Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) and the Challenge of Access: Truth or Dare

Presented by
David H. Kalsbeek, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President for Enrollment Management and Marketing

March 30, 2005

This is the plenary address that David H. Kalsbeek gave at the 2005 American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) National Annual Conference on “Access and Opportunity in Higher Education” in New York City on March 30, 2005. In his presentation, he places the current debate about access and opportunity in a historical and strategic context. He challenges those critics who claim that the practice of Enrollment Management erodes access and opportunity for low-income students. To the contrary, he illustrates that the analytic discipline of the Enrollment Management approach enables institutions to weigh the price of their principles. Statistical analysis and graphic presentations developed with Brian Zucker, president, Human Capital Research, Corp.
INTRODUCTION

At the end of my time with you today, I will have posed to you some questions about which you can reflect as you go through the rest of this conference and as you head back to your campuses.

And those questions emerge from the confluence of three things:
1. First, the explicit theme or purpose of this conference: namely access in American higher education.
2. Second, the traditional attendance at this conference: participants who are university administrators (as opposed to public policymakers or faculty, for example).
3. Third, the emerging professional orientation or perspective of this particular national annual conference and its parent association: namely, the practice of what has come to be known as “enrollment management” or more particularly Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) in American higher education.

My hope and purpose is to illustrate how the goal of access, when framed at the institutional level, presents a range of challenges and opportunities to all of us institutional administrators—especially as we attempt to further the goals and purposes of SEM on our campuses. I also hope to illustrate how this challenge is embedded in the systemic structures and deeply rooted realities of the higher education marketplace.

I invite you to join me as I meander through my own musings about what we can do at our respective campuses to further the pursuit of access goals and values; what we can do to help the leadership of our institutions appreciate the magnitude and complexity of that challenge; and what we can do to influence the national dialogue in this regard.

I will dare you, challenge you, to question how access relates to your institution’s strategic goals and its position in the academic marketplace. I want to leave you intrigued with some ways of posing and framing the pursuit of truth to those questions. And I hope to leave you both bothered and emboldened by the answers that emerge.

I will quickly review some of the broad societal dynamics that shape our discussion of access and opportunity, and then explore some of the institutional dynamics that frame a perspective on this challenge at the institutional level. I will conclude with some insights on the systemic dynamics of the higher education market that create the context within which we can and will determine if SEM and access are incompatible or if they are inseparable as institutional values and viewpoints.

In my very brief and rapid overview of the societal dynamics at the heart of the access debate, I will draw liberally, and at times verbatim but without full reference, from the great work of the American Council on Education in their recent book edited by Donald E. Heller: “The Condition of Access,” and more specifically the work of Brian Fitzgerald in this text and his recent article on the access and affordability crisis in Change magazine, all of which I commend to your attention.
American higher education has long held access as one of its principle values. “The goal and promise has always been to ensure, at a minimum, that lower income students have the opportunity to attend college without being unduly constrained by high costs.”

And while the promise and the premise of access to higher education remain at the center of our national dialogue, it is an increasingly obvious shortcoming of our current educational system, an unrealized aspiration, and, as a result, a weakened part of our social fabric and social contract.

We gather here in 2005, 40 years after the 1965 Higher Education Act, which not only put into motion many of the policy and programmatic solutions to the challenge of access that remain today, but successfully framed our entire approach to access. It’s an approach that has been remarkably persistent for 40 years in defining the way we conceive of the financial aid industry, the financial needs of families and students, and the accountabilities of governments and institutions in addressing our national commitments to an educated citizenry.

The 1965 Act created a mental model, which despite cataclysmic changes in so many other dimensions of our society and our world, has remained largely intact. So we should be gathering here today to celebrate 40 years of unrelenting progress and the fulfillment of the inspired visions reflected in the 1965 Act.

In the 1960s, the nation faced a crisis of opportunity and equity similar to today:
- There were swelling enrollments and inadequate capacity on college campuses.
- Race and ethnicity played a substantial role in determining college attendance.
- There was widespread recognition that financial barriers severely restricted access to higher education (e.g., students of high-income families were five times more likely to attend college than low-income students).

Though I wasn’t exactly paying attention at the time from my fourth grade classroom, it is my understanding that the national solutions in the 1960s were driven by two distinct justifications:
1. A vision of economic opportunity: recognizing the benefits of a more educated citizenry such as a flexible workforce, lower crime rate, concern for environment, higher level of public health, increased productivity, etc.
2. A vision of social equity: a commitment to a goal of providing all citizens equal opportunities for personal advancement through participation in higher education.

“In making the promise of access, the goal of the 1965 Act was clear: to narrow over time the unacceptable income-related gaps existing in postsecondary participation, persistence, and degree completion.”

These were inspired visions indeed. And those visions were realized with a wide range of initial victories.
When we ask ourselves how are we doing in making good on the promise and premise of access, and we look at what evidence we have of progress toward those noble hopes and aspirations—how does it look?

Any discussion of access certainly tends to focus first on participation in higher education. For example, we know that interest in postsecondary education among high school completers is now almost universal: 97% of high school completers report that they plan to continue their education at some time and 71% expect to earn a bachelor’s degree. Even among low-income students whose parents have no college education, the aspirations for higher education have both broadened and elevated.

We also know that enrollment in college immediately after high school has risen over the past 20 years. The proportion of high school completers who enroll in an institution of higher education immediately following high school has in fact increased considerably—over the past 20 years or so, it’s gone from about 50% to 65% (from half to two-thirds).

In this regard, we have much to be proud of—and the overall participation rate in higher education in America is and should be a source of national pride and international admiration.

**Inescapable Verdicts**

Although we have realized some victories in overall participation rates, there continues to be an understandable, even predictable, disparity in participation by income level.

Most disappointing is the fact that the gap in participation between low- and high-income families has remained constant for over 30 years—at 32 percentage points.

While the level of participation has improved for all, the magnitude of the gap in participation—the very inequity we had hoped to address back in 1965—has remained the same for 30 years.*

But “compared to the persistent gaps in college participation, the gap in degree attainment is far wider,” and this is critical because the name of the game is not participation, but degree completion. We need to remember that it’s really all about attainment, not access. As my colleague Brian Zucker puts it, access without attainment is access to nothing.

At the level of attainment, our progress hasn’t been as admirable. For example, in 1975, 7% of those in the bottom income quartile and about 40% of those in the top quartile received a baccalaureate degree by age 24. In the ensuing 25 years, the number for the bottom quartile stayed constant at between 5% and 8%, while the rate for the top quartile generally grew to somewhere between the mid-50s and the high-60s.

*N.B.: Another corresponding and inescapable reality is not only these lower rates of general participation, but that among those who do attend college, where students enroll is related to family income. The lowest income students—while now more likely to participate than decades before—are nonetheless more likely to attend public two-year institutions than are the highest income students, and less likely to attend a four-year college. Only one in five students from the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) quartile who goes to college enrolls in a four-year institution, compared to two out of three from the highest quartile. The most disadvantaged students are increasingly concentrated at community colleges. Now while that’s a good thing in terms of affordable participation in higher education, we know that community college students are far less likely to earn a four-year degree than those who start out at a four-year college.
So here’s the painful reality and inescapable verdict, as Tom Mortenson’s valuable research has concluded: Every time you go up one quartile in family income, your chance of earning a bachelor’s degree by age 24 in America today just about doubles.

Our dialogue about access and the ongoing disparities in the entire postsecondary education experience between low- and high-income students can go on and on. There is no shortage of evidence about the pervasive challenges faced by prospective college students whose families are in lower-income brackets. We have ample evidence through the studies of the educational choices, experiences and outcomes of low-income students that if our goal, our premise and our promise is that students, regardless of their financial situation, can participate fully in and benefit fully from the extraordinary educational system we have created in America, we have far to go.

Any comprehensive and candid review of the national evidence reflects that the chasm between the inspired visions and initial victories of the 1960s and the inescapable verdicts of today is wide and deep—and getting wider and deeper over time.

Of course we have to acknowledge that the access debate in the United States has also rendered a verdict regarding academic preparedness (as Dr. Michael Nettles noted in his opening address at this conference). Financial accessibility is a necessary but not sufficient ingredient in realizing the promise of access in America. There is clearly much work to be done in K-12 education to ensure that all students complete secondary education in ways that prepare them for college.

However, my concern today is an institutional focus on financial accessibility, and as important as it is to also discuss how to elevate levels of educational achievement and improve remediation, early intervention, and so on, I keep coming back to four numbers drawn from Brian Fitzgerald’s work, perhaps the most damning findings of recent studies about the access crisis.

If we take the high school graduating population and identify the highest and the lowest quartiles on two different dimensions—socioeconomic status (SES) and academic preparedness or achievement, and then juxtapose those in this 2x2 matrix showing the college participation rate and we see two known realities:

- First, nearly all of the most affluent and best qualified high school graduates in America attend college.
- Second, due to factors related to both socioeconomic status and academic preparedness, only about one-third of the poorest and least prepared attend college.

The most bothersome finding is this: “The college-going rate of the highest socioeconomic status students with the lowest achievement levels [77%] is the same as the poorest students with the highest achievement levels [78%].” (B.Fitzgerald)

Socioeconomic status remains such a powerful barrier to attending college that it trumps academic preparation even for the best and brightest achievers. Is it any wonder that one of the recent reports on the condition of access in the United States was entitled “Access Denied”? The social consequences of these realities are staggering—and multiple studies have tried to estimate the magnitude of the impact of the access denied to so many deserving students. The Lumina Foundation
calculates that during the last decade, an estimated one million academically qualified low-income students failed to attend college due in some part to financial need. Another study calculates that in 2002 alone, due to record-high financial barriers, nearly one-half of all college-qualified low- and moderate-income high school graduates will be unable to do so—that’s more than 400,000 students who were fully prepared to attend a four-year college but who did not; and nearly half of these students attended no college at all.

Is it any wonder that another report outlining the consequences of our 40-year-old pursuit of the goal of access was entitled “Empty Promises”?

Of course, the final pivotal element in the current access dialogue surfaces when we stop looking at today’s challenges and begin to anticipate tomorrow’s. We face a demographic future that is going to overwhelm our current system of higher education and exacerbate all of the challenges previously noted.

Demographic change will swell the number of high school graduates to unprecedented levels as the children of the Baby Boom generation and new immigrants flood high schools and colleges; the demographic trend will peak in 2008/09 when the largest number of students in the history of our nation will graduate from high school. This record number of students—along with their diversity, socioeconomic profile, level of parental education, and academic preparedness will place even greater strains on all of our systems of higher education and higher education financing.

In an extraordinary understatement, the recently published report on “The Condition of Access” in the United States concludes: “In promoting access to higher education, policymakers are currently facing immense challenges that show no signs of abating.”

How can a challenge so clearly envisioned 40 years ago and a set of solutions so sweeping in scope and comprehensive in execution have left us still struggling today with unmet goals and unrealized aspirations?

Bottom-line, there have been tectonic shifts in educational policy at the federal, state and institutional levels that have and still are adversely affecting access to higher education for students of disadvantaged backgrounds—shifts that have thwarted the promise of access laid out in 1965.

In a nutshell, let’s just recap a few of these trends.

**At the Federal Level**

The first dynamic at the federal level we face is the declining power of the Pell Grant.

“Pell Grants were to be the main engine of access and choice” and there’s an immense body of evidence that these grants were effective in achieving exactly their intended goal—to close the gap between family resources and college costs that would otherwise preclude college participation and attainment. But we all know that “the purchasing power of Pell Grants has diminished over time, limiting students’ opportunities and options.”

- The erosion in the purchasing power of the maximum Pell Grant over two decades is estimated as declining from a high of 84% of public college tuition in the mid-1970s to only 37% today.
The maximum Pell award would have to almost double for the purchasing power to be fully restored—and though the billions of dollars it would take looks pretty paltry compared to latest supplemental budget request for the Iraq war—we all know it’s not forthcoming.

Secondly, at the federal level, we see the explosion of student loans.

“Since 1980, the federal financial aid system has been transformed—from one characterized mainly by need-based grants to one dominated by loans and by a growing level of student borrowing with all of the attendant consequences of growing student indebtedness.

In 1981, loans accounted for 45% and grants for 52% of all students’ financial aid. By 2000, loans represented about 60% of all aid and grants represented only about 40%. And if only federally funded aid is considered, loans now account for 80% and grants only 20% of the federal financial aid.”

The third dynamic at the federal level is this: if the 1980s were marked by a shift in the federal government’s role in ensuring access from grants to loans, the 1990s were marked by a shift to an aid policy less focused on the needs of the most disadvantaged and more responsive to the preferences of the middle-income families who wield greater political clout. This is seen in the shift in federal posture toward tax credits.

The HOPE and Lifelong Learning federal tax credits that were enacted during the Clinton administration are comparable to merit aid in their impact…like merit awards, the main beneficiaries of tax credits are families whose children would go to college anyway. Rather than focus on the programs designed to ensure access for low-income students, the federal government has shifted its priority toward programs improving affordability for middle-income families.

At the State Level

Of course the federal government is only one actor in this drama; enter the states and the reasons for today’s access challenges become even clearer.

In Brian Fitzgerald’s history lesson on American higher education, I learned something I never knew: that America’s Founding Father’s considered the creation of a national university system. Instead, though, a decision was made to grant primary responsibility for higher education to the states. How interesting it is to imagine what a national system of higher education would look like today, and in particular, how it would affect the bracketology of March Madness. Seriously, though, we all know that “in the American system, the states bear primary responsibility for higher education policy, for support of higher education, and for providing financial assistance to students in public and private higher education.”

In recent years, several trends have dominated the states’ financing of public higher education and have hampered our pursuit of the promise of access.

First, state policies have permitted tuition increases over the past decade that have outstripped general inflation, surpassed the rate of growth in family income, and increased the reliance of many families on student aid. Naturally, the steepest increases in tuition have occurred during recessionary years when families face greatest economic hardship.
That occurs because of the second challenge: **Every time there is a recession, states cut higher education budgets.** State support for higher education has fallen as a share of total state expenditures and has certainly not kept pace with enrollment demand or the costs of educational programs and services at our universities today. Budget cuts required by the current recession have been exacted disproportionately from higher education.

And like the Pell Grants, the purchasing power of state-funded need-based grants has fallen throughout the 1990s and into this decade.

The net effect of all of this is a shifting of the burden of financing public higher education from the state to the individual. Sadly, neither the cuts in higher education funding during the 1990s nor the state fiscal crises today have been accompanied by policies to insulate low and moderate income students from the impact of the accompanying tuition increases.

In fact, almost to the contrary, the states’ approach mirrors the federal one, in which policy and preference is shifting to address affordability for those with some means rather than access for those with little to no financial means. Specifically, we see this in the **emergence of state merit aid programs**.

Most state merit aid programs subsidize students who already can afford to pay for college and who are already college bound, while failing to lower the financial barriers for low-income students who, without assistance, are not likely to attend college at all. In 1990 only 10% of state aid was awarded without regard to financial need. Today, fully one-fourth of state aid is available to all students—even those from the wealthiest families.

As Brian Fitzgerald has noted in his analysis: “Despite the long-standing recognition that lowering financial barriers is essential to ensuring opportunity, shifts in policy priorities at the federal and state levels have been responsible for increased financial barriers. In particular, shifts from a political and policy focus on low-income access toward a popular focus on moderate and upper income affordability have allowed the opportunity gap to not only persist— but to widen even further—for 40 years.”

And so, in yet another great understatement, the ACE’s reports have concluded that: “The problem of unequal opportunity has proved more intractable than anyone anticipated in the early years of the Higher Education Act.”

There’s little that I’ve shared so far that you haven’t likely already heard and read, since there is a growing chorus of indignant voices—throughout higher education, in our professional associations, and among our federal and state policymakers—protesting this continuous erosion in this nation’s support for the inspired visions of 40 years ago.

**INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS**

It’s easy to conclude as you listen to some of the clarion calls for action at the policy level that all of these changes in federal and state practices and priorities over the decades constitute the hand we’ve been dealt. At least that’s the posture I find many institutional leaders taking, that somehow, at the institutional level where we all live and breathe, we are all innocent victims of economic forces and political realities at the federal and state levels that are making our work more difficult—if not impossible—in trying to realize our unflagging commitment to access.
But are we all just innocent victims in an increasingly hostile political and policy environment? Has your role in this arena been that benign, that passive, that peripheral, that innocent?

For when you read the current literature carefully and listen to the indignant voices dominating the national dialogue about access, you will see that we are collectively the third culprit in this unfolding drama.

Let me quote a few of our most outspoken leaders in this arena:

- At the state, federal and institutional levels, student financial aid policies “have focused increasingly on making college more affordable for middle-income students, rather than on the fundamental goal of making postsecondary education accessible to all qualified students.” (Sandy Baum)
- “The federal government, state governments, and colleges and universities themselves have backed away from the commitment to measure and meet financial need that has dominated thinking about higher education finance in this country since the 1960s. Structural shifts in the targeting of aid have played an important role, we believe, in the declining access to and increasing stratification in higher education.” (McPherson and Schapiro)

Those of us in positions of institutional leadership—particularly those of us who lead institutional enrollment strategy, are hardly painted as just innocent victims. To the contrary, we are indicted as institutional villains. Along with the federal and state governments, colleges and universities themselves are implicated co-conspirators in the collective, societal reneging on the promise of access in America.

How are we complicit? Well, according to the increasingly vocal critics of the institutional role in the access crisis, the most obvious evidence of our complicity is the dramatically escalating tuition and fees charged by institutions of higher education.

- College tuition remained nearly flat in the 1970s when adjusted for inflation, then soared after 1980. Average, inflation-adjusted tuition prices have more than doubled for both public and private four-year institutions since 1980.
- During same time, median family income was stagnant, rising less than 25%.

The net result is that college costs as a share of income have increased—and have increased most dramatically for lowest income families. The average price of a public four-year institution represented 60% of income in 1999 compared with 40% about 30 years earlier for low-income families. Other studies cite other comparable rates, but the point is the same.

Are we complicit in this? Sure we are. And here are some reasons why.

- Those of us who are actively involved in tuition pricing decisions that create a growing affordability burden certainly share the blame.
- Those of us who either actively advocate or passively permit fee creep on our campuses are at fault.
- Those of us who aren’t doing all that we can to control the costs of our services and programs contribute to the problem.
- Those of us who will eat an extravagant meal or two at this conference and pass those costs back to our institutional budgets to be paid by student tuition (indirectly but in large part) aren’t innocent.
Those of us who have failed over the years to paint a sufficiently vivid portrait for our boards, our faculty and our presidents of the extraordinary lengths our students and families go to afford our escalating costs are hardly blameless.

Of course we’re all inescapably, undeniably collectively guilty of contributing to the escalating costs—tuition and otherwise—borne by our students. But our roles and responsibilities in battling the ever-escalating costs and list price of an American college or university education are not my focus today.

The increasingly vehement rhetoric being levied against you, against me—against us—in the heated access debate is focused not upon institutional tuition pricing decisions so generally but more specifically upon the practices and purposes and principles of enrollment management.

In particular, the focus is usually on how the practice of strategic enrollment management (SEM) has introduced approaches to net revenue optimization which use institutionally budgeted funds to shape enrollment profiles, particularly via price discounting. But while that’s the specific practice most frequently criticized, the indictments are levied against SEM broadly.

Let me give you some of the verbatim comments from some of the more august commentators on the national crisis of access:

- "Over the last ten to fifteen years, colleges and universities (and the consulting industry that supports and is supported by them) have responded to intensified competition for students by adopting an instrumental view of financial aid as part of an enrollment management strategy. Rather than seeking to eliminate price as a factor in college choice, which is the official ideology in 'meeting need,' schools are turning the net price to their advantage in the competitive struggle."

- "The Ivy League schools are latecomers to the use of financial aid as a competitive strategy. The rest of the industry is well ahead in using merit aid, preferential and differential packaging, idiosyncratic measurement of need, and other techniques to make their aid dollars serve institutional self-interest."

- "Non-need aid is only a partial indicator of the extent to which colleges [now] use aid as a competitive device. Other enrollment management strategies are less easy to measure quantitatively. However, many indicators suggest that colleges are departing further and further from the kind of aid award practices that a simple focus on meeting need would imply."

And here’s the sweeping judgment by these scholars and presidents commenting on the practice of enrollment management:

- "These trends are no doubt dismaying to many college leaders, and especially to student aid officials, most of who feel strong professional and ethical commitments to a need-based aid system."

There’s nothing subtle here. There’s nothing even thinly veiled in these indictments of enrollment management; in these assertions that it is SEM (particularly as reflected in the emergence of elaborate and market-responsive price differentiation strategies) that is partially contributing to the empty promises of access in higher education; in these accusations that SEM is somehow violating professional and ethical standards in ways which many college leaders would find abhorrent.

This is an unfortunate dimension of the access debate—and like the access challenge itself, it shows no sign of abating. The national dialogue has presented to us a challenge of the first order which, if AACRAO indeed purports to be the professional home of SEM, must be addressed head on by this association, by its leadership, and by its membership.

Let me offer one slight caveat here: This same indictment is echoed overseas. For example, as institutions in the UK begin to charge students tuition and fees for the first time, they realize that they thereby become organizations ruled by market forces. They are questioning how they will be able to remain committed to
access as the dominant social good, realized through previous funding models, once they’ve succumbed to the marketization of the academy. So they look across the pond to the US—to consider what lessons are to be learned from this emerging practice of enrollment management—and they find us wanting in nearly every regard. My Enrollment Management team at DePaul has begun a dialogue with several associations and consortia of institutions in the UK—on the basis of DePaul’s visible and mission-driven commitment to balancing access with market savvy and market responsiveness. In general, the international verdict is as clear as the accusations from within the American higher education community: The persistent access crisis in the US has as one of its culprits or catalysts the emergence of the practices and perspectives of SEM.

SYSTEMIC DYNAMICS

So here’s where I’d like us to begin to play “truth or dare” in trying to grapple with the complex and clearly controversial connection between access and SEM at the institutional level.

We know the truth about the increasing challenges created by the shifting priorities and politics, roles and resources of federal and state governments in ensuring access. But have we fully explored the truth about the institutional dynamics also at work?

Should we dare those who judge enrollment management practices so harshly to first explore the broader market factors and systemic market structures that are foundational to any strategic enrollment outcome? Will any of us dare our institutional leadership to reconcile their rhetoric about their commitment to access with the realities of the institutional priorities that guide their strategic plans (especially their pursuit of prestige) which may work in direct opposition to the access goals they espouse?

Here’s my first challenge that I want to pose to you today: Are our commitments to the promise and premise of access and our commitments to the practices and principles of SEM invariably, essentially and irreconcilably at odds?

Although there are indignant voices in this national discourse that would boldly, even belligerently say “yes,” I think that it is only through the perspective and practice of SEM that institutions can fully comprehend and thereby effectively respond to the challenge and the hope of access at the institutional level.

EXAMPLE 1: AID LEVERAGE AND DISCOUNT ANALYSIS

Let me share with you one very traditional enrollment management tool that has emerged as an approach to mapping and measuring an enrollment strategy—and more specifically as a tool for allocating or leveraging financial aid resources toward the realization of enrollment priorities including but not limited to access.

Our basic approach is to array a student population, in this case a freshman class, across two dimensions:

- **Academic profile:** a six-point grading of academic preparedness (ACT, GPA, etc) across the x axis from low to the left to the best and brightest on the right.
- **Family financial resources:** a six-tiered scale from the least affluent at the bottom and more affluent toward the top, with the highest row being those not even filing for financial assistance.
What this analysis enables us to do is to segment our entire student population (or in this case a freshman class) across these two dimensions. Each cell on this grid represents a segment of the student body—described simultaneously by their academic abilities and their financial resources. The size of the bubble in each cell represents the number of students in that segment.

At its simplest level, this grid enables us to identify, compare and contrast the enrollment dynamics characteristic of the:
- highest income/highest ability students toward the top right
- lowest income/lowest ability toward the bottom left
- highest income/lowest ability toward the top left
- low income but very well prepared students toward the bottom right of this chart

Every institution can array its student profile similarly, though the actual range of each axis will vary by institution.

The array of enrolled students is actually drawn from the profile of students admitted to the university. This chart shows that group of admitted students—with a notably larger group of students on the top row, representing all of those who apply and who are admitted but whose interest in our institution was not strong enough to prompt them to apply for financial aid.

So our enrollment strategy is focused on achieving a competitive and sufficient ‘enrollment yield’ from that admitted pool and across the widely varying segments of students applying and admitted. This chart shows the yield rate, or the percent of those admitted who actually enrolled at the institution. We see considerable variance in those yield rates across the various segments—representing the institution’s position in the market and the outcomes of efforts to recruit and enroll its desired mix.

In this case, you find a higher enrollment yield as you move down the chart—a reflection of an institution committed to access and enabling students of limited means to be able to enroll, across all levels of academic ability.

At most institutions, enrollment strategy is focused on achieving competitive and sufficient ‘enrollment yields’ across various segments, which requires widely varying levels of institutional financial aid to achieve those yield rates. Unless that aid is underwritten by endowment resources, that level of institutional aid can be described as a “tuition discount,” or the amount of grant/scholarship aid offered as a percent of tuition.
In this case, we see larger discounts as one moves down in each column, reflective of greater financial commitments to respond to financial need. We also see larger discounts as one moves to the right, reflective of the greater discount required to achieve a competitive yield rate among the higher profile students who have more options available to them.

So here’s the big picture that an enrollment manager must look at in a freshman class: for an entire class and after all financial aid is allocated to shape that class, the resulting aggregate net revenue for the institution can be arrayed across this grid. And we see that a disproportionate share of net revenue comes from certain segments of the class.

To illustrate, the blue-shaded cell (to the lower right) and the green-shaded cell (to the upper left) have exactly the same number of students charged the exact same tuition rate to enroll at our institution. But the institution on average nets over twice as much revenue from the green segment than the blue; in other words, it takes two blue-cell students (academically well prepared but financially needy) to generate the same revenue as one green-cell student (less academically prepared but with more financial resources available).

Of course, most enrollment strategies are not only about revenue. This grid illustrates other insights that come from this analytic approach; in this case the institution’s commitment to ensuring diversity. In this chart, we’re simply looking at the percentage of each cell that is comprised of Black or Hispanic/Latino students. We see these students disproportionately clustered in the lower tiers of financial ability. And while arrayed across all academic ability columns, they cluster disproportionately in the lower left. Particularly, the diversity of the aforementioned blue-shaded segment of students, which generates half as much net tuition revenue per student that the green segment, has more than three times greater diversity or representation of Black and Hispanic/Latino students than the green.

“Managing the mix” defines the enrollment management challenge on our campuses, and the forces affecting that mix include the different interests of key institutional stakeholders:

- Who pushes strategy toward the right—toward higher and higher academic profile or merit? (Typically the faculty, the deans, and chief academic officers. Also, the entire rankings industry in higher education and the student market that equates institutional quality with academic profile of its students creates pressure to shift profile to the right.)
- Who pushes strategy upward—particularly toward the upper left, toward higher and higher net revenue margin? (Typically the CFOs and often the board.)
- Who pushes strategy downward—particularly toward the bottom right, toward meeting the needs of the financially disadvantaged but academically capable? (Typically the financial aid officers and, depending on the school, the mission of the institution.)
- What pulls an enrollment strategy toward the bottom left—toward less affluent and less prepared students? (The entire tsunami of demographic and societal change that the admissions office faces in the coming decade pulls us in that direction.)
The challenges and tensions of SEM can be in large part defined by the strategic balancing of these competing forces.

What I have just shown you is the basic construct which SEM’s critics have in their crosshairs when taking shots at how the practice of enrollment management is partially to blame for our current access crisis. That’s because this kind of analytic model and process allows some institutions in a clear, calculated manner to trade off using financial aid to solely “meet need,” with using aid to improve yield among high ability or more affluent segments of the student market. This is done in order to shape their enrollment and realize goals of quality, diversity, and net revenue—in addition to access. Unfortunately, in much of that criticism, this single analytic tool is equated with SEM and vice versa.

I understand why the critics of enrollment management techniques are upset with this; I too tend to curse my hammer every time I whack my thumb. But I would argue: what better way to help our institutions—our executives, boards, faculty—understand those tradeoffs and appreciate the balancing act that is strategic enrollment management? We can bemoan the fact that these tools enable schools to leverage institutionally budgeted aid toward goals and objectives other than ensuring access for the neediest, but isn’t the truth that these tools also enable us to frame the debate about access in more meaningful and measurable terms than ever before? Isn’t it the development of these very SEM constructs and perspectives that has helped us weigh the real costs of our values and ambitions, to know the price of our principles, to quantify the inextricably intertwined interdependencies of our institutional intentions, and thereby juxtapose our rhetoric about access with the reality of our institution’s multiple enrollment goals?

Do we have incompatible values at work here? There is no doubt that we do. However, there is no incompatibility between the practice of enrollment management per se and the goal of access.

In fact, it is the SEM perspective that brings to the forefront of our attention the fundamental conflicts that have long resided in our multiple institutional values. It also brings to the forefront the chasm between the rhetoric of our values and the reality of our actions, and the incompatibility of many of the directions pursued simultaneously as part of our institutions’ strategic enrollment goals.

And that’s my dare to you today as campus leaders: to ensure that SEM on your campus is not a de facto surrender of your access commitments and values, but rather is acknowledged as a strategic way to embrace the challenge of access, to elevate the dialogue and energize the debate, and to enlighten the decisions we make every day at the institutional level.

As an aside: The critique of these approaches to SEM, as I offered to you earlier, continues to be grounded in calls to return to approaches of “meeting the need” of all students rather than using scholarships and grants to shape other dimensions of the enrollment profile. The critiques stake out some presumed moral highground that is the exclusive province of need-based aid strategies. But let’s be honest—the concept of “meeting need” lost any meaning ages ago. Our calculations of need are problematic, and our rhetoric about meeting need is disingenuous in light of the fact that most of us have absolutely no clue as to how the expected family contribution (EFC), which determines calculated need, is managed by most families.
Few institutions have unpacked the black box of the EFC, and therefore should not dare to hide behind meeting residual need as a sufficient gauge of ensuring access.  

The truth is this—the formulaic fortress within which some critics of enrollment management take shelter is itself a flimsy house of cards. On this 40th anniversary year of the 1965 Higher Education Act that created it, do we dare now lay bare the truth about the shortcomings of the entire federal formulae, which while well intentioned, hardly offers a solid and sufficient foundation for mapping and measuring and maintaining access?

**EXAMPLE #2: US NEWS & WORLD REPORT AND THE PURSUIT OF PRESTIGE**

Let me offer a second example of how an enrollment management perspective on access at the institutional level brings to us ways to help our institutions appreciate the incompatible values that frame and fuel this challenge. In this case, we won’t look at the incompatibilities between SEM and access, but between access and our institutions’ aspirations for prestige—particularly as reflected in national rankings such as U.S. News & World Report.

In this so-called box and whiskers chart, we see:

- Arrayed across the horizontal or x-axis, the four tiers of national doctoral institutions, according to the rankings of U.S. News. The highest ranked institutions—Tier 1—is at the left, and moving right we have Tiers 2, 3 and then 4.  
- Up the y-axis we’ll see the various measures that comprise the rankings; in this case the peer assessment, or the subjective rating of quality on a scale of 1 to 5.  
- Each box shows the range of the 25th to the 75th percentile of those ratings for each tier. The top line is the highest score and the bottom line is the lowest score at each tier. The bold mark within each red box marks the median for each tier.  
- The long line across the chart represents DePaul’s rating—in this case right at the median of Tier 3, below the 25th percentile of Tier 2, and lower than any Tier 1 institution.

The point is to note the relationship between this variable (peer ratings) and the ranking of Tiers 1 through 4. Naturally, there’s a relationship since the peer assessment is one of the variables that determines the ranking that’s reflected in the U.S. News tiers.

We see the same pattern for the average ACT score for the institutions’ freshmen classes; with the median for Tier 2 the same as the lowest of all the Tier 1 schools. DePaul is at the median for Tier 3.

The pattern for high school class rank is remarkable, showing clearly how widely disparate the freshman class at Tier 1 schools is from the rest of the field.
The acceptance rate (or the percent of applicants admitted) is an inverse relationship. The lower the admit rate, or the greater the selectivity, the better the ranking. However, the median admit rate is obviously similar across Tiers 2 through 4. The top Tier 1 doctoral universities have such demand that their median acceptance rate is lower than any institution in any other tier. DePaul’s admit rate, by contrast, while at the median for Tier 2, is higher than nearly all Tier 1 institutions.

One of the measures purportedly related to the academic quality of the student experience is the percent of classes that have 20 or fewer students enrolled. As this chart shows, there is not as much of a skew across the U.S. News tiers on this variable. On this measure, DePaul has a higher percentage of small classes than 75% of Tier 2 or 3 schools and is at the median of Tier 1 institutions.

Freshman-to-sophomore retention rates are enrollment ratios also related to academic reputation. Again, the relationship between retention rates and the rankings is striking. Tier 1 institutions demonstrate a high and also highly compressed range of retention rates compared to the other tiers. On this measure, DePaul is the highest of the Tier 3 schools and at the median of Tier 2, but still lower than all Tier 1 institutions.

Graduation rates demonstrate a similar pattern. The proportion of freshmen who eventually graduate from an institution (and the relationship of that measure with other indicators of reputation and quality) is strongly reflected in the rankings and in this chart.

All of these charts have only been a preface to the point I want to make regarding the relationship of prestige and access. The previous charts show a relationship between a certain variable and the Tier 1 through 4 rankings, as you would expect since they are all variables that define those rankings in the U.S. News calculations.

This slide, however, demonstrates a relationship that is not part of the U.S. News rankings. It shows the percent of freshmen receiving federal grant aid, or a Pell Grant, indicative of the neediest of students attending college. In the slide, the graph on the left is for private institutions and the graph on the right is for public doctoral universities.

The top tier institutions have a very low percent of students eligible for Pell grants. DePaul’s percentage is at the median of Tier 3, above the 75th percentile of Tier 2, and by considerable margin greater than any Tier 1.
This slide also demonstrates a relationship that is not part of the U.S. News rankings. It shows the percent of freshmen who are African American or Hispanic/Latino. (Again, the graph on the left is for private universities, the graph on the right is public.) In these graphs, the red bars show undergraduate enrollment and the green bars show graduate enrollment.

We see again that the percentage of the enrollment in top tier doctoral universities comprised of underrepresented minorities is very low, and the contrast with the diversity in Tier 4 is staggering. DePaul, with a minority enrollment at the 75th percentile of Tier 3 institutions has a higher percentage of African American and Hispanic/Latino enrollment than any private Tier 2 or Tier 1 institution.

So there you have it: U.S. News rankings are not just “beauty contests” or measures of reputation. There is a predictable, highly demonstrable relationship between the U.S. News rankings and any number of other empirical factors that are in fact the determinants of the rankings themselves (such as ACT profile, graduation rates, faculty resources, etc.). But my point today is to show you that there is also a relationship with some other factors such as racial/ethnic diversity and socioeconomic diversity. Taking DePaul as one provocative example, can an institution be as socioeconomically and racially/ethnically diverse as DePaul and still achieve and demonstrate the other academic measures that drive these rankings—measures that have come to be accepted as the sine qua non definition of quality in American higher education? These charts would seem to suggest that it is not probable in that there are no institutions that have such a profile. At least it’s a formidable and strategic challenge—and one that cuts to the heart of the access debate.

Yet the compulsive push for prestige persists. This collective press to achieve higher and higher rankings is reflected best in the following quote from an article by the Association of Governing Boards. Out of my sense of decency, I’ve omitted the name of the university president being described here:

“[The President] keeps his eye on the prize, too. He carries a laminated index card that lists his 2000-2005 presidential priorities. Topping the list is moving the undergraduate ranking from Tier 3 to Tier 2. He has a great incentive to accomplish this goal: For every year [his university] is ranked in Tier 2, the board has promised him a $25,000 bonus.” (AGB Priorities)

Do we need any clearer signal that the purposes and priorities in American higher education have gotten completely out of whack? My esteemed colleagues, the sad truth is that the challenge of access doesn’t simply lie in the tug-of-war of enrollment goals I illustrated earlier. No, in very real ways and as these charts show, the truth of the matter is that any commitment to access runs headlong into the buzz saw of institutional vanity.

Any time we bow to the superior status granted by these rankings and their indices of quality, we pay homage to a stratification of American higher education that underlies and likely perpetuates the challenge of access. And I think the challenges of the times and the unfulfilled visions of 1965 dare each of us to tell the truth to our institutional leadership about how all of this interacts and intersects. Perhaps our goals should be to have university presidents carry a laminated card that simply reminds them of the disturbing fact we saw earlier: the percent of high-ability/low-income students going to college in America equals the percent of lowest ability/highest income students.
And while I’m on this soapbox, let me go ahead and include a few others in my round-up of not-so-usual suspects in this cult of prestige.

The compulsive pursuit of prestige has been decried in a number of other professional associations of many of our closest colleagues—most notably those meetings of admissions counselors, high school guidance professionals, financial aid professionals, and at gatherings such as College Board meetings. There’s a disturbing and increasingly shrill decibel level in the cries of “let’s blame the college marketing and enrollment management leaders” for eroding the integrity of this heretofore pristine and ethically pure process of college choice, selection and admission. AACRAO shouldn’t be silent in response to the disingenuous diatribes by a segment of our educational industry that is every bit as complicit in the celebration of prestige for its own sake.

You see, as one of the acknowledged national leaders in the evolution of SEM in higher education, I’ll gladly accept their criticism—but only once I no longer see prominent college prep high schools publishing senior class profiles that dedicate three pages to the handful of their students admitted to the Ivy’s while only footnoting the huge proportion of their class choosing to attend the local community college or nearby regional public university.

As one of the earliest architects of analytic models for using merit-based aid in pursuit of institutional enrollment goals, I’ll accept the blame from the high school community for the growth in merit scholarships to shape enrollment—but only once I go to their National Honor Society banquets and see that they’ve stopped celebrating all the merit scholarships their seniors have won from the colleges they’ve applied to, thereby using the very practice they decry as a primary outcome measure of their own educational excellence.

I’ll shoulder my share of responsibility for the feverish state of the insanely intense competition over the best and brightest students—but only once I see that high school counselors have dropped the notion and the language of “reach schools,” which is an aspirational set of institutions sufficiently selective enough that the student is not likely to be admitted, but therefore valued all the more—perhaps valued only because of their exclusivity and selectivity.

Do we dare tell the truth that the marketing practices in American higher education today are not the cause but rather the consequence of a society insatiably engaged in the pursuit of prestige? The emergence of enrollment management and marketing practices in higher education does not drive America’s infatuation with prestige; in fact, I suspect it’s just the opposite. The truth is that colleges, like cologne, cognac and caviar, derive value from being accessible to the privileged few. It may be that their exclusivity and selectivity is in itself their primary value.

And if you need any additional evidence that this is the case, look no further than the approach of your credit rating agencies—the organizations charged with determining your institution’s credit worthiness and thereby determining your institution’s capacity to borrow and the cost of your capital. Moody’s, Standard and Poor’s, and the like all share a common approach—assessing the strength of an institution’s competitive market position using as a primary metric of market position its admission rate, or admission selectivity. So I’m forced to wonder: Is the value our institutions hold in the bond markets tied directly to a measurement of quality, exclusivity, prestige and market position which in real ways runs counter to a commitment to access? Do we dare ask that question? Can we handle the truth it may reveal?

And here’s my final shot—and perhaps the ultimate irony: The Chronicle of Higher Education, our industry newspaper, has been weighing in on this matter with their own indictments of what marketing and enrollment management and rankings have done to the college admissions process. And where else should we turn to for the truth in these matters than to our industry paper? Yet the Chronicle occasionally falls prey to
the very same compulsion by lavishing disproportionate attention on the few institutions catering to the most elite strata of American families and students. In the latest special Chronicle insert about college admissions, appearing just a few weeks ago, article after article addressed the growing crisis in competitive college admissions. But if one looks at all of the institutions profiled, at the admissions directors quoted or featured, the Chronicle commits the very bias it bemoans. My colleague Jon Boeckenstedt tallied it up: The average SAT score for the institutions profiled and interviewed in this issue on college admissions was about 1400—a group of institutions that occupy that rarefied air of the most prestigious serving the most privileged. My opinion on all of this, if I was inclined to share it, would have something to do with those who point out the speck in another’s eye while ignoring the log in their own. But this is a podium, not a pulpit, so I’ll move on.

My point for you today is this: I think it is the SEM perspective on things like the U.S. News rankings that is needed to peel back the layers—not of the rankings per se as I’ve done in this example—but rather of the underlying market structures and stratifications that the rankings simply reflect.

EXAMPLE #3: UNDERSTANDING THE HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETPLACE

And that brings me to what I’d like to offer, in closing, as a third example of how you, as institutional leaders, can help elevate and elucidate these discussions on your own campuses.

What each of my last two examples offered were insights into how various factors are intertwined and interdependent threads in the tightly woven tapestry of the higher education marketplace—threads that make our conversation about access at the institutional level more intricate than many initially acknowledge.

- The first example was at the institutional level—showing how market forces are reflected in the differential pricing and tuition discounting required to leverage enrollment yield among different segments of students at a particular institution given its particular place in the competitive market, and thereby how various institutional goals can conflict with access goals.
- The second example showed how rankings themselves are interwoven with issues of diversity and access, ensuring that the singular pursuit of prestige can and does unravel or erode our commitment to access.
- My third example elevates our vantage point on the higher education marketplace to 30,000 feet—and gives a similar, but broader, lay of the land that is often missing in our campus dialogues about access.

This is a glimpse at the higher education marketplace, developed by my colleague Brian Zucker, president of Human Capital Research.

Each bubble on this graph represents one of America’s four-year colleges or universities. The light blue are private, the dark blue are public. The size of the bubble is the size of the freshman class.

Each institution is plotted on two dimensions:

1. The horizontal or x-axis (like the freshman grids we saw earlier) shows the academic profile of the institution—a composite measure of quality indicators of the student body (test scores, high school preparation, etc.), arrayed from 0 to 100 in percentiles. In other words, the column of cells to the far right represents schools in the top 10% of academic profile nationally.
2. The y-axis shows the average net tuition revenue generated per full-time undergraduate, from $0 to $25,000. That’s why the public institutions are arrayed along the bottom, given their lower average tuition.
Every one of you here today from four-year institutions has a place on this bubble map of the higher education marketplace. You have a place on the continuum of academic profile and a net revenue average, and, at least among the private institutions, you see that these two are related.

To make the presentation clearer, we’ll use this second format. This is for private four-year institutions only. The green bubble is DePaul, the blue bubbles are all other private institutions, and the red bubbles are the schools that comprise DePaul’s primary competitors in terms of applicant overlap. This is a map of the competitive sandbox in which DePaul plays, a map within which all our strategic thinking and planning must occur.

Clearly we see that as you move up in academic profile, schools tend to gain in net tuition revenue—but not appreciable until you get into the top 25%. DePaul, by contrast, achieves substantially greater net tuition revenue per student than is characteristic of institutions with our academic profile—as shown by how far above the statistical regression trend line we are.

This chart shows the admit rate for these schools. Again, selectivity is quite comparable across most of the market (between 70 to 80% on average) until you get into the top 25% or so—where demand increases and selectivity tightens. Again, DePaul is where one would expect, though its primary competition is much more selective since they are generally higher profile institutions (further to the right).

This perspective on the mapping of the market can include variables other than enrollment ratios. Here we see the total cost of instruction per FTE, reflective of the level of investment made in the education of each student at each institution. The institutions with the highest profile have the most to spend per student and do so.

Likewise, we can plot the total net assets for institutions arrayed across the academic spectrum. Here we see that as academic profile rises, so do the total institutional assets per FTE student. (Or is it vice versa? Well, that’s the question, isn’t it?) In this case, DePaul’s position and performance are not as strong as would be expected given these market dynamics.

The endowment per FTE also skyrockets as the academic profile rises. DePaul’s endowment is lower than institutions of similar academic profile and certainly lower per FTE than most of our primary competitors. But the trajectory demonstrated here of how endowment is related to academic position in the market is powerful.
Is it any surprise that since the higher the academic profile, the greater the selectivity and the greater the financial resources available per student, we see that the graduation rate is also higher? These graduation rates aren’t higher because these schools work harder at retention; their graduation rates are institutional attributes that correlate with all these other indices of market position.

And DePaul is exactly where it would be predicted to be in six-year graduation rates—but lower than its primary competitors who are also higher on the academic profile axis.

All of this brings me to the following series of slides that illustrate certain measures of financial access and accessibility as they relate to the structure and symmetry of the higher education marketplace that these bubble maps are intended to reveal.

This chart shows the percent of freshman applying for aid. As the academic profile rises, the percent of students seeking financial assistance drops, declining steeply in the top 20% of institutions. Relative to the marketplace at large, DePaul has a lower percentage of freshmen filing for assistance than would be predicted from its academic profile.

Of those seeking financial assistance, what percent demonstrate financial need? Again, there is a relationship between academic profile and demonstrated need across private universities (i.e., the higher the profile, the fewer students with need). And again, this chart helps illustrate DePaul’s particular enrollment dynamic relative to the marketplace at large. While the prior chart showed that DePaul has a lower percentage of students filing for assistance, this chart shows that DePaul has a much higher percent of students with demonstrated financial need than most of its primary overlap competitors, but lower than most institutions with the same academic profile.

And here’s what I’ve been building to: How does the marketplace of colleges and universities look when considering the percent of freshmen at the lowest levels of family income?

Institutions at the high end of academic profile have a much lower percentage of low-income students—much lower than DePaul. DePaul has a higher percent of low-income students than nearly all of its competitors, and higher than would be expected from its academic profile, given its place relative to the trend line.
We looked at the incidence of Pell Grant recipients when we were exploring the U.S. News rankings in my earlier example, and we'll look at it again here, independent of rankings: the higher the academic profile, the lower the percent of students on Pell. A pretty striking trend line, isn’t it? The prevalence of the poor in an institution’s enrollment is inversely related to its academic profile relative to other institutions. DePaul, with a percent on Pell that would be expected from its academic profile, has a much greater percent receiving federal need-based grants than nearly all of its primary competitors.

And I conclude this series of charts with this kicker: this chart shows the other side of this dynamic—the percent of the freshman class that receives no institutional aid whatsoever and are therefore “full-pay” students.

First, the trend line shows how rapidly the “percent full pay” increases among higher profile schools. But DePaul has an atypically high percentage of full-pay students for an institution with its profile. To command this level of full-pay students, one would expect an academic profile in the top 10 to 15% nationally. (The reasons for this and what it says about DePaul’s enrollment and marketing strategy are a topic for another day.)

The points I’m making with this particular market analysis are twofold. First, this analysis is intended to illustrate how some indicators of access—such as family income, levels of need, reliance on federal aid—are reflective of systemic structures and symmetries in the higher education marketplace in which we strive to survive and thrive. As we saw with the U.S. News analysis, diversity and access are dynamics intertwined with reputation and academic quality in myriad and systemic ways. These bubble charts show that effectively charting an enrollment strategy that couples access with quality goals requires both an understanding of an institution’s competitive market position and the interrelationships of these various elements of market position. It’s obvious how the prevailing structures and symmetries of the marketplace define the competitive playing field within which we have to balance our various goals and aspirations. How could you forge a truly strategic enrollment plan that includes access goals without first having this comprehensive picture of the structure of the competitive arena?

Second, by what measures do you assess your institution’s commitment to goals of access? I’ve suggested a few here, and it is not surprising that many enrollment managers, while quite capable of and comfortable with citing statistics about admit rates and average ACT scores, sometimes aren’t quite as fluent in measures of access. We should all be vigilant in asking ourselves: How do we measure access, and what evidence would we have of progress toward our institution’s access goals if we in fact made any? In what measurable directions on these charts and bubble maps are we trying to move as we make strategic plans and choices for our institutions? And where do we stand as our institutional leaders push to move to the right, to raise academic profile and prestige, when we know how that is likely to work directly against access goals—given these maps of the marketplace.

Before concluding, I should note two things by way of context for all of this analysis.

First, much of what I’ve shown here today in these examples illustrates the particular purposes underlying enrollment management at DePaul University—purposes which are firmly grounded in how the university’s
Vincentian mission shapes the goals and aspirations we pursue in our enrollment strategy. SEM, pure and simple, is always a mission-driven enterprise. In that regard, much of the critique in the national dialogue of the practice of SEM is perhaps more rightfully focused on the missions of our institutions and how effectively they are interpreted by and integrated with the enrollment strategy. A commitment to access is at the core of DePaul’s marketing and enrollment strategy.

Second, this type of analysis emanates from and is illustrative of the definition of SEM which I introduced in my plenary speech at AACRAO’s 2003 SEM conference held in Boston at which I was asked to define and redefine SEM for the years ahead. I offer that definition again for you here: The focus of SEM is the systematic evaluation of an institution’s competitive market position; the foundation of SEM is the development of a research-based definition of the desired or preferred strategic market position relative to key competitors; and the functions of SEM are the marshalling and managing of institutional plans, priorities, processes and resources to either strengthen or shift that market position in pursuit of the institution’s mission and its optimal enrollment, academic and financial profile.

In that address, I argued that SEM is first and foremost a market-centered enterprise that begins with an understanding of an institution’s market position and then marshals the institution’s planning around strengthening or shifting that position. This is a different approach to SEM than how it is commonly conceived, yet it’s the one we’ve embraced at DePaul and are developing with my colleague Brian Zucker at Human Capital Research. That’s the perspective guiding what I’ve presented here today.

**CONCLUSION**

But for now, and in conclusion, two of our more articulate commentators in the access debate conclude in an essay on the institutional role in ensuring the promise of access that there is little at the institutional level we can do to affect the current state of affairs.

Their premise is sound; these systemic market factors do limit what most institutions can readily set out to achieve independently and of their own volition. But I nevertheless ask you to join me in rejecting their surrender of the flag so prematurely. And so I toss the gauntlet:

- What are you prepared to do about the challenge of access—as institutional leaders and through the perspective of SEM?
- Are you to be counted among those with indignant voices who bemoan that they are innocent victims in this situation, standing like indifferent voyeurs on the sidelines as these verdicts are rendered—as if you all are not inescapably engaged in the game?
- Are you complicit in the pursuit of prestige for prestige’s sake, complicit in your institution’s vanity as your faculty and boards and executives all aspire for yours to be the kind of institution that has as its greatest claim to fame that it can make a silk purse out of silk?
- Are you content to be a passive pawn in this game, straddling helplessly and torn hopelessly between incompatible values rather than embracing those conflicts as the source of the very potential energy and tension needed to frame and forge strategic choices?
Let me dare you to embrace this challenge and this opportunity: Where there are incompatible values in how your institutions are crafting their strategic plans, I dare you to use the principles and perspectives of SEM to cultivate more informed viewpoints that show the truth about how commitments to access either complement, coexist or conflict with other aspirations; I dare you to affirm on your campus that SEM in itself is not the problem but perhaps is the only potential solution at the institutional level to these challenges.

I dare you to revisit the inspired visions of 40 years ago, to learn from the inescapable verdicts of our collective efforts to date, and recreate at each of your institutions an intensified vigor and vitality and vigilance on the promise and premise of access—using SEM perspectives and principles to elevate and energize and enlighten that dialogue in ways otherwise impossible.

Finally, rather than be the institutional villains, let's all bring to the policy debate a set of perspectives and principles that are distinguished by both their daring and their truthfulness—what we might call “intrepid veracity.” These times require us all to explore new ways of balancing the competing values of our institutions and experiment with new ways of managing the inevitable tradeoffs we all face at the institutional level. And by doing so, let’s vow to help our boards, our faculty, and our executive leadership be open to new and innovative vistas of opportunity at the institutional level.

I ask you to join me—together, it would truly be an incredible voyage.