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INTRODUCTION

When the board of Sweet Briar College announced in March 2015 that the college would shut down that semester, many in higher education were stunned. How could a college with money in the bank and a well known name suddenly fall apart?

Some of the answers may have been unique to Sweet Briar's mission, location and history. But the key issues were ultimately those shared by every private college: Will enough students enroll? Will students and families be able to afford to pay tuition and other costs? Are the longterm enrollment and financial trends favorable?

The articles in this compilation illustrate how many colleges are trying – not always with success – to navigate these waters. Strategies involve both admissions and financial aid in ways that make these inseparable. There are no magic bullets, but many institutions report progress.

Inside Higher Ed will continue to cover these issues, and welcomes your ideas for future articles, and your reactions to these pieces.

--The Editors

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NEWS

A selection of articles from *Inside Higher Ed*

WHO'S NEXT? WHO ISN'T?

BY RY RIVARD

Some fear Sweet Briar's decision to close will prompt other small private colleges to do the same, leading a number of presidents to outline how their colleges are not like Sweet Briar.

Sweet Briar College's sudden 2015 decision to close may cause other struggling private colleges to do the same by creating a new paradigm for when a college should call it quits.

That's the fear of Richard Ekman, the head of the Council of Independent Colleges, which represents many small private colleges across the country. He worries Sweet Briar's decision will influence other trustees.

"My hope is that it will not," Ekman said. "My hope is that trustees at most colleges will look at the possibility of trying other things. There are plenty of examples of colleges that have tried things and

it's worked for them."

Sweet Briar, a well-known 700-student women's college in rural Virginia, announced it will close after the spring 2015 semester. The decision is designed to prevent a death spiral that some struggling colleges have fallen into, stranding students and waylaying faculty.

Sweet Briar's closure raises twin questions for the leaders of struggling private colleges: Should a college with some resources -- like Sweet Briar and its \$85 million endowment -- fight to the bitter end? Or should some of the colleges exit gracefully before they are forced to close their doors

by creditors and red ink-stained balance sheets?

Ekman cautioned colleges against using short-term results -- lower enrollment, for instance -- to decide they cannot last. "I don't think the trends are destiny," he said. "I think it's too easy to extrapolate from the trend of a few years to say this is the way it'll always be."

He said challenged colleges are trying new programs -- some of these programs, he said, may not be so good, but there are a lot of options.

There does not yet seem to be a solid metric to tell college leaders -- not to mention the public,



including the college's students -- when a college should call it quits. Colleges that talk openly of closing could turn away students, destabilizing the very revenue source they would need to stay open. This may be why some college presidents facing uphill battles remain publicly optimistic. But because the conversations about the future are so often done in secret, a final decision can end up being a shock.

The U.S. Department of Education does actually have a metric designed to predict when a college might be in trouble. Yet the system failed to detect Sweet Briar's troubles -- not the first time the department's financial responsibility score has not seemed to jibe with reality.

The department had no outstanding issues, findings or concerns regarding Sweet Briar's most recent audited financial

statements, according to a department official who requested customary anonymity.

Small-college presidents across the country now seem to be facing existential questions caused by Sweet Briar's end. They tend to be drawing attention to the ways that they are not like Sweet Briar and saying they have no intention to close.

The president of Hollins University, another women's college in Virginia, tried to make the point this week that her college is "very different" from Sweet Briar -- that the closing of one college does not require the closing of others. Hollins, which has about 580 undergraduates, also launched an effort to enroll Sweet Briar's students.

Lynn Pasquerella, the president of Mount Holyoke College, e-mailed her campus this week with a statement and a fact sheet

comparing Mount Holyoke to Sweet Briar. Her point, she said, was that the two women's colleges are "quite different." Indeed, Mount Holyoke has about three times as many students, is more selective, does better in rankings, enrolls students with better academic credentials and has a \$714 million endowment.

But the point may just as well be that she even had to make that point.

"The fact that the number of women's colleges has declined nationally is undeniable, and we must always be aware of such trends and our own status," Pasquerella wrote.

By no means are such statements coming just from women's colleges.

Steven Bahls, the president of Augustana College in Illinois, sent his Board of Trustees a note comparing and contrasting their college with Sweet Briar: Augustana has a larger endowment, is not rural and admits both men and women, among other things. He said the e-mail was in response to questions from trustees.

Bahls said he did not want to second-guess Sweet Briar, but he would not want to preemptively call it a day and close Augustana until every resource was exhausted.

"I don't think it's irresponsible to say, 'We're going to spend the last dollar before we close,'" he said.

Even though Sweet Briar had

an \$85 million endowment, Bahls and others have noted that much of the money was restricted, meaning it could not be spent on general operating costs. Sweet Briar expected to run about a \$2 million deficit this year, it told its credit rating agency, Standard and Poor's.

The president of Northland College, in Wisconsin, riffed on Sweet Briar's president, who lamented in an interview that

Sweet Briar was "30 minutes from a Starbucks."

Well, said Northland President Michael A. Miller, Northland is 90 minutes from a Starbucks. Instead, there are a half dozen other coffee shops and restaurants in Ashland, the 8,000-person town Northland occupies near Lake Superior.

"We can no longer sit idly, waiting for students to arrive," Miller said in a letter sent to *Inside Higher Ed*. He said the college has to try new

things, like an evolving curriculum and efforts to diversify its sources of money.

"I can't lie," he said of his 550-student college. "I'd rather have 800 students -- the number we had in the heyday of the 1990s -- but we're not there yet, and may never be. In the last five years, we've worked to evolve our curriculum, take inventory of our natural assets, build our pillars of strength and stay relevant." •

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/03/06/will-sweet-briars-closure-prompt-college-leaders-rethink-their-fight-stay-open>

MIDDLEBURY TO ABANDON INFLATION PEG

BY RY RIVARD

College received attention and praise for trying to limit tuition increases. Now, the college says the system will no longer work.

Middlebury College is ready to abandon its attention-grabbing effort to hold down prices.

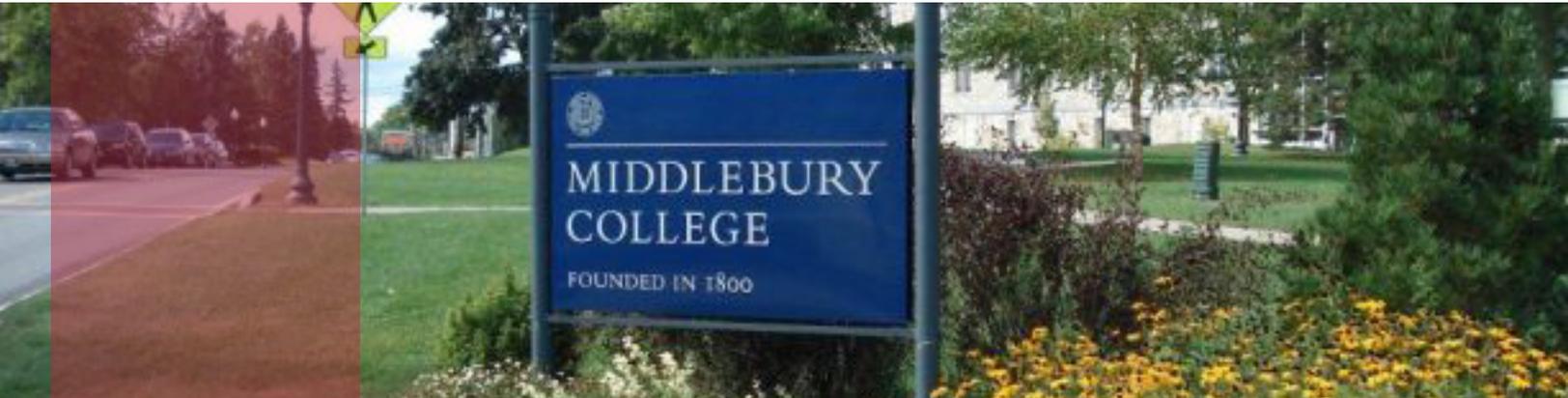
In 2010, the Vermont liberal arts college announced it would not raise its sticker price more than one percentage point above the rate of inflation. In 2014, the college

began to back away from the plan. Now it seems likely to abandon it altogether.

In a February 2015 interview with the student newspaper, President Ronald D. Liebowitz, who was there when the arrangement was announced in 2010 and plans

to step down this year, said the college simply had to move away from its plan.

The private college's policy attracted considerable praise. It was designed to acknowledge that even the wealthiest families would question the price of a liberal arts



degree at a certain point.

A college spokesman said Middlebury remains committed to meeting the financial needs of students who are admitted but suggested the college's expenses were rising faster than the basket of consumer goods that dictate the Consumer Price Index, the measure of inflation also known as CPI that Middlebury used as a peg for its "CPI+1" strategy.

"In a low-inflationary environment such as the one we are in, the CPI+1 model, which has served us well for 5 years, will not cover the increase in our costs," Middlebury spokesman Bill Burger said in an e-mail.

When Middlebury announced the CPI+1 strategy, the college had among the highest sticker prices of its peers, according to its own data. In 2015, it has among the lowest. Amherst College and Hamilton College, for instance, charge more than Middlebury in 2015.

At Middlebury, the sticker price is dancing just beneath \$60,000 -- tuition, room and board, and

student fees are currently \$59,160. Hamilton is \$59,970 and Amherst is over \$62,000.

But Middlebury said the plan worked while it lasted. Now, the college just cannot keep restricting its revenue in the same way.

"Consumer prices last year increased by the second lowest percentage in 60 years," Burger said. "Our financial aid spending is increasing at a much faster rate than that."

According to the college, about half its students get some kind of scholarship aid. For the current freshman class, the average grant is \$41,046, according to its Web site -- or about 69 percent of the sticker price.

Most private colleges operate with such a model, known as the "high-tuition, high-discount" model: they charge a lot of money and then cut prices -- although at places with large endowments, they actually have plenty of money to cover the discount.

The reason that many private colleges without Middlebury's

endowment or academic reputation embrace this high tuition model is that psychologically, it appears that people like feeling as if they are getting a good deal -- they equate high prices with a quality product and feel enticed by the sale prices they are given via scholarships.

In 2014, the college began to back away from CPI+1. The college's Board of Trustees increased the sticker price for students by 1.44 percent above the rate of inflation -- which means students are paying about \$250 more in 2014-15 than they would have if Middlebury had kept the cap in place.

A college spokesman at the time blamed rising room and board costs, such as that of providing vegan and gluten-free dining options.

But the shift away from the CPI+1 plan last year was partially obscured by the language the college used to describe the year's prices. Observers called the college's strategy misleading and unfortunate.

Other Pricing Experiments

Middlebury is not the only prestigious liberal arts college to back away from an innovative attempt to cut prices. Two years after the University of the South -- also known as Sewanee -- announced a dramatic 10 percent price cut, charges there are back up to nearly what they had been -- although less than what they would have been had the university not made the 10 percent cut.

So, Middlebury's move raises further questions about a number of marketing strategies colleges use based on their prices or perceived prices.

A move away from a plan billed as holding down costs could hurt a college's credibility, said Jason Simon, a vice president and partner at SimpsonScarborough, a Virginia-based firm that advises colleges on strategy and marketing.

"Now, to move from that within, essentially, a short period of time, brings to question what's the ultimate goal if we're launching new goals and new initiatives that we retreat from when finances change, which they are apt to do," he said.

Other colleges and universities have undertaken a variety of plans to try to assuage families' concerns about college spending. Some strategies involve slashing sticker

prices; others involve making clear that low-income families will be given generous scholarships. And others -- like Middlebury -- have attempted to guarantee some stability in the price. Simon said despite these efforts, families remain worried about college prices.

"I think the reality is that with the overall sentiment around cost, even predictability in pricing is not stemming that overall perception," he said.

It is not yet clear what price Middlebury will charge for 2015-16. In the 18 years before it announced the CPI+1 plan, Middlebury's price rose an average of 2.36 percentage points above inflation per year. •

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/02/16/middlebury-set-abandon-plan-tied-tuition-inflation-keep-down-prices>

PREDICTING WHERE STUDENTS GO

BY RY RIVARD

Colleges use data to predict who they should target as they hunt for students.

INDIANAPOLIS — A trio of senior college enrollment officials gave a peek into how they decide which students to recruit. The process now involves number-crunching students' demographic and economic information — not just sending chipper ambassadors

to every nearby high school, mailing glossy books to students' homes and relying on gut instincts. The discussion, during a session at the annual meeting of the National Association for College Admission Counseling, in September 2014, was one of many

to take place here about how to hunt for students. The search for students involves a web of data points, formulas and consulting firms that perhaps few parents and students are aware of.

Don Munce, the president of the National Research Center for



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PRIVATE COLLEGE ENROLLMENTS: NEEDS, NUMBERS, SOLUTIONS

College and University Admissions, or NRCCUA, offers a modeling service meant to predict which high school students are most likely to enroll at a particular institution. The center sells data on students to college admissions officials.

Munce moderated the panel of three college admissions officials who use his predictive modeling service. One of the college officials joked he bought so many student names from NRCCUA that he probably paid for Munce's yacht.

Munce advocates a "smart approach" — which is the brand name of the modeling service he sells — that would help colleges target the students most likely to enroll.

Are officials targeting students likeliest to attend their college, "or are you throwing a lot of activity out there at students who don't enroll or may never enroll?" Munce asked.

NRCCUA, the College Board and ACT all gather data on students. The three services sell millions of student names for about 37 cents apiece to colleges and consulting firms hired by the colleges. They also all sell colleges predictive modeling services based on the data they collect — things like family income, GPA and zip codes. NRCCUA gathers data on students through surveys they are asked to take in high school and has about 300 data points it can use.

There's a funnel for prospective

students that admissions officials — and chief financial officers and presidents — pay a lot of attention to. It starts with a general population of students. Then there are inquiries, which means the students who ask a college for information. Then there are those that really apply, those that are actually admitted and those that finally attend.

The funnel can be huge at the top. High Point University, a private college in North Carolina, gets inquiries from 70,000 students. This fall, 1,370 freshmen enrolled, said Andrew Bills, High Point's vice president for enrollment.

High Point has grown rapidly. In 2005, its freshmen class was just 412.

Bills said the university decides what prospective students to focus on using modeling.

About 90 percent of the students

who enrolled at High Point came from the 40 percent of students a model scored above a .66 on its scale going to 1. The factors include geography, academic interest, whether students would prefer a private college and family income. So, for the university, it makes sense to focus its recruitment effort on those students, rather than students with a lower score.

"We were wasting our time messing with a lot of those inquiries," Bills said.

Stephen Lee, the executive director of admissions and recruitment at West Virginia University, uses modeling to help sort through the pool of out-of-state students and find out which out-of-state students recruiters should spend time communicating with.

"We wouldn't be able to do that if our mission was, 'Get to every high school,' " Lee said. He showed a



High Point University

chart that had some Pennsylvania students — a key feeder state for West Virginia. And that showed how many prospective students went to each high school and of those students how many had a predictive modeling score that showed they were likely to attend.

James Steen, the vice president for enrollment management at Houston Baptist University, uses modeling to target students but also to figure out what traditional recruitment methods work or not.

Houston Baptist used to send out about 12,000 viewbooks — those glossy guides aimed at prospective students that cost a lot to make and mail. One year, Steen decided

to not send viewbooks to 2,000 of the students his model predicted were most likely to attend.

He found would-be students in the group that didn't get the viewbook actually were more likely to attend than those that got one.

"So guess what? We didn't do a viewbook last year and we lived to tell about it — our enrollment was still up this year," Steen said.

The ability to slice and dice prospective students has helped some colleges diversify their class and target students who might not think about going to their college or even college at all, but also raises the specter that some colleges with worrisome bottom lines will only go

after certain kinds of students — like wealthy students who can pay their way without scholarships — at the expense of others. Traditional recruiting already targets wealthier families in some cases. For instance, the *Los Angeles Times* found that college recruiters gave low-income high schools fewer visits than affluent high schools.

Advisers to the College Board -- which has data on seven million students it sells to about 1,100 institutions each year -- met last summer and talked about doing more to police how colleges can use the board's student data, but a committee decided not to change its policies.

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/09/19/colleges-now-often-rely-data-rather-gut-hunt-students>

TOO MUCH DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

BY RY RIVARD

Some high school counselors fear a tactic used by college admissions officers to find students who most want to enroll is getting out of control.

INDIANAPOLIS — Some high school counselors are worried about another college

admissions hurdle students have to clear: repeatedly showing interest in certain colleges, even

though they have already applied.

During the annual meeting of the National Association for

College Admission Counseling in September 2014, admissions officials from several colleges laid out how they used students' "demonstrated interest" to make admissions decisions. The concept of demonstrated interest isn't new — and colleges have long been wary of applicants who might not be serious — but its role has grown in a significant way.

Students may demonstrate extra interest by applying early, communicating with recruiters or visiting campus, among other things. Colleges that use demonstrated interest to make admissions decisions say it helps them decide where to focus recruitment efforts and signals to them who really wants to come.

A few high school counselors strongly questioned the emphasis on demonstrated interest, suggesting that its use blurs the lines between education and business, and that it may be a needless ego trip by college admissions offices. If a student has already applied to the college, isn't that demonstrating interest enough?

Demonstrated interest seems to be about "how loved you guys feel," Noel Blyler, associate director of college counseling at Charles Wright Academy, in Washington State, said to a panel that included officials from three colleges that use demonstrated interest to make decisions.

"We're all going to get good at teaching our kids to jump through hoops for the sake of jumping through hoops," Blyler said. He said he felt "despair" over what the panelists had said because demonstrated interest sounded like a "game of gotcha."

He received applause for his remarks, which he made from the audience during the question-and-answer portion of the panel.

At times, it was unclear which attempts to demonstrate interest might help students, and which might hurt them.

"I think we've all seen, the line between being famous and being notorious is somewhat thin when it comes to demonstrated interest," said one member of the panel, Owen Wolf, associate director of admission at Pitzer College in California.

Wolf said he didn't want hear from students "a ton" because if they run out of meaningful things to say he is less likely to pay attention to their emails. If they send a letter, it ought to be a page or less, because the admissions staff members want to be able to project it onto a screen to look at it. And they can only read so much.

"We don't have a lot of time to be parsing through pages and pages," Wolf said.

He also said that students should steer clear of being too enthusiastic.

"Don't get all King Lear and say,

'Oh, I love you more than any college in the world,' " Wolf said — presumably referring to the hyperbolic but inconstant affection of two of Lear's daughters, Goneril and Regan, in Shakespeare's play.

Jon Reider, director of college counseling at San Francisco University High School, said in an interview after the panel that he'd had a curious thing happen several years ago to a student of his. The student, who was Hispanic and a first-generation college student, applied to 13 colleges, including Pitzer.

The student got into 12 of the 13 — including Harvard University and Yale University — but was waitlisted at Pitzer. Reider suspected Pitzer knew the student had applied to other colleges and didn't admit him out of a suspicion that she would enroll elsewhere. The student would have, Reider said, but he said that's not really a reason to deny someone admission.

Reider said students applying to a college that uses demonstrated interest may not be able to visit a campus — which can be too expensive for some families — or they might miss a visit to their high school by an admissions official because they are studying for a test. Both things could later count against a student at a college that uses demonstrated interest.

Often times, sheer numbers make clear how colleges want students to demonstrate interest.



High Point University

Jeff Schiffman, associate director of admissions at Tulane University in New Orleans, pushed back against the idea that demonstrated interest is asking too much of students.

“I’m not asking students to jump through hoops, I’m asking students if they are very interested in the school, to write an essay about that,” he said.

Tulane is keen on demonstrated interest. Schiffman, who writes a blog about admissions, said 70 percent of Tulane’s freshmen applied early as part of the single-choice, early-action application that Tulane encourages.

Students who apply this way are asked not to apply early to any other private college. That is

one surefire way to demonstrate interest.

Reider called Tulane’s process “breathtaking,” and an example of the way demonstrated interest has “dissolved” the line between education and business.

“The early bird gets the worm,” Reider, a former admissions official at Stanford University, said in an interview after the session. He also stood up during the panel, which he was not on and which did not feature any officials from colleges that do not use demonstrated interest, to question demonstrated interest policies.

“He says, ‘We’re not going to make kids jump through hoops’ — no, he’s not, but I will,” Reider said.

If that’s what students have to do

to go where they want, he’ll help them do it. “But,” he said, “it’s not genuine. We’re teaching the kids to turn themselves into a product.”

Schiffman said some things a student does besides applying early make clear they really want to attend Tulane — thank-you notes and telephone calls count. And if two students have nearly identical applications, but one has filled out an optional statement on their application, Schiffman said he will admit the student who has filled out the optional statement.

“I think you should all know that the word ‘optional’ should be stricken from the record, because rarely is it optional,” he said.

Carey Thompson, vice president for enrollment and communication

at Rhodes College, in Tennessee, said demonstrated interest helps the college sort through who is really interested in coming to Rhodes and who simply applied. “Our goal is to reduce the noise in the system,” he said. “We can go through our admit pool and identify consistently 400 students we don’t believe are interested in Rhodes College.”

To those students — who are qualified but have not shown interest beyond applying —

Rhodes sends a letter saying, in effect, that it doesn’t believe they really want to come.

If they do in fact want to attend the private liberal arts college, they should do a Skype interview or visit the campus and they will be admitted on the spot.

In 2013, 17 of those 400 or so students followed up on the letter — about 4 percent.

The practice cuts the college’s acceptance rate — because Rhodes isn’t admitting the other

roughly 380 students — something that could help it appear more selective.

“Does it cut our acceptance rate? Yeah,” Thompson said. “Is that why we do it? No.”

Susan McCarter, director of college guidance at Girls Preparatory School in Tennessee, praised Rhodes and other colleges that at least make clear they use demonstrated interest as a factor.

“Not everyone is as upfront about it,” she said. •

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/09/22/students-are-asked-demonstrate-more-interest-colleges-just-applying>

ADMISSIONS PSYCHOLOGY

BY SCOTT JASCHIK

Rose-Hulman plans to ask applicants a set of questions designed to determine if they think they can control their fates. Test of system has found correlation with students' grades and retention rates.

Some people have a knack for writing, while others will never write well no matter how hard they try.

That is an example of a question that will be part of a battery that Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology plans to start asking undergraduate applicants to determine if they think they can control their destinies. Students

who answer in ways that suggest that they are confident they can control their fates -- or who have a “locus of control” to use the psychological term -- will get an edge in admissions decisions. And the system could start as early as next year.

Rose-Hulman has been administering its test to freshmen for several years now, and then

tracked grades and retention rates, and there is a clear correlation between higher locus of control attitudes and successful academic performance, said Jim Goecker, vice president for enrollment management and strategic communications.

In an interview, Goecker said that over his 28 years in admissions work, he has been left wondering



increasingly about the value of traditional criteria. “The longer you are in it, the more it’s clear that the measures we use are just not adequate.” Essays, which he noted have been seen as a way to get to an applicant’s personality, are frequently the result of coaching, and evaluating them can be “subjective.” What Rose-Hulman is trying to do, he said, is to get “to the essence of success.”

Goecker said that he started to study the literature on locus of control (the idea has been around for decades, with different tests designed to measure the quality). Rose-Hulman also experimented with various measures of applicants’ curiosity, but to date has not found correlations with subsequent academic performance for that index. As a result, the institute is planning to go ahead only with the locus of control test.

He stressed that he didn’t think it would have a huge impact on all

applicants, and that grades and scores on the ACT or SAT would continue to be used. But he said that the research tracking freshmen indicates that some with high locus of control scores, but slightly lower grades or test scores are in fact doing better academically than other measures would predict. So there will be applicants who might get in, or get a close look, as a result of the test.

The battery of about 30 questions (either yes/no questions or with answers on a five-point scale) will simply be added to the Rose-Hulman application.

We’ve all heard some students say, “It’s the professor’s fault I’m not learning,” while others may say “I’ve got to put in more effort,” Goecker said. This approach is an effort to identify more of the applicants in the latter camp.

Asked if applicants might answer the questions the way they perceive makes them look better,

Goecker said there is a worry about applicants “gaming the system,” but he noted that much of college admissions has the same issue.

Further, he noted that the questions are a mix, with some being in “a gray area” where it may not be immediately clear to an applicant what answer would indicate a person who believes he or she is in control.

For example, one statement to which students could be asked to respond is: “I am going to college because it is expected of me.” For some applicants (many of them no doubt great students), the answer is yes, and there’s nothing wrong with that, but those who answer no would get points for locus of control.

Goecker said that because of how the scoring scale works, an applicant wouldn’t get a terrible score for honest answers on such questions. At the same time, those who defy expectations (and may be worthy of extra consideration) might be identified.

The Search for Non-Cognitive Criteria

The new approach at Rose-Hulman is part of a broader movement in higher education to look for non-cognitive criteria on which to judge applicants. Goecker said he was concerned that many of those efforts were too subjective, and said that he was attracted to locus of control in part because of

the way he could test the idea (as he has the past few years) to get a sense of its effectiveness. He said he didn't know of any other colleges going this way.

Some of the ideas in the Rose-Hulman project sound similar to research by Gallup, which suggests that students who have higher levels of hope may be more likely to succeed academically.

A growing number of colleges have dropped SAT or ACT requirements, but this has been relatively rare among engineering-focused institutions like Rose-

Hulman (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, in Massachusetts, being a notable exception). Goecker said he saw continued value (and faculty members see value) in SAT or ACT scores, but that he was hoping to add a tool to identify talent that might not otherwise show up.

Recent years have seen a number of colleges -- generally liberal arts colleges -- experimenting with alternative approaches to admissions.

Bard College in 2013 introduced a system in which applicants may

submit four 2,500-word research papers. Those whose papers are judged by the college's faculty members to have produced B+ work or better will be offered admission -- on that basis alone.

Goucher College in September introduced a system in which applicants could be judged on the basis of a two-minute video.

And Bennington College followed a few weeks after that with a system in which applicants themselves can decide what to submit for their candidacies to be considered. •

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/10/27/rose-hulman-plans-add-new-psychological-test-admissions-process>

IN YOUR FACE

BY CHARLIE TYSON

Two Boston institutions have started unusual marketing campaigns in an attempt to draw notice in a crowded market.

Each fall, Boston's population swells by a quarter-million. With 34 colleges and universities in Boston proper, and many more in the surrounding area -- from Harvard University, the nation's oldest, to the Urban College of

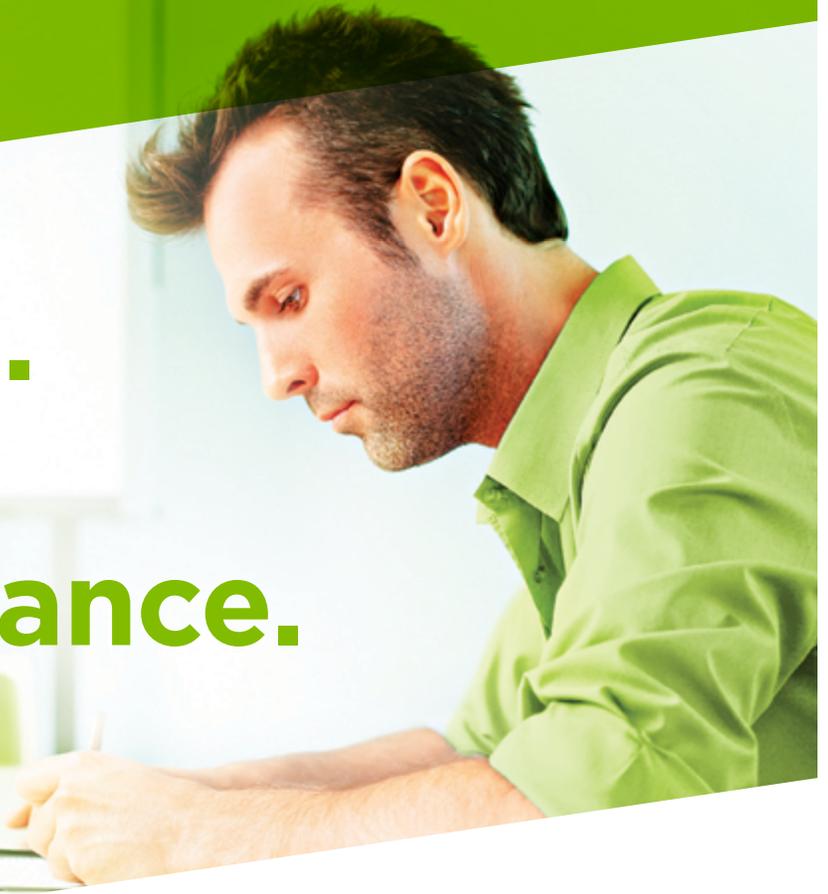
Boston, founded in 1993 -- the city expands and contracts as students come and go.

With so many rivals close by, the city's colleges and universities must jostle for elbow room. Two private institutions -- Wheelock

College, an 850-student predominantly female college, and Suffolk University, a 9,000-student institution with working-class roots -- in 2014 launched unusual marketing campaigns in a bid to grab attention. Both appeal



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to working-class students in the region, for whom any private institution may appear expensive compared to public options.

Wheelock has eschewed the well-trodden images of smiling students sitting on a grassy quad. Instead -- on its website, on billboards and on the sides of Boston buses -- the college has opted for black-and-white close-ups of unsmiling students, framed by the words: "Are you tough enough?"

Suffolk's strategy is more irreverent. One ad jabs at snobby students: "while most of our students don't have trust funds, they do have a work ethic." Another ad declares: "Suffolk students rely on their will to succeed, not their father's will."

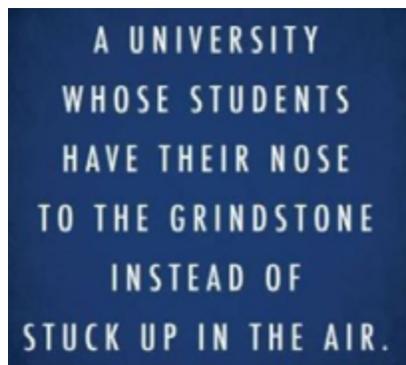
Suffolk's marketing effort, which includes radio spots, TV commercials, outdoor billboards and print ads in *The Boston Globe*, is the university's first branding campaign in eight years. And the "Tough Enough?" venture is the first advertising campaign in Wheelock's history.

"[Wheelock] is a culture where they didn't understand marketing," said Stephen Dill, Wheelock's marketing manager, who arrived at the college in 2011. "We've never really done advertising. Word of mouth had been more than enough for 125 years."

Elizabeth Scarborough, the chief executive of SimpsonScarborough,

an agency that did marketing research for Wheelock, said university-wide branding campaigns were a fairly recent innovation for higher education in general.

"Ten to 15 years ago, most colleges and universities weren't even doing any marketing," she said. "They were doing a lot of communicating regarding recruitment and fund-raising. But they really weren't implementing comprehensive that university-wide marketing campaigns."



The Boston institutions' forays into branding reflect not only the increased importance of reputation-based advertising in higher education, but also the accelerating pressure for colleges and universities to carve out niches and market themselves in unexpected ways.

"Most of the advertising in this industry is kind of mediocre in my opinion," said Ellis Verdi, the owner

of DeVito/Verdi, the Manhattan-based ad agency that created Suffolk's campaign. "If your advertising looks institutional and boring, I would tell a student that's fair warning about the school. The advertising in and of itself is a presentation of who you are. It should be provocative, it should be smart, it should be witty."

Historically Female, But Not Delicate

Founded in 1888 as a training school for kindergarten teachers, Wheelock graduates a disproportionate number of educators, social workers and child advocates -- as the college's mission of "improving the lives of children and families" might lead one to expect.

But these are not strictly female professions, and Wheelock is no longer a women's college -- although it is 90 percent female.

"A lot of people had incorrect impressions of Wheelock," Dill said. "There were still people who thought it was a girls' school." Others confused the college with Wheaton, a liberal arts college in Norton, Mass.

The "Tough Enough" rebrand, which Wheelock incorporated into its recruiting materials in fall 2013 and extended off-campus in mid-March, seeks to change attitudes not just about Wheelock, but also about the child-oriented vocations the college emphasizes.

Since 2010, Wheelock had been using the tagline “inspire a world of good.” Adding three words – “tough enough to” – marked a major shift in tone.

“What I knew is the materials that we used previously really didn’t describe Wheelock,” President Jackie Jenkins-Scott said. “You’d see these wonderful photos of smiling blue-eyed blond-haired girls sitting in a circle with kids reading a book. It was one image of Wheelock, but not the only image of Wheelock.”

Some people at the college, as well as alumni, initially bristled at the word “tough,” Jenkins-Scott said. Some worried that the word connoted physical rather than internal strength, or suggested femininity was a bad thing.

“Tough for me means resilience, it means strength, it means character,” she said. “Very often alumni who’ve been teaching in classrooms for 20 or 30 years, they’ll say, ‘I’m a tough old bird.’ I developed a comfort level with that word by listening to our alumni and how they described themselves.”

The images, too, were difficult to get right. Dill said some of the initial imagery was “too grim, too physical.”

“We realized that this was a subtle but important nuance,” he said. “We couldn’t have faces that looked mean. We couldn’t have faces that looked depressed. We had to have just a little bit of a



inspire a world of good | WHEELOCK COLLEGE

smile, just a little bit of a curve.”

Wheelock’s initial plan for the campaign budgeted 90 percent of its funds for offline marketing and 10 percent for online, said Jeremi Karnell, the chief executive of Beehaus, a marketing agency that helped the college develop its strategy.

“We flipped it around,” Karnell said. So far, 70 percent of the campaign’s budget has gone to online marketing, such as targeted ads on Pandora.

The campaign cost half a million dollars, Dill said.

Wheelock officials credited the branding effort with increased enrollment for the coming fall. The 300-student class entering in fall 2014 is 35 percent larger than the class that entered in fall 2013, college officials said. Male applications rose 20 percent. Web

traffic and campus visits have also increased.

Adrian Haugabrook, Wheelock’s vice president for student engagement and success, said boosting male enrollment was not the campaign’s primary aim. Nonetheless, the university hopes to be 20 percent male by 2020, he said – and a new, grittier image might help.

A Brassy Voice

Suffolk, like Wheelock, launched its branding effort in hopes of increasing application and enrollment numbers. Suffolk, however, has largely restricted its efforts to the Boston area – with the aim of presenting a voice that can “cut through the clutter,” said Greg Gatlin, Suffolk’s vice president of marketing and communications.

“It’s a very competitive

environment,” Gatlin said. “There are a lot of universities in or around Boston, and a lot are advertising. If you drive up and down the Southeast Expressway and then into Boston, you’ll see the billboards.”

Suffolk kicked off its campaign at the end of June. Instead of going after prospective students directly, the multipronged campaign advertises in public places in an attempt to improve how Bostonians – including parents, high school counselors and other adults who influence college choice – view the institution.

Verdi said the advertising initiative had drawn an unusual amount of attention – in the “top five” of any campaign he’s ever done. His ad agency has received letters and notes from observers in a range of fields, not just higher education.

“It’s a strong voice,” the ad executive said. “I don’t think anyone goes into advertising to create a weak voice. But some do in higher education because they’re paralyzed.”

The voice that comes through in Suffolk’s advertising is a defiant one, underscoring the university’s commitment to hard work and impatience for moneyed dilettantism. And the numbers

seem to back up the advertising’s claims: in fall 2013, 37 percent of Suffolk undergraduates received Pell Grants, and 73 percent received financial aid, university officials said.

Nonetheless, the university is one of Massachusetts’ most expensive, with a yearly sticker price of more than \$41,000 in tuition and fees.

Suffolk is the ad agency’s first higher education client.

“We came into a world where there is very lackluster work and – I don’t want to talk about myself this much – but I think we’re raising the bar in an industry that needs the bar raised,” Verdi said.

Although Suffolk’s campaign pokes fun at wealthy colleges, Gatlin said the advertising had no specific target of mockery.

“I don’t think we’re thumbing our nose at any one institution,” Gatlin said.

Wheelock, by contrast, made sure to advertise on a bus driving past Harvard, Dill said.

Marketing has long been “anathema” to many colleges and universities, Verdi said. “Institutions were above advertising,” he said. “They felt that it cheapened who they were. If you saw someone advertising it looked like they were hungry, helpless, needy.”

But higher education advertising need not be tawdry. “My point of view is, people just never tackled the assignment properly,” Verdi said.

Scarborough, whose firm did Wheelock’s marketing research, said colleges and universities should feel a sense of urgency to adopt marketing strategies tailored to their “brand.” Too many institutions simply follow the competition, she said. “When an institution sees its competitor advertising in a certain publication, for example, they think, ‘We need to be there too,’ ” Scarborough said.

“They should be thinking exactly the opposite.”

In Boston – where, Jenkins-Scott said, education is the economy’s “holy grail” – a conservative approach to higher education marketing is no longer enough. And the same may be true for higher education more broadly, the college president said.

“I think everybody is thinking how to be distinctive,” Jenkins-Scott said. “The beauty of the United States is that there are lots of choices for people who are pursuing education. That’s both a strength and a challenge for institutions that are trying to thrive.”

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/07/11/boston-institutions-try-grab-attention-provocative-marketing-efforts>

RANKINGS NOISE

BY RY RIVARD

*What would it really take to be in the U.S. News top 20?
And can anyone really change in the "beauty pageant"
of the reputational survey?*

What would it take for a well-regarded institution -- such as the University of Rochester, and a few dozen more like it -- to be among *U.S. News & World Report's* top 20 national universities? Hundreds of millions of dollars and a prayer, according to a new peer-reviewed paper co-written by a former Rochester provost and his staff.

The study, published in 2014 by the journal *Research in Higher Education*, argues that small movements in the rankings are simply "noise" and that any kind of sustained upward movement is both immensely expensive and nearly impossible.

Ralph Kuncl, a former Rochester provost who is now president of University of Redlands, in California, co-wrote the paper, which was a decade in the making. He started thinking about changes in the rankings when he was vice provost at Johns Hopkins University.

He said "the trustees would go bananas" when Johns Hopkins

dropped in the rankings. The administration would then have to explain what had happened.

"Every year Hopkins went from 15 to 16 to 15 to 16 -- and I thought, 'What a silly waste of energy,'" Kuncl said in an interview. (Johns Hopkins is currently No. 12.)

The paper found that small movements up or down in the rankings are more or less irrelevant. For most universities in the top 40, any movement of two spots or less should be considered noise, the paper said. For colleges outside the top 40, moves up or down of four spots should be thought of as noise, too.

"For example, a university ranked at 30 could be 95 percent confident that its rank will fall between 28 and 32, and only when the rank moves beyond those levels can a statistically significant change be claimed," the paper said.

Colleges that want to move any farther have a hard row to hoe, the paper argues, because "meaningful rank changes for top universities are difficult and would

occur only after long-range and extraordinarily expensive changes, not through small adjustments."

Robert Morse, who directs the rankings at U.S. News, said the rankings were designed for consumers, not higher ed administrators. A change in a college's fundamentals is borne out over time, he said, "like going up stairs or going down stairs -- you move up a few -- it's not any given year that shows the meaningful change, it's whether over a period of years that the school is moving either upward or downward."

But the paper, by authors who have all worked at Rochester, adds to the ruminating by administrators over the *U.S. News* list with several arguments, including in-depth exploration of what it would take for Rochester, consistently in the mid-30s on the list, to break into the top 20. Emory University, Georgetown University and the University of California at Berkeley currently tie for No. 20.

The researchers examined a decade of data on colleges that

PRIVATE COLLEGE ENROLLMENTS: NEEDS, NUMBERS, SOLUTIONS

were ranked among the top 200 colleges in 2012 and had been among the top 200 ranked colleges for five or more of the last 10 years. While the formula for the *U.S. News* rankings is available, only some of the data that goes into the rankings is public, so the study tried to closely approximate what *U.S. News* uses for its calculations.

If it wanted to move into the top 20, Rochester would have to do a lot on several of the various factors *U.S. News* uses to rank colleges. To move up one spot because of faculty compensation, Rochester would have to increase the average faculty salary by about \$10,000. To move up one spot on resources provided to students, it would have to spend \$12,000 more per student. Those two things alone would cost \$112 million a year.

To get into the top 20, Rochester would also have to increase its graduation rate by 2 percent, enroll more students who were in the top 10 percent of their high school graduating class, get more alumni to give, cut the acceptance rate and increase the SAT and ACT scores of incoming students. Some of those things, like offering aid money to highly qualified students, might further increase the expense.

But that's not all, the paper argues. Rochester would still have to do well in the rankings magazine's "beauty contest."

Because 15 percent of the ranking is based on reputation among other administrators, even massive expenditures year after year and huge leaps in student quality and graduation would not be enough. The reputation score as judged by its peers would need to increase from 3.4 to 4.2 on a scale of 5, something that has only a .01 percent chance of happening, the paper said.

Rochester is among the four colleges on the *U.S. News* national rankings that have had the same reputational score over eight years. The others are Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford University. It's unclear what drives

those four stay exactly the same, most at the top also don't move much either.

"If all of these changes were made, but a corresponding change in undergraduate reputation did not follow, the second simulation showed that a rank between 25 and 30 would be more typical, and this university would never move into the top 20," the paper concluded.

Kuncl said institutions spend tens of thousands of dollars on the "stupidity" of sending glossy brochures to other colleges' administrators to try to beef up reputational scores.

Morse said colleges can rise without a change in their reputation because reputation among higher



administrators from across the country to consistently consider Rochester to be about the 35th-best college in America. While

ed administrators and high school counselors makes up less than a quarter of the overall rankings. But, he said, "Is it true that the

reputational part of the ranking is more stable over time? Yes.”

A spokesman for the University of Rochester said officials have not yet had time to familiarize themselves with the paper. He noted, however, that the current strategic plan does not refer to rankings.

Kuncl said the paper’s findings are likely to apply to other U.S.

News lists, including the lists of regional colleges and liberal arts institutions, but that the study focused only on the magazine’s main national universities list.

Some institutions have made rankings part of their stated goals, including Arizona State University, which tied its president’s pay to rankings, or Northeastern University in Massachusetts,

which mentions the rankings in its strategic plan.

Both are among a handful of institutions that have seen sustained increases in their rankings over the past decade.

“We have long said that the rankings are a byproduct of our success, not the real success,” said a Northeastern spokeswoman, Renata Nyul. •

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/06/03/what-would-it-really-take-be-us-news-top-20>

WHO DEFINES MERIT?

BY SCOTT JASCHIK

Admissions leaders gather to consider how to promote broader definitions of worthiness and more diversity in their classes -- all while dealing with the pressures of money and rankings.

LOS ANGELES -- As college presidents went to the White House in January 2014 to talk about new efforts to attract more low-income students to higher education, admissions leaders gathered here and talked about how they define merit. Who is admitted? Who gets aid? When spots and the aid budget are limited, who gets priority status?

Speakers turned to definitions (from dictionaries, Latin and Greek) and to philosophy, and generally agreed that merit in higher education must mean more than having the highest grades and test scores. But beyond that, things get complicated.

Recruiting a more socio-economically diverse class is a great thing, everyone seemed to

agree at the annual conference of the Center for Enrollment Research Policy and Practice of the University of Southern California.

But is that still the case if your rankings slip and your SAT average drops a smidge? Nancy Cantor, who spoke here, was described as heroic by many for doing that at Syracuse University. But Cantor has left Syracuse and

her successor seems much more interested in rankings than she was.

And for institutions that compete for students, decisions that might be applauded here as ethical can be quite difficult. A case study was presented by Jenny Rickard, vice president for enrollment at the University of Puget Sound. She described how Puget Sound, between the 1970s and today, evolved from a local commuter college to a national liberal arts college, attracting increasingly competitive students.

But in 2013, the college discovered just how quickly a gain in one college goal can lead to a loss elsewhere. Like many private colleges, Puget Sound feared that its discount rate had been rising too fast during the economic downturn, so it decided to loosen criteria for some non-need-based aid in the hope of building a good class without spending as much on all aid.

The plan worked in part: The discount rate fell from 43 to 38 percent. The class size was right on target (670). But as more of a limited aid budget went to be sure the class targets were met, there was less money for needy students.

The percentage of first-generation students in the class dropped from 17 percent to 8 percent.

"This is a classic illustration of the tradeoffs that are made," Rickard said.

Puget Sound is not accepting those results as a new status quo. The college is reviewing all of its admissions and financial aid policies with a goal of making the discount rate sustainable, but making sure that other values -- such as economic diversity -- don't suffer. Some tweaks are already being made, even as a full study continues.

Rickard was hardly the only admissions leader here trying to decide on the relative merits of students of varying ability to pay -- and doing so with a limited budget. (Puget Sound's \$280 million endowment is larger than that of many colleges, but leaves the institution depending on tuition revenue for operating support.)

Costs and Benefits

Marianne H. Begemann, dean of strategic planning and academic resources at Vassar College, said that with commitment, colleges can do the right thing. Vassar returned to need-blind admissions

in 2007, shortly after Catharine B. Hill became president. And the college has stayed need blind, even though the decision came shortly before the economy tanked in 2008.

Since making the shift, the college's discount rate has increased from about 35 to about 50 percent -- significant and expensive growth. But the share of students who are from minority groups has grown from 20 to 35 percent. Begemann said that such policies require a strong presidential and board commitment or they don't happen.

Some focus on these policies in terms of their cost. But Begemann said that she believes it is better to talk about "foregone revenue," since the choice really is not to admit more students who could pay. "We need to stop talking about everything only in terms of an expense," she said.

She said that the question -- when looking at need-blind admissions -- should be (in non-financial terms): "Can we afford not to have this policy?"

Language Matters

Begemann was one of several speakers to talk about how to talk



about admissions policies.

Georgia Nugent, president emerita of Kenyon College and a senior fellow at the Council of Independent Colleges, who has campaigned against the use of non-need-based aid, said it was time to stop calling such awards “merit aid.”

When colleges say “merit aid,” in this context, they mean “a student or family with sufficient means to pay for college education but they want to get a good deal and they want bragging rights,” she said. “So-called merit aid is awarded neither because the student has earned it nor because we are meeting the objectives of our colleges.”

Another term Nugent attacked: “need-sensitive.” Colleges that do not practice need-blind admissions use the term to refer to policies under which, at some point in the admissions process, they only accept students who can afford to pay their own way. Nugent said that when she first became a college president, “foolishly I thought the term meant sensitive to the needs of our students,” adding that “I learned it meant the opposite.”

Nugent -- a classicist by training -- said these phrases matter. “When the language we use is disordered, it’s often a clue that our practices are less than admirable,” she said.

Many here responded privately that they agree with her (and

others here who called for more idealistic definitions of merit in college admissions) but that they can’t be expected to win over presidents and trustees worried about balancing budgets. Nugent tried to inspire them by discussing *The Honor Code*, a book by Kwame Anthony Appiah, a professor of philosophy and law at New York University. The book explores how longstanding social practices -- dueling, foot-binding and slavery -- were defeated.

Nugent said that the moral arguments against these practices were well known for years, but that, at a certain point, people took courageous stands, built alliances and made changes -- sometimes at risk to themselves.

Random Selection

Many speakers talked about frustrations with the current system of admissions, noting the many advantages wealthier applicants have -- from birth on -- and how their “merit” was determined in part by things over which their fortunate birth circumstances were the deciding factor.

Donald E. Heller, dean of the College of Education at Michigan State University, in prepared remarks for later in the conference, reviewed the way, for example, there is a strong correlation between family income and standardized test scores. And he talked about how rising college costs deter many

families from higher education. In this environment, he posed the following as a “thought experiment” to get people to rethink merit.

“Take any one of our selective institutions, and look at the scholarship athlete, or legacy, or for that matter, any student who was admitted and had the lowest academic credentials, however you want to choose to measure those credentials. I’ll assert that this is a decision to establish a floor at which the institution has determined any student can succeed. Right? If we admit the student, then we’re making a statement that the student can succeed at our institution,” he said.

“Now that we have that floor, let’s take all the students who applied and who had credentials above this floor, and run a lottery for admission. The number of lottery slots would equal the number of admitted students we believe we need to meet our class target, given our expected yield.... How differently would our selective institutions look if we did admissions this way? Would they look any different at all, or would they still be pretty much how they look today?”

Totally New Definitions of Merit

Heller was not the only one to talk about the possibility that a lottery could be more fair than the status quo.

Harry Brighthouse, professor of philosophy and education policy studies at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, didn't suggest a lottery, but throwing traditional measures of merit out and replacing them with others. He said that, at elite colleges, merit is defined by "the English way," in the tradition that there is some measurable level of intelligence and achievement that sorts students.

American faculty members, Brighthouse said, love this system because it produces student bodies of intelligent people who use a college's resources to learn. "These are students the faculty don't have to teach," he said.

A better system, he said, would define applicants as meritorious in this way: "It means possession of traits that predict a student will gain more from a spot [than another would] and that they will contribute more to the social good than a rival candidate would." In this system, students would still need to demonstrate the ability to do the work, but slot would be awarded in completely different ways.

Brighthouse offered a series of educational programs an undergraduate might pursue -- philosophy, pre-med, social work, early childhood education, pre-law,

political science and others. The university's contribution to society, he argued, isn't just educating students, but training professionals in fields that will reach those who aren't headed to elite higher education. He said, for example, that the potential of many of the poorest children can be changed by the intervention of one caring social worker or educator.

Regardless of whom an elite institution admits, if it is training great professionals in such areas, he said, it is doing good. Pre-law? Not so much. Brighthouse said he will only write law school recommendations these days after asking students for a real answer to the question "why?" and that many don't have such an answer.

When the university fails to think about merit in terms of societal contributions, he said, it distorts its entire mission. He read an email from a student of his who has discussed her interests with faculty members.

"While I am an ambitious person who wants to take on a challenging career and succeed, I also know that what I am passionate about is something involving children and helping people and families" and feedback from faculty members: leaves her "feeling guilty and somewhat unambitious regarding

my career choice."

A college with the proper values, Brighthouse suggested, would not only seek to admit such students but to nurture them.

No one here rushed to announce the replacement of current admissions criteria with a focus on contributions to society. But many cheered Brighthouse, saying that he was pointing to the problems with current system.

Youlonda Copeland-Morgan, associate vice chancellor for enrollment management at the University of California at Los Angeles, said she worried that current reform efforts in higher education won't go far enough. It's great to find new ways to recruit some more disadvantaged students, Copeland-Morgan said, but she compared it to "peeing in the ocean" in that these efforts "just don't make a big difference."

When, she asked, will more colleges be willing to "take real risk in terms of letting some of the traditional measures of merit fall?" While some say such changes would devalue merit, she said that competitive colleges today can't be satisfied with all the students they decide not to educate. "All of us reject a lot of students who could do well," she said. •

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/17/admissions-leaders-gather-and-consider-how-define-merit>

TRANSCRIPT-FREE ADMISSIONS

BY SCOTT JASCHIK

Goucher College creates a new option in which applicants will be evaluated on the basis of a two-minute video.

Can an applicant explain why he or she would thrive at a given college in two minutes? If the applicant wants to enroll at Goucher College, that is pretty much all it will take under a new admissions option announced in September 2014. Applicants can now submit a two-minute video instead of all the traditional requirements, such as test scores, transcripts and essays.

"There's a lot of concern that the college application model is broken -- I use the word 'insane' sometimes," José Antonio Bowen, Goucher's president, said in an interview.

Asked why the college would make such a radical shift, Bowen spoke of the way scores on the standardized SAT and ACT exams correlate with family wealth, and noted that essays can reflect the ideas of parents or writers for hire. But Goucher has been test-optional since 2007.

Most colleges that eliminate SAT or ACT requirements cite research that the best predictor of college success is grades in

college preparatory courses in high school. So why eliminate the transcript requirement in favor of a two-minute video?

"There are a lot of students out there [for whom] the transcript doesn't look the way they want it to look," Bowen said. "They were totally focused on music or drama or the soccer team, and so for whatever reason, they have a smudge or two on their transcripts." He added that while transcripts may predict academic success in college, that's not all that matters. "They are predictors of how well you will do in school, not how well you will do in life." Bowen said he believes many people are unfairly judged based on less-than-perfect grades and test scores, and sense that they won't be admitted to a good college -- despite their many abilities.

Goucher is not being subtle about its willingness to consider students without any transcript. A video the college is releasing on the new option opens with a transcript being ripped up.

Many colleges accept or even

encourage applicants to send videos on top of more traditional materials, but Goucher believes it is the first to offer an option based almost entirely on a short video. Applicants will also be required to submit two pieces of work from high school.

But the college said that the video alone would make up "the crux" of decisions.

Bowen said applicants will be judged on the substance of their videos, not the production value. He said it would be possible for a student to make a video on a smartphone.

"We're going to release the rubric, so there will be no secret way of evaluating these," Bowen said. "We are being very clear. We are looking for authenticity. What's the substance? Are you thoughtful in the way you articulate that story? ... You will get no points for having fancy lighting or multi-camera angles."

Many open admissions colleges of course may not require standardized tests or transcripts, but Goucher -- while



not very competitive -- is not open admissions. In the last three years it has admitted 72 or 73 percent of applicants. Entering class size at the liberal arts college has been stable in the low 400s.

Scott Sibley, a professor of chemistry and chair of the faculty at Goucher, said via email that the faculty was consulted on the idea and played a role in developing the specifics of the plan. He said that "most faculty here are quite comfortable to have this as an alternative application process."

Some admissions experts--while stressing that they hadn't yet been able to study Goucher's approach -- said they were surprised by the idea of going transcript-free.

Jerome A. Lucido, executive director of the University of Southern California Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice, said that most admissions officers find the transcript to be key to understanding applicants. "You can see the level of academic work they have taken, the extent to which they have challenged themselves, the curriculum at their high school," he said. Without a transcript, he asked, "How do you know what capabilities a student has?"

Wayne Camara, senior vice president for research at ACT, said that there are many factors beyond academic ability on which colleges may opt to make admissions

decisions. "But clearly we know if a college is concerned about the success of students academically, or the success in persistence to graduation, standardized indicators are not only valid but fair, and that includes the transcript." A transcript, he said, is a key way to evaluate the rigor of courses and how a student fared in high school.

"No matter what we say about high school grades, a high school transcript and GPA captures a whole range of courses," Camara said. "Any one course can be unreliable, but a transcript is likely to have four math teachers, four English teachers" and so forth, he said. "You can get a lot of information." •

VIEW THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/09/04/goucher-will-create-new-option-admissions-two-minute-video>

NEW WAYS TO GET IN

BY SCOTT JASCHIK

In first year Goucher applicants may be judged on a short video and Bennington applicants by an application portfolio they design, both colleges report early signs of success.

It turns out that there are students who want to apply to college based on a two-minute video. These applicants may be more likely than others to be non-white and women. But it's also the case that, given the option, most potential students won't apply that way.

At least that's the early word from Goucher College, which in 2014 decided to let students use that method to apply. Bennington College, which also introduced a non-conventional application system (in which students can design their own application portfolio), also reports early success with its new option.

The Goucher option, announced in September 2014, attracted the most attention. Applicants can be judged simply on the basis of a two-minute video, although they also must submit two pieces of work from high school. Applicants need not submit test scores (Goucher has for some time been test-optional). But in an unusual move, applicants need not submit transcripts (those applying for

financial aid must do so, although the information isn't considered in the admissions decision).

So far in the 2014-15 admissions year cycle, the college has received 64 applicants through the video option, and admitted 48 of them. The remainder included 2 applicants whose videos couldn't be seen (and who are being helped to resubmit them) and 14 who were asked for some more information pending a final decision. So while no video applicants have been rejected, not all have earned admission.

The 75 percent admission rate (which could still grow in theory up to 100 percent) is slightly higher than the 72 percent rate for applicants who applied through traditional means. But Goucher officials say that the numbers suggest success beyond having 64 more applicants.

Whether from the attention the college received or other reasons, early action applications reached a record high of 1,761 (not counting the 64 video applicants) by the December 1, 2014 deadline. The

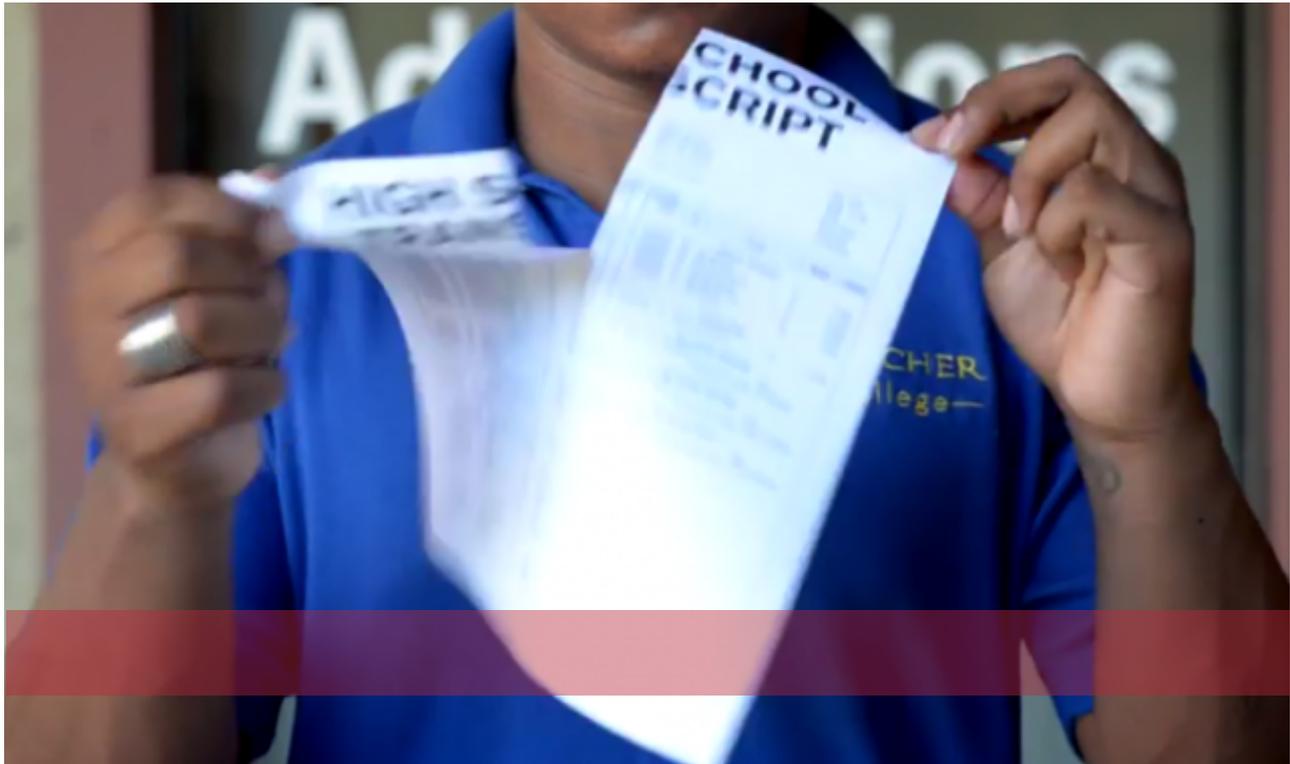
figure for traditional application early action is up 12 percent over the total of each of the previous two years.

Of particular interest to Goucher is that there are signs that the video option is attracting more minority students -- particularly black students.

Of non-video applicants, 41.5 percent were members of minority groups, while the figure was 52.0 for video applicants. And while 18 percent of traditional applications were filed by black students, 39 percent of the video applications were.

Women make up a solid majority of Goucher's applicant pool so far this year (68.4 percent) and an even larger share of the video applicants (73.4 percent).

Further, by looking at the transcripts submitted by video applicants (but not considered in admissions decisions), Goucher officials say that the grades suggest a similar academic performance level to those who apply through traditional means. So thus far, Goucher officials are pleased with



the experiment and hopeful about the rest of the admissions cycle.

Bennington's new option is called "dimensional" admissions, under which applicants themselves decide what to submit (and can opt not to submit traditionally required items like transcripts, although they may opt to send them as well).

As is the case at Goucher, Bennington is seeing good overall numbers this year, Early decision applications (only some of which use the new option) are up more

than 60 percent.

Through January 2015, 61 people have applied through dimensional admissions, and 8 have been admitted, but many others haven't been reviewed yet.

For the two application periods for which deadlines have been passed, dimensional applicants made up 11 of 39 for early decision applicants and 31 of 345 early action applicants.

Hung Bui, vice president and dean of admissions and financial

aid at Bennington, said via email that, so far, the new option has "exceeded our expectations with regard to quantity and quality." He noted that 77 percent of those using the application applied in various "early" rounds of admission (Bennington uses early action and early decision). This indicates a "genuine interest," he said, as does the quality of the material submitted. Bui said that the new approach lets students share "more of their personality." •

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/01/13/goucher-and-bennington-both-report-success-highly-nontraditional-admissions-options>

SHRINKING AS A STRATEGY

BY RY RIVARD

While dozens of liberal arts colleges are banking on plans to grow, a Vermont institution doesn't think that's realistic, and has developed a path to preserve itself by getting smaller.

After surveying the fate of small private liberal arts colleges, Saint Michael's College in Vermont is now planning ahead for enrollment declines, inexpensive online classes for credit and debt-averse students and families.

College officials say they now have a way to keep the college sustainable by making it smaller. Even though enrollment is steady and there's been a budget surplus each of the past six years, Saint Michael's is planning to enroll 10 to 15 percent fewer students over the next three to four years and, in turn, employ about 10 percent fewer faculty and staff members. That approach runs counter to the strategies of some liberal arts colleges that are saying that they will thrive by getting larger, even as many doubt that a growing number of students will be seeking liberal arts degrees.

A task force of three Saint Michael's alumni, three faculty and three trustees spent about nine months studying what will happen to small tuition-dependent liberal

arts colleges and found there's a "perfect storm" approaching.

For Saint Michael's, those projected problems include a 15 percent drop in high school graduates in the Northeast, but also an unsustainable pricing model that is going to collide with a student debt bubble and large-enrollment online courses from elite universities that will drive down costs.

President John J. Neuhauser, a former business school dean at Boston College, said Saint Michael's is preparing for its enrollment to drop from 1,900 now to 1,600 in the next several years. In turn, the college plans to cut the number of faculty positions from 150 to 135, mainly through attrition.

Neuhauser said the assumption is that the steep fall-off in the number of high school graduates is going to affect somebody -- and that somebody might be Saint Michael's.

"Everybody thinks they are smarter than everybody else, but we're going to plan as if we

weren't and try to be smarter than everybody else," he said.

The college is trying to avoid a number of scenarios by planning for the worst and hoping for the best. Some colleges have had to suddenly and sharply cut faculty because of unexpected enrollment declines.

Saint Michael's is also adding a summer online program for students from elsewhere that will start to rely on content from online courses to help lower costs. The summer program could eventually help students graduate in three years.

"It's pretty clear that you have to get some productivity out of small liberal arts colleges or else they are simply going to price themselves out of existence," Neuhauser said.

Michael McGrath, a trustee who chaired the task force, is a former business consultant who said he's seen companies swept under by technology. He asked everyone on the task force to take a free online class, whether from iTunes or from the massive open online course



Saint Michael's College

providers edX and Coursera.

He said the task force concluded there are going to be significant changes in the market for all of higher education, and he said it's better to be "slightly paranoid and react in advance."

"There's that potential in higher education that it's going to be more than a little downsizing by the marginal colleges," he said. "It could be quite profound."

John O'Meara, an associate physics professor who was on the task force, said faculty members plan to discuss the college's plan in depth in May but are increasingly aware that perhaps the current higher ed economy is not "just the normal doom and gloom-ism."

He said professors read about problems but always assume the larger trends won't hit them.

"No faculty member is saying, 'Please fire me' or something – nobody is embracing this with joy," O'Meara said. "But I think there is an acknowledgment among the faculty that we may be in a more unique financial situation than we have in the past."

McGrath, the trustee, believes the student debt bubble is going to pop and depress prices. He called the government-backed loans with few strings attached the "biggest government scam and the most unethical thing in history."

"It's the biggest scam, and then they will probably turn around and

blame colleges," he said. "They will hold hearings and they will say, 'When the student applied to you for a federal loan, why didn't you monitor what the grades were?'"

If that easy money dries up, McGrath said, there will be even more pressure on colleges.

Other small private colleges are working on ways to grow their market share by, among other things, cutting their sticker price.

"Those things can either be just interesting strategies or desperate – depends on how they work out," McGrath said.

Neuhauser, likewise, said any effort by Saint Michael's to grow net tuition by increasing enrollment would be "foolish."

For one thing, Saint Michael's is near its capacity now, meaning additional students at the residential college could force new construction.

The college is still working out how it plans to reduce faculty lines and continue to maintain a healthy variety of course options.

Some people argue most traditionally structured colleges will struggle to maintain a diversity of

courses if they have fewer than 2,000 students.

Neuhauser said that's generally true but he believes the threshold is a bit lower and technology can help.

"I think it's going to change how it's conducted, but we'll see, it's easy to be critical of MOOCs and things like that now, but what's edX, 18 months old? It's pretty new," he said. "I betcha Gutenberg

had the same problem."

McGrath said he believes the trustees are setting a good example by planning for the worst -- "it's really dumb if you don't prepare for a storm" -- and that he's seen too many boards in the corporate world fail to react to changes.

He said he used to tell his clients, "If everybody is happy 90 days from now, then we're not doing enough." •

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/04/09/vermont-liberal-arts-college-expecting-things-will-get-bad>

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