liberal arts institution, Foothills wants to give its students a cultural experience that they argue cannot be obtained at other public schools in the state. Although I understand that Foothills is attempting to respond to the competitive landscape in which they are located, I would argue that without the proper support mechanisms in place for out-of-state students, this effort to recruit students from across the country may only lead to challenges for both the benchmarks the institution is attempting to improve and the newly recruited population of students. The chief enrollment officer believes the academic profile of the institution will also increase when a heavier focus is placed on out-of-state students since students who might want the private school liberal arts experience at a cheaper price will be recruited. Similar to Greene College, Foothills University is putting more work into recruiting students who are high academic achievers. This is demonstrated by their 2020 decision to transition the Honors Program into an Honors College and doubling the number of honors students enrolling. While this is a common means for increasing student outcome metrics, it could mean more honors-eligible students are accepted, leaving fewer spots for less academically accomplished students who want the liberal arts experience at the public-school cost (Tsui, 2003).

As Foothills is targeting a population beyond its state border, it is not losing focus on the students within their state. This is an effort to satisfy the state higher education

governing board's expectation that public institutions serve as provider of economic advancement for their state. For example, rural students continue to be a priority to ensure the institution is meeting its mission as a public school by serving local students and creating a "comprehensive territory management plan to hit every corner of the state" (Chief Enrollment Officer, Foothills University). Interestingly, the chief enrollment officer pointed to the benefit going test-optional during the COVID-19 pandemic had on the diversification effort. This point is seemingly at odds with the goal of increasing the academic profile considering standardized test scores are often proudly touted as evidence of impressive incoming classes by institutions each year. While other institutions in the state are working to become more capable of serving adult learners, the on-campus, liberal arts environment of Foothills is not nearly as prepared to receive this new student population. However, the administrators do recognize the need to become a place that is comfortable for both Hispanic and Black students, but I did not hear about efforts being made to make this a reality. Programming, including the ability to provide bilingual materials to prospective students and families, is part of this strategy. Each of these strategies mentioned during the Foothills interviews point to a desire to increase the number of possible student enrolling and an increased probability of them improving student outcome metrics.

Indeed, the expansion of the age, ability, race, and geographical home of students enrolling at an institution can happen without creating an enrollment management division. However, each of the institutions primarily placed the responsibility of diversifying their enrolled student body on their enrollment management division. Each of the enrollment managers interviewed emphasized the value in having recruitment-

focused offices within the same unit to accomplish the goal of diversification. This structure allows the offices to be better aligned in the push to increase enrollment stability. Though gaining institutional buy-in from faculty and staff across campus is essential to creating a more stable enrollment funnel, all enrollment management units in under the same umbrella allows for collaboration. This demonstrates an institutional focus on enrollment, and helps the institution create a stable path to growth.

Personnel Matters

During the course of the multiple interviews completed for this case study, there were a few unexpected findings. It was surprising to hear the number of times personnel issues came up when interviewees discussed the reasoning behind the creation of an enrollment management division. Not all of the conversations went into great depth regarding the personnel-related topics, most likely due to human resources policies, but I find this theme to be fascinating when considering the strategic nature of the decision to move to an enrollment management division. It should be noted that although this was a recurring topic, personnel issues were not solely credited with creating any of the enrollment management divisions. Since people are at the center of how organizations function, it makes sense for personnel to be part of the broader conversation.

Personnel challenges were common in the conversations with campus administrators. For example, at Magnolia University, the external audit that brought to light a need for change as it relates to the way enrollment management functioned on campus also confirmed some of the personnel issues suspected by the President:

> We took the feedback from that study. I got to identify a lot of people who I sensed might be low performers, uninformed, lacking in ability and expertise, and

> confirm that. And then we got to put in place leaders that could give us clear answers. I mean, what we were lacking was expertise.

Magnolia's president elaborated on the point by stating that "talent is everything," especially when it comes to enrollment management. To improve the low retention and graduation rates at Magnolia, an increased level of expertise in enrollment management would be necessary. According to the president, having expertise in the world of enrollment management is much more than just being able to get enough students to enroll at the beginning of an academic year, according to the president:

> For me, enrollment management is not admissions and getting you into the door. It's the chasing your experience down as a student and making certain that you matriculate through because we are in the graduation business, not the enrollment business. So, we needed more seasoned leadership that could tell us what to do next. That's what the report said, and we went out and found [our VPEM].

The president at Magnolia also shared that without people on staff who truly understand the intricacies of enrollment management, student outcomes will consistently suffer because there is a lack of learning and too heavy of a focus on being in a leadership role before fully understanding what that entails. The realization brought on by the external consultant resulted in the hiring of a chief enrollment officer with years of enrollment management experience. Ultimately, this hiring led to the portfolio of the chief enrollment officer being expanded and offices being absorbed by the newly formed division.

At Foothills University, part of the reason an enrollment management division was reimagined was because the person previously in charge of enrollment efforts retired.

This opened the door to rethink the organization of offices directly related to enrollment management. According to institutional theory, actors are likely to make decisions based on what they believe to be in line with the processes and perceived rules (Manning, 2013; Zucker, 1987). Therefore, shifting behavior of the structural organization is challenging until an opportunity, such as a retirement, occurs. This disturbance in the functioning of the organization will mean the creation of new systems, which will take time to establish, but will lead to new social rules that allow for the navigation of modern social complexities (Meyer, et al., 2007; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). As such, the idea of making organizational changes in the wake of personnel shifts is a means for "more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities" (proposition 1).

The new version of enrollment management at Foothills brought on the hiring of the chief enrollment officer. Interestingly, this is the only associate vice president on campus with the senior title, something the current chief enrollment officer says was very attractive when interviewing for the position. Including the designation of "senior" places a heavier emphasis on the work being done by enrollment management. Once hired, the chief enrollment officer inherited certain offices immediately, such as Admissions, the Welcome Center, and First-Year Experience. However, as the chief enrollment officer continued to become more acquainted with campus and their expertise was displayed, new offices that align with their previous experience and expertise have been added.

In conversation with the registrar at Foothills University, they identified another version of the effect of personnel issues on campus. From their perspective, as interesting as it would be to attribute the reorganization or creation of new offices, such as enrollment management, to a theoretical or organizational framework, it rarely is the

catalyst for such decisions. In reality, “every single decision made has been from a personnel issue” (Foothills’ Registrar). Some of the organizational shifts were a result of spouses or partners not being able to supervise each other. Occasionally, and in the scenario of the chief enrollment officer at Foothills, the expansion of a staff member’s portfolio could lead to organizational shifts. According to the Registrar, this can sometimes be selfish for their own career goals and not always aligned with what is best for the institution. As DiMaggio (1988) accurately points out, the selfish needs or wants of actors within an organization can lead to variation in structure, like when an administrator wants to expand their portfolio to further their own career. Conversely, there have been situations in which someone’s workload was getting to be too much, and it became necessary to split the work amongst others. These anecdotes demonstrate why the decision to reimagine or create an enrollment management division may not always be grounded in anything other than a need to be reactionary. This finding is seemingly at odds with the earlier emphasis on data-driven making discussed and helps explain the complexity of structural reorganization in enrollment management divisions.

Thus far, this section has described challenging personnel issues that required organizational shifts to be solved. For Greene College, the situation was slightly different. When the VPEM arrived on campus, there was a systemic staff turnover issue. As a result, the enrollment management division began to focus heavily on staff retention. Today, the division has the best staff retention on campus, according to the VPEM. This increase in staff retention was attributed to the way the division is run—through a process in which there is a defined organizational structure but the leaders within enrollment management are accessible and supportive of expertise from all

contributors. Further, the unit focuses on including staff at every level in decisions, both big and small, through working groups. Run by the Executive Director of Financial Aid and the Registrar, these working groups help to avoid some of the personnel problems that previously existed because staff members are heard and included in the decisions that affect the entire enrollment management division. While this idea did not affect the decision to create an enrollment management division, from what I was told during the interviews, it has been a positive effect of the unit's transformation.

Unique Institutional Findings

Although the institutions included in this study were intentionally selected to represent a diverse subset of public colleges and universities, the findings described to this point in the chapter have focused on similarities across all three cases. These common themes are important to discuss in detail because of their broader importance when attempting to contextualize the rationale behind the creation of enrollment management divisions and their overall organizational structure. However, as is expected in a study of different institutional types, not all findings were universal. Though not every finding was seen across all three institutions, their value is not negated, as will be seen in the conversation debrief below. The following findings are those that are vital to understanding the reasoning behind creating enrollment management divisions but were not seen at all three of the institutions.

Too Much Responsibility

For two of the institutions included in this study, Greene College and Magnolia University, creating a separate division for enrollment management partially happened because the administrators previously charged with enrollment responsibilities were

beginning to have too many offices and too much responsibility in their portfolio. At Greene College, the Provost's portfolio encompassed academic and student affairs along with enrollment management, meaning that somewhere around "75% to 80% of the responsibilities of the institution fell onto the provost" (Executive Director of Registration Services, Greene College). When the school was considered new and still small, this structure worked. As the number of academic programs and students continued to expand, the focus of the provost needed to shift away from enrollment management toward academic program enhancement:

> Once you grow an institution to a level that this one has grown to, you've got to stand back and say, wait a minute, this person cannot manage all of this. Even if they had limited numbers of direct reports, they're so far removed from what's going on a daily basis. And so that was part of that decision, was to truly separate those and have enrollment management report directly to the president and academic and student affairs report directly to the president. (Executive Director of Registration Services, Greene College)

Shifting organizational structure when the realization that someone has too much responsibility is an example of an institution needing to adjust in the wake of new and complex challenges. Previously, the provost at Greene College had the capacity to include the offices related to enrollment management in their portfolio, but as the work continued to expand due to an increase in student population, academic program offerings, and expectations, there was a need to restructure. For the "efficient navigation of modern complexities" (proposition 1), a separate cabinet member was needed to lead the enrollment management charge.

According to the chief enrollment officer, the shift to the current organizational structure has allowed for more focus to be placed on the physical campus space dedicated to enrollment management. The Welcome Center, the first building many prospective students see when arriving at Greene College, and the offices for the staff working in the division are far more appealing. These are important improvements as the Welcome Center is used for recruiting prospective students and families. Further, the people hired to work in enrollment management are more motivated to do their work and remain employed at Greene when the physical space they are given to work in is aesthetically pleasing and organized. However, beautiful, well-functioning spaces are not going to retain staff on their own. Therefore, the VPEM at Greene College has made it their mission to improve the life of those working in enrollment management by fighting for them to stop being overworked and to be properly compensated for their efforts.

As students are considering whether to attend college or not, they are increasingly taking building design and levels of modernization into account (Moody, 2024) Thus, institutions are expected to update buildings and renovate spaces as they have the ability to remain competitive in the marketplace (proposition 3). With colleges being heavily dependent on student tuition money, improving the spaces with which students will interact is top of mind, but moving quickly and finding the funds to do this can create challenges. Becoming, or remaining, a place where people want to work is another way institutions are trying to remain competitive. There are hundreds of industries for people to choose from and convincing them to work in-person (versus remote), oftentimes, for a less-than-ideal salary is made easier when the physical spaces is enjoyable (Donadel, 2024).

When the current President at Magnolia University arrived on campus, they brought with them a campus administrator who would fill the joint role of vice president for student affairs and enrollment management. Though this administrator previously worked in enrollment management and been a student affairs leader on other campuses, it did not take long for the two to realize that the positions needed to be split if they were to ever accomplish the goals they had for Magnolia:

> Something was being neglected either way, and I brought in a skilled student affairs leader because every bit of my research and my charge here was to transform the experience of students. And that meant too, that we had to transform the enrollment management enterprise as well. But we quickly got to, this isn't going to work (President, Magnolia University).

The person in the role responsible for both student affairs and enrollment management shared a similar sentiment with the president. Now serving as solely the vice president for student affairs, this administrator had the realization that there was too much work to be done in enrollment management and student affairs to continue serving in a dual capacity. This moment came during a conversation in which the President of Magnolia was hearing about some of the strides being made in the student recruitment process:

> He said, 'I'm not going to discourage you from having that conversation, but herein lies the problem.' And I said, 'problem, I just told you I don't have a problem.' And he said, 'chief of police calls you while you're in that meeting and says we have this X, Y, Z situation. What do you do?' He's like, 'you're the head of enrollment, but you're the head of student affairs. What do you do?' And I said, 'well, I'm going to drop everything, and I'm going to go help the chief deal with

> whether it's a parent or students or whatever.' And he said, 'exactly. And who leads the recruitment team?'

At this point, both leaders determined it was time to bring in an expert in enrollment management so that the new person in the vice president for student affairs role could focus on student programming that would positively impact the student experience and assist in the retention goals. When it was realized that the needs of prospective students and the current students at Magnolia University were pulling the one administrator apart, a new structure was needed. Every generation of students will have different needs and in order to successfully navigate modern expectations, a new formal structure is oftentimes necessary (proposition 1).

Student Experience

The separation of some of the aforementioned responsibilities at both Greene College and Magnolia University also highlighted another issue: student experience and effective processes. To positively affect the retention and graduation rates at the two institutions, administrators realized a need to improve the student experience, from both the engagement side of the equation and from an efficiency standpoint. At Magnolia University, the Vice President for Student Affairs shared this sentiment:

> I heard about what the student experience was like here, pre-COVID and what they were looking for and what they wanted. They wanted more engaging, more student activities. They wanted more frequency of activities. And so that was an area where I felt like I had a ton of experience and definitely could excel and help lead this team. And I would say we've been extremely successful. That's probably

> one of our brightest spots, is the ability to execute at a high level on student engagement, student involvement opportunities.

The undergraduate student experience was suffering, and the president became more interested in improving student life at Magnolia when "every bit of [his] research and [his] charge here was to transform the experience of students" (President, Magnolia University). Therefore, the president, the vice president for student affairs, and the newly hired chief enrollment officer were all able to begin working towards affecting "the entire lifespan" of the students by providing them with a seamless process from recruitment to graduation (Vice President for Student Affairs, Magnolia University).

The president at Magnolia firmly believed that this type of institution—a regional, public school—provides an opportunity students are seeking out and he instructed enrollment management to begin recruiting the students for which the school was designed in an effort to become "consumer focused" (President, Magnolia University). This is a unique recruitment tactic in today's market as many institutions believe they need to compete with all other institutions, not just the ones for whom they are designed (Schultz & Lucido, 2011). To compete amongst the other regional, public schools with a similar demographic, and to become consumer focused, the President at Magnolia argued the student experience needs to be sought after. The public regional institution experience is one that many students desire. In a world in which the resource (students) is becoming scarcer, leaning into the foundation of what makes Magnolia the institution it is can help them remain competitive (proposition 3). From the perspective of the new chief enrollment officer, student engagement is vital to the health of an institution as "it's

cheaper to keep them than it is to recruit new students" (chief enrollment officer, Magnolia University).

For Greene College, the push for an enrollment management division was more about improving the processes students move through to reach graduation. When the chief enrollment officer started at Greene, the admissions team was still using paper to process the application journey for students, including awarding financial aid. This paperwork inhibited the office from being able to document processes and individual student conversations, which made following procedures quite difficult. With the creation of the enrollment management unit, working groups were formed to better automate processes and create procedures that the entire division, not just certain offices, could support. The need to improve processes so students are able to more seamlessly move through their time at Greene College is directly related the idea presented in institutional theory. As more complexities are entered into organizational functioning, more formal structure will be needed to help students achieve their goal of graduating (Meyer& Rowan, 1976).

In a conversation with the executive director of registration services and the executive director of financial aid, they emphasized the importance of working together for the sake of students and providing the highest level of customer service. Without the new vice president for student affairs, these two leaders do not feel as though the focus would be so heavy on providing a good experience to students. The associate vice president for enrollment management commented, "[chief enrollment officer] has been such a terrific leader in that we all have a voice. It doesn't matter who you are, you have a voice. And one of the things we've done in the past several years is anytime something

didn't work, we all get in a room, all the players, and we come up with a process improvement." Even now, when asked, "What do you see as the goals of enrollment services right now," the chief enrollment officer said, "We have to continue to automate processes. So, we do two a month, a manual process that we're automating. So, I have a team that does that. Enrollment management tech works with the different areas. So, a lot of those are in the registrar's office now, but we need to continue to automate."

Presidential Power

As can be seen in the interview protocol (Appendix A), I asked questions regarding the internal or external pressure felt by administrators in the creation of the enrollment management divisions. Interestingly, the answers to these questions revealed little, if any, explicit pressure from external entities, such as the state system, government entities, or donors. However, at two of the three institutions, it was specifically said that the president made the ultimate decision to create strategic enrollment management offices. In order to receive more insight into why and how the final decision was made, I was told that the president would be the best person with whom to speak. In the case of the third institution, the president was behind the decision, but it was spearheaded by the provost instead.

At Magnolia University, I was given the chance to speak directly with the president. As was previously mentioned, the conversation about creating a separate enrollment management division started between with then vice president for student affairs and enrollment management and president. From the interview data collected with the chief enrollment officer, I gathered that the president had begun thinking about needing a separate cabinet position before broaching the subject with the vice president.

It was very apparent during the interviews with the vice president and the president at Magnolia that both people's opinions and expertise were taken into consideration when implementing the new organizational structure. While the president did not make the decision without having an external consultant provide data to assist in the effort, the effort was heavily backed by the president. I would argue one of the reasons the president moved immediately created an enrollment management division instead of gaining insights from a committee, the cabinet, or another group of constituents was to avoid a high level of internal analysis. It is important to note that this was not directly stated, but to move swiftly towards improving the issues identified in the external consultant's report, the president could have felt it necessary to make an executive decision.

Similarly, at Greene College, the chief enrollment officer shared the power of the president in making the decision to create a new division when they said, "There weren't any external pressures from the [state system] that was… they're not as concerned probably with structure, I think unless there's a big problem. It was basically a presidential decision." When asking the associate vice president for enrollment management and the director of admissions were asked about the decision-making process, the answer I received was very similar:

> That was definitely a senior leadership decision. And yes, I think it was the cabinet level decision. They didn't really involve [others], I was not involved in those conversations at all. I was an associate director at the time. So, I would say it was a senior leadership, definitely decision. I would say it was the president.

Like the inference made above regarding the presidential decision at Magnolia University, it is possible, though not confirmed, that the president at Greene College

recognized a need to move quickly to ensure their institution improved key student outcome metrics. Bypassing a large decision-making committee or internal analysis was likely predicted as a way to increase metrics in the effort to be seen as legitimate (proposition 2).

The team at Greene College also mentioned the importance of the strategic plan and how the president felt that the goals would not be realized without a larger focus on enrollment management. Greene's president shifted the trajectory of the bigger vision for the institution, but was even involved in improving recruitment efforts, something not all presidents are intricately involved in. The feeling from the administrators I interviewed was not one of frustration, but instead of gratitude. They were thankful to have a president fighting for their work and seeing the value in improving enrollment management at Greene College.

Conclusion

The findings of this study were robust and helped greatly in explaining the development of enrollment management divisions on three different types of campuses. After collecting and analyzing the data through semi-structured interviews with campus administrators and document analysis, multiple themes became apparent. Five of those findings, (1) the use of benchmarks and metrics to justify the development of an enrollment management division, (2) the creation of an enrollment management division to improve student outcomes, (3) data-driven decision-making in enrollment management divisions, (4) the prevalence of personnel challenges in decision making, and (5) the institutional recognition of a need to diversify target populations, were apparent at each of the three institutions. This is a finding in and of itself and will be further analyzed in

the next chapter as the three cases in this study were very different institutional types, yet many of the findings can be applied to all.

However, interviews revealed a number of additional findings that were not universal but instead confined to a subset of the institutions. These include: (1) too much responsibility placed on certain staff members, (2) a need to improve the experience and processes for students, (3) and the power of presidents in making structural decisions, were discovered. These findings had great implications at both Greene College and Magnolia University. In all, this study produced much to consider when conversations around the creation of an enrollment management division begins on other college campuses. The interview participants were unaware of the propositions defined for this study, but the responses to many of the questions were directly connected to at least one of the four propositional statements. Support provided by the propositions will be expanded upon in the final chapter, along with the interconnected nature of the justifications for creating an enrollment management division.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to provide more in-depth insight into why various institutional types are choosing to create enrollment management divisions. The work, and even the term, of enrollment management has been around since 1976 when Jack Maguire first defined the important work of enrolling, retaining, and graduating students (Maguire, 1976). Since then, higher education's understanding of enrollment management and the value of the work done by those who call themselves enrollment managers has continued to evolve. Throughout the years, many challenges, specifically around the relatively consistent increasing interest in a college degree, have created a need for higher education to adapt and change. From the inclusion of women and students of color to the creation of the GI Bill to support college attendance for veterans or the questioning of whether or not a degree is worth it, enrollment managers have faced their fair share of opportunity for creative problem solving. The strategies implemented in the wake of these challenges are just as diverse as the challenges themselves. Many institutions realized the need for more innovative marketing tools, leaned on impressive faculty in enhanced recruitment efforts, and are continuing to rely on ever-increasing scholarship and financial aid money to increase the return on investment for students.

In the last couple of decades, the need to strategically organize around the theme of enrollment management has become more necessary (Lips, 2021). As competition for students increases across higher education institutions, leaders are forced to think outside of the box to meet and even exceed enrollment goals. This competitiveness is driven in

large part by the prestige race brought on by rankings annually shared by organizations such as *US New and World Report* (Schultz & Lucido, 2011). However, colleges and universities are also dealing with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic which affected interest in higher education from students who believed higher education's response was too conservative and those who believe it was too liberal (Kamssu & Kouam, 2021). Economically, the pandemic discouraged many students from choosing to attend college because they could make immediate financial gains by going directly into the job market (Reilly, 2021). The impending enrollment cliff, predicted to take full effect by 2026, means schools are also being forced to look beyond the traditional population of high school seniors to other populations for meeting enrollment goals (Phillips & Jones, 2024).

Though the enrollment cliff has not fully hit higher education, especially not in every region of the United States, many institutions are looking to their peers for how to navigate such challenges. Looking towards others in the face of adversity is understandable and a standard practice, but it is the mimetic and coercive isomorphic pressures brought on by competition and a heightened level of pressure both internally and externally for fear of not meeting enrollment goals (Cardona Majia, et al., 2020; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; March & Olsen, 1976). The competitive nature of enrollment within higher education is only amplified by the future enrollment cliff. Every campus is dependent upon students enrolling and remaining enrolled each year. If that "resource" becomes scarcer, institutions are forced to adapt to meet the ever-changing nature of higher education (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Institutions will continue needing to fill

their incoming classes, and retain more students, but with fewer interested students, the competition is likely to increase over the next decade.

These factors, plus many others, including those that are institutional-specific, have prompted leaders at institutions of all types to combine the enrollment management work happening on campus under one umbrella. Functioning under the assumption that more formal structure will allow for the navigation of modern complexities, administrators at many institutions are choosing to combine the previously enrollment focused units (Hossler & Bontrager, 2015; Meyer & Rowan, 1976). I began this work with four propositions to explain the creation of a new enrollment management division:

> Proposition 1: *Enrollment management divisions are created out of a belief that formal structure will allow for more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities.*
>
> Proposition 2: *Enrollment management divisions are created due to isomorphic pressures originating from a desire to be seen as legitimate, and to avoid internal analysis.*
>
> Proposition 3*: Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success.*
>
> Proposition 4: *Enrollment management divisions are created to meet the performance goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding.*

These four propositions were based on theory and literature on the topic of enrollment management. The propositions were not meant to be exhaustive, as shown, and it is unlikely that all enrollment management divisions were created solely for the reasons

above. However, the four identified for this study were very obvious during the literature-gathering phase and a link was made between these propositions and the theories undergirding the study. While the propositions presented were taken into consideration during the literature review and while building the theoretical foundation for this study, there was also space for alternative and multiple reasons for the creation of an enrollment management division to be shared by the interview participants.

When combining the competitive nature of higher education, the increasingly diverse student body, the COVID-19 pandemic, the questioning of the worth of an undergraduate degree, and the impending enrollment cliff, the focus on the work of enrollment managers is ever-increasing. Therefore, the organizational structure and strategic use of enrollment management as a conceptual framework is under the heaviest scrutiny yet (Henderson, 2005; Huddleston & Rumbough, 1997). Although the word "strategic" is often a precursor when describing enrollment management work on college campuses, there are questions about whether the reasoning is always strategic (Johnson, 2016). While the "why" behind the development of an enrollment management unit is not always strategic, justification in some form does exist. According to enrollment scholars, the institutions that see success from the creation of an enrollment management division are those that keep their mission and long-term goals at the forefront (Dolence, 1993; Hossler, 1986).

For the institutions in this study, the reasons for the creation of a new enrollment-focused division were more complex and unable to fit neatly into only one of the four propositions. While the idea of a decision being made as a result of one, or even a couple, points of justification, it is a very interesting finding that the propositions were so heavily

included during the conversations at each of the three institutions. As seen in Figure 1 below, all four propositions seem supported by the decision at each of the institutions, but the weight given to the propositions definitely varied during the decision-making process at the three schools. This complex move towards an enrollment management division demonstrates that the decision was not made unilaterally or with simply one challenge in mind. Instead, through the interviews in this study, the complexity involved in the restructuring or creation of a new division focused on enrollment management was seen across each institution. Decisions in higher education cannot be made within a silo, especially in the case of enrollment management, something that affects every piece of work done on campus and the institutions in this case study serve as a great example of this. This complex, nuanced, and multi-faceted decision to move towards the enrollment management unit model is the first of several strong arguments in the culmination of this research.

Not only is there more than one means of justification for the creation of an enrollment management division, but the reasons for development are also almost exclusively interconnected. Though it would prove less complicated to be able to point to one reason for the newly developed division, it is impossible to separate the modern challenges an institution is facing, another strong indication of a need to avoid working in silos. Higher education in the United States is often accused of functioning in a very decentralized structure, without strong communication between the various efforts across campus. However, the creation of an enrollment management division is a prime example of how combining efforts across campus can serve more than one goal. From their need to appease government agencies or be seen as legitimate in the eyes of their peers, to the

incredibly competitive nature of higher education and the need to navigate personnel challenges, institutions are realizing a need for a more formal structure (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The first proposition was originally separate from the other three:

> Proposition 1: *Enrollment management divisions are created out of a belief that formal structure will allow for more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities.*

However, as a result of this study, it is argued that the move towards a more formal structure is oftentimes, though not always, due to one of the modern complexities laid out in the final three propositions:

> Proposition 2: *Enrollment management divisions are created due to isomorphic pressures originating from a desire to be seen as legitimate, and to avoid internal analysis.*
>
> Proposition 3*: Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success.*
>
> Proposition 4: *Enrollment management divisions are created to meet the performance goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding.*

The interwoven nature of the issues administrators are expected to solve means collaboration across many offices will be required, but it also complicates the story of why organizational change occurs in higher education. Bringing together the previously separate offices under one division is the solution the institutions in this study, and many others across the country, have determined to put them in the best position to compete in an ever-increasing higher education marketplace. Again, as these institutions choose to

reorganize in the same fashion, they are becoming more similar in functioning as well. Therefore, even for institutions who previously were designed to meet the needs of a certain population, as they adjust to the current higher education landscape, they lose their ability to serve specific populations, leading to the social reproduction of inequality (Chu, 2021; Tsui 2003). Since the two primary resources, students and government funding, are becomingly scarcer, administrators are being forced to adjust the way they function to fit the environmental factors so institutions can remain financially healthy (Hossler, et al., 2015; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). This dependence on very specific, finite resources, means there will always a need to be flexible and organize around the current landscape (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Furthermore, the final three propositions are often connected to each other as well. A clear example of the interconnectedness between these propositions is demonstrated through the isomorphic pressure institutions are often subject to when attempting to solve enrollment problems. As they create new academic programs, increase their academic profile, or even create new divisions, they are both attempting to be seen as legitimate in their field and compete for students against every other institution. The increase in homogenization amongst institutions is also an obvious effort to meet the performance standards set out by governing agencies. In the case of the three institutions in this study, a main objective of creating an enrollment management division was to see student outcome metrics increase. These outcome metrics are tied to public funding and a desire to the state higher education agency to be home to more nationally ranked institutions.

At the outset of this study, I made the distinct decision to choose three public institutions, in the same state higher education system, but classified differently. The hope was to see how various institution types come to such a decision as creating an enrollment management division. I found organizational, functional, and personnel differences, as expected, across the three schools, but interestingly, the reasons for the creation of a new division focused on enrollment management barely varied across the institutions. The weight that each of these propositions had in making the decision to create a new division is definitely different across the institutions, however, each of them were brought up with enough frequency for them to be considered a reason for the creation of a new division.

Within each of the three enrollment management divisions, the need to navigate modern complexities was the most prevalent of the four propositions. However, the very closely related proposition regarding needing to compete in a highly competitive market, as institutions are heavily dependent upon one specific resource, also came up prominently throughout the conversations with campus administrators (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). At both Foothills University and Magnolia University, a desire to avoid significant internal analysis led to the creation of a new division, but in all three cases, a heightened level of legitimacy was a goal in mind. A desire to be seen as more legitimate in the eyes of other institutional leaders often leads to mimicking the way peer and competitor institutions are operating, a form of isomorphism common not only in higher education, but many other businesses (Cardona Mejia, et al., 2020; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

These similarities point to the overarching challenges and desires of institutions of higher education are facing, regardless of their classification or student population. Due to the similarities, it is not surprising that the institutions in this study decided to create a new enrollment management division to solve problems and reach new goals. Thus, the fact that higher education as a whole is facing congruent issues leads to strong isomorphic pressures felt by institutions (van Vught, 1996). Isomorphic pressures lead to homogenization and less diversity in the structure of higher education can have a negative on effect on the ability for every student to have access to a degree that is made for them (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Tsui, 2003).

Considering the conversation around enrollment management often being so concentrated on admissions, I was not expecting the significant conversation around retention and graduation rates. At each of the three case institutions, the decision to create an enrollment management division was heavily focused on student outcome data, in comparison to the interview data collected regarding first-time enrollment. This idea was unexpected because of the prevalence of research and discussion in the current higher education landscape around the need to increase the number of students applying and choosing to enroll in college (Perna, 2006). There is considerable data in the field to show the difference in cost of yielding, or enrolling students for the first time, as opposed to retaining currently enrolled students. Retaining students who are already enrolled at an institution is far more affordable than the cost associated with recruiting a student for the first time (2022 Cost of Recruiting an Undergraduate Student Report). If the creation of an enrollment management division leads to a greater focus on improving retention and

graduation rates, it will most likely have a positive effect on the institutional budget, while also improving the student outcome data.

Student outcome metrics and benchmark data overwhelmingly dominated a majority of the interviews with institutional administrators. Primarily focused on retention and graduation rates, the interview participants at all three institutions discussed the need for enrollment management divisions to be prepared to share outcome data for a variety of stakeholders, including executive leadership and the governing boards. While it is relatively common for enrollment offices to house massive amounts of benchmark data, the expectation that these newly developed units also be responsible for an improvement in these outcome measurements was mentioned far more frequently than expected. The idea of state higher education systems expecting a consistent improvement in benchmark data is a clear example of the principal-agent theory in which the principal, the state system, expects the agent, the institution to execute the objective increase (Lane & Kavisto, 2008).

Though many administrators talked about enrollment management as the responsibility of every faculty and staff member on campus, it was clearly stated enrollment management administrators are the people held accountable for the increase in student outcome metrics. This is apparent in the way Magnolia University created a student success office within the division of enrollment management. It is also obvious in the frustration shared by the chief enrollment officer shared around the lack of control their office has over marketing efforts. Even though enrollment management is charged with ensuring enrollment is stable, the division does not house their marketing unit, a challenge when trying to control the message students are seeing. Finally, the enrollment

management unit at Foothills University uniquely houses its student career development center. A decision that is demonstrative of the importance of outcomes on the success of an institution.

Implications

This study was conducted in hopes that institutions considering the creation of an enrollment management division would find the qualitative data collected to be useful when making decisions regarding their own institutional structure. Combined with the literature reviewed for this dissertation and the literature available from other enrollment management scholars, data may serve as support for an argument to move toward an enrollment management unit. With that said, leadership at every institution is not considering the creation of an enrollment management office on their campus. Thus, this research could also undergird an argument for not believing an enrollment management unit would solve the issues facing an institution.

As the work of enrollment management is increasingly in the spotlight on college campuses, the trend of creating divisions that encompass each of the offices dedicated to enrollment management work is becoming more popular. The accepted assumption is that the decision to place enrollment management work under one umbrella is strategic and aligns with an institutional goal of student success. As a result of this research, this assumption was supported in multiple ways. In all three cases, the decision to create a new division was based partially by a desire to see the data surrounding student outcomes, such as retention and graduation rates, increase. However, the desire to an increase in data was not solely based on improving the student experience, as there was

also a hope that it would assist in higher education rankings and legitimacy. This is not necessarily to say the reason for creating an enrollment management division was not strategic at the case institutions. The hope for higher rankings and a greater sense of legitimacy are real ways to become, or stay, relevant in an incredibly competitive marketplace.

On the surface, this research is meant to support conversations around the possible move towards an enrollment management division, but the findings within this study have implications that go far beyond the decision to create a new division. For enrollment managers, the idea that a new enrollment management division often leads to them being accountable for improving student outcome metrics was very apparent in these findings. Simply the creation of a new division does not inherently mean these benchmarks will increase, but the offices within the enrollment management unit will likely be expected to take responsibility for seeing this happen. Even without control over every aspect of the student lifecycle, enrollment management divisions, when created on college campuses, will be held accountable for an increase in student outcome metrics. This is a clear example of the impetus being placed on the work of enrollment management, and how in the wake of various challenges, institutional leadership is looking to enrollment experts to solve many problems.

A strong conclusion drawn from this work is the focus institutions are putting on retaining and graduating students. For institutions facing other challenges, not necessarily struggling with recruiting students to enroll, an enrollment management division may not seem like an obvious solution. As a result of this research, administrators who might be navigating challenges related to declining retention rates or disappointing graduation

rates could still benefit from conversing about the possibility of an enrollment management unit. The conclusion of this study demonstrates the way an organizational structure more focused on enrollment management places retention and graduation rates in the center of the work being done on campus. Therefore, a valuable implication here for campus leadership would be to consider a shift in organizational structure when a variety of issues are happening, not just when a recruitment challenge occurs.

Arguably the most concerning implication of the findings from my research is the possibility of the reproduction of social inequality. As has been mentioned previously, the administrators in this study believe that improving their student outcome metrics will provide relevancy and legitimacy, sought by every institution across the country. The campus leadership wants to have impressive data points to share, which can sometimes lead to a reproduction of inequality when leaders care more about attracting students with a high academic profile than giving access to students who might not have ever gone to college. Mimetic isomorphic pressure increases the homogenization of higher education when institutions choose to mimic the decisions made by those who have found a high level of relevancy or legitimacy. What this means is that enrollment managers will focus on improving their inputs, i.e. the students they are admitting, to ensure the retention and graduation rates see improvements. This is why institutions are focused on expanding their student population and ensuring their academic profile continues to increase. Yet to a great extent this runs the risk of neglecting the student populations these institutions were meant to serve in the first place. The ripple effects of this are numerous. By focusing on a specific high-achieving population, institutions are keeping those who

don't have the dominant social, economic, and academic capital from being considered for accessing the long-term benefits of a college degree all in the name of legitimacy.

Although this study did not incorporate social reproduction theory or frame the study using this particular lens, after gathering the data and analyzing the justifications for creating enrollment management divisions, I found this to be a significant concern as enrollment management divisions were created. Since institutions are reliant upon the same scarce resource, they are likely to adhere to similar enrollment practices (Powell & Rey, 2015; van Vught, 1996). When institutions begin to struggle meeting their enrollment goals, thus putting their resource supply at risk, they often look to emulate the work being done by schools who are considered "the best" by various college ranking systems (Chu, 2021). Highly ranked institutions turn into household names, providing them with more applicants than they have room for, allowing them to tout low acceptance rates and top caliber academic profiles (Byrd, 2017). These schools end up providing education only to those students who have the dominant cultural, social, and economic capital to be academically prepared enough to receive admittance. Therefore, when lower ranked institutions imitate the work being done by "elite" universities, inequality begins to permeate all higher education. As the mission of institutions who once attempted to meet the needs of a diverse population shifts to meet the expectations of public funding and rankings systems, students who were underprivileged in high school remain at a disadvantage as they enter college, reproducing inequality for another generation (Tsui, 2003).

Future Research

The research presented in this study was meant to be introductory as the phenomenon of creating enrollment management divisions is relatively new. As such, there is a need for further studies to determine the justification for changing the organizational structure to focus more heavily on enrollment management work. Institutions of all types, sizes, and classifications across the country are creating these units and due to the scope of this study, the research was limited to only three classifications of public institutions, all located within the same state higher education system. This decision was made due to my close proximity and understanding of both unique private, liberal arts institutions and the landscape within which they are existing. However, this determination does not mean further research around the development of enrollment management divisions on private, liberal arts campuses is not needed, as looking into the specific institution type will likely provide necessary insights.

Choosing three schools within the same state system provided the opportunity to analyze the role governing boards play in the decision-making process. Research on institutions in different governing systems, or those with a differently organized state higher education system would expand the body of literature on the topic of enrollment management division creation. Additionally, studying why enrollment management divisions might be created on flagship campuses, or more prestigious schools would add greatly to the literature. These institutions are seemingly the most fiscally healthy due to either their prominence in the public higher education system or their name recognition and prestige, but enrollment management units are being created on these campuses, nonetheless.

The focus of this study was on the justifications behind creating enrollment management divisions, but it was out of the scope to study the actual process of creating an office. A study on the internal and external processes which took place would offer other schools considering the same shift more of a roadmap. Beyond the need to study the actual path to creating the division, further studies should delve into the consequences of such a decision. In various interviews included in this research, the aftermath of the decision was alluded to, but in a very surface level way. I started the conversation around how the decision to create enrollment management divisions with the justifications shared in this study could lead to the reproduction of inequality. It would be extremely useful for institutions who are considering the creation of an enrollment management division to better understand the outcomes of these new units, and how they are contributing to the possible exclusion of certain populations from higher education. There are likely to be both positive and negative effects from such a decision, so giving future administrations the ability to make estimated predictions on the outcome would be helpful.

Conclusion

The goal of this research was to provider greater insight into the phenomenon of developing enrollment management offices in higher education. Over the last decade, enrollment management divisions at various institution types have become part of the organizational structure. While there are many assumptions which could be made for this trend, I was interested in learning more about the justifications and decision-making processes. These assumptions, backed by a detailed literature review, an understanding of

the current enrollment landscape in higher education, and a rich theoretical framework, became four propositions:

> Proposition 1: *Enrollment management divisions are created out of a belief that formal structure will allow for more control and efficient navigation of modern complexities.*
>
> Proposition 2: *Enrollment management divisions are created due to isomorphic pressures originating from a desire to be seen as legitimate, and to avoid internal analysis.*
>
> Proposition 3*: Enrollment management divisions are created in response to a competitive marketplace and a dependence upon environmental factors for success.*
>
> Proposition 4: *Enrollment management divisions are created to meet the performance goals set by governing agencies and tied to public funding.*

These four propositions lead to the creation of an interview protocol with semi-structured questions, leaving space for ideas outside of the propositions to make themselves known. By choosing three different institution types in the same state higher education system, I removed the variables of both private versus public institutions and the difference a governing board can make in institutional decision-making.

Early insight into the organizational structure of each of the institutions came from websites, blogs, and organizational charts available online. A majority of the data gathering in this study took place during semi-structured interviews with at least three administrators at each of the three case institutions. These interviews, with the exception of three, were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for cross-case findings. When this

analysis process was complete, more than five cross-case findings were made very apparent. For each of three institutions, retention and graduation rates were heavily considered the impetus for creating a new enrollment management division, and the newly formed unit is now held responsible for an improvement in these benchmark data points. An institutional desire to expand the student population beyond a local region or typical student population also rang true for all three institutions who believed an enrollment management division would help to create a more stable recruitment pipeline. Interestingly, personnel matters on each of the campuses also contributed to the decision to create a new division, demonstrating that the choice to restructure is not always strategically connected to enrollment or student success.

Unsurprisingly, each institution also had its own unique set of justifications for creating a new division. Connected to personnel issues, a couple of the institutions cited an issue of there being too much responsibility on a specific administrator as being a contributing factor in the decision-making process. As the conversation around pressure, whether internal or external, was discussed, many of the interview participants shared the power their president had in the decision to create an enrollment management division. While the presidents themselves, or the administrators speaking on their behalf, did not seem to make the final decision in a silo or without evidentiary support, some version of 'it was a presidential decision' was shared at two of the institutions. Though each of the schools did mention, and obviously have a focus on, student success and their experience, it was not widely considered a justification at all three of the case institutions. One institution did bring up the value in splitting the work done by enrollment management

and student affairs in creating a better student experience, leading to an increase in student outcome measures.

As a result of this study, it is my hope that administrators facing a similar decision will glean valuable insights into the early parts of the process. One of, if not the largest, findings from this work is the prominence of conversations regarding retention and graduation rates in comparison to those related to recruiting new students. It is imperative that campus leaders realize the value of creating an enrollment management division even if they are not yet facing extreme recruitment challenges. Enrollment managers should be prepared to take on the responsibility of improving student outcome data after the creation of their new division, just as each of the newly created units in this study were held accountable for these goals. A fascinating finding within this work is the similarities between the three, very different, institutions.

The research provided here only scratches the surface for what should be available for institutions considering a new enrollment management division. The scope of this study was narrowed to the reasonings and justification measures for creating the offices. In future research, an examination of public institutions across different higher education governing boards could assist leaders in understanding the role such a governmental body may play in the decision to create a new unit. Studying private institutions, not chosen due to my familiarity with such schools, would make the research more generalizable and applicable to another large group of institutions in the United States. Once the decision-making process has been sufficiently studied, the consequences, both positive and negative, of creating such an office should be examined. Some of the outcomes were alluded to throughout the interviews in this study, but an

expansion of the aftermath would provide great insight into what administrators should expect.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol:

Important information:
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Before we begin, please remember that you may choose not to participate at any time or refrain from responding to any of the questions I ask today. You are also welcome to contact me following the interview with any questions or concerns. My contact information is provided in both the email to schedule this interview and will be provided in a follow-up email. The interview will last no longer than 90 minutes and I'd like to record for transcription purposes. Are you comfortable with that?

Description of the research:
The goal of the research is purely explanatory in nature. I would like to learn more about why institutions are creating divisions or offices of enrollment management. Through the research I've previously conducted for my literature review, along with a strong theoretical framework and my experience in enrollment management, I've come up with propositions for why enrollment management divisions might be created. In completing this research, I hope to gain a better understanding of the why behind the creation without making any judgement calls on the data collected.

Introduction

1. Can you tell me a bit about your position? (probing: What does your job entail? What offices are part of your portfolio? Who do you report to?)

Foundational:

1. When was the office established?
2. Can you tell me about how the enrollment function was organized prior to the creation of an enrollment management office?
    a. Which offices were originally under the enrollment management office umbrella when it was first created?
    b. Are there new offices (or fewer offices) now part of the enrollment management office?
3. Can you talk about the initial conversations surrounding the planning of an enrollment management office? (probing: Who was involved? What were those conversations like?)
4. Were there any enrollment challenges facing your institution when the decision to create an enrollment management office was made? (probing: Were there internal or external pressures at play?)

5. How would you describe the organizational structure of the enrollment management office?
6. What is the enrollment management office responsible for on campus? (aims and goals?)
    a. Who holds the office accountable?

Strategy:

1. What do you see as the primary reason/s for creating an enrollment management office here at X? (probing: What prompted the creation of the office?)
2. What, if any, evaluative measures were taken prior to creating the office of enrollment management?
    a. Was the decision to create an enrollment management office driven by data? (probing: Other information?)
3. What factors were considered when thinking about how best to organize the office? (Probing: Were other institutions that had already done this examined or considered?)
    a. How was the decision made regarding which offices would fall under an enrollment management office?
7. What was the creation of an enrollment management office meant to solve when it was first created?
    a. Have these goals changed over time?
8. What do you see as the future goals for the enrollment management office?

Closing

9. Is there anything else you would like to say more about? Is there anything we didn't talk about that you would like to discuss regarding the office?