Enrollment Management
White Paper

BACKGROUND

East Central University has made several, intermittent attempts to have an integrated enrollment management plan. In 2002, the university created an enrollment management committee which made several recommendations. Committee recommendations were implemented with some measure of success (Freshman Seminar, inclusive advising, Career Center, etc.), but not all recommendations were addressed and some that were addressed may benefit from updating. Another attempt to address enrollment management resulted in hiring an enrollment management director in 2004. However, this position lacked the authority to make decisions necessary to guide enrollment management initiatives. Since then, ECU has installed a new admissions module to the student information system (SEM) and split the Records and Admissions office, in order to combine the Admissions and Recruiting offices. Additionally, there has been tremendous personnel turnover from the front line staff to the executive level administration, making it difficult to implement a strategic vision for enrollment management. This, along with significant financial cuts over the last four years and eroding public trust in higher education, make enrollment management at East Central University a difficult proposition.

Since 2010, ECU has seen a steady decline in enrollment, from a high headcount in 2010 (4,893) to a low in 2017 (3,723). Of greater concern than the steady decrease, is that the decrease is occurring in almost all recruiting categories (incoming freshman, transfer, graduate) as well as in retention across the board. Historically, ECU one-year retention percentage hovers in the low 60% range. However, the first time, full-time freshman one-year retention rate from 2015 to 2016 was 52% and from 2016 to 2017 was 46%. In Fall 2015, ECU experienced a large increase in new international students. For a variety of reasons, these students were not retained. Major numbers have decreased for almost every major, making discussions about program viability a necessity. While new programs have shown growth, none have shown explosive growth. The university needs a comprehensive strategic approach to enrollment management.

LESSONS LEARNED

During these enrollment declines, several key concepts have emerged:

1. All employees and units in the university must be involved in a strategic effort to improve enrollment management.
2. The university must develop an enrollment management plan that includes clear benchmarks and accountability.
3. The university must be vigilant in keeping the focus on the students and their success.

NATIONAL TRENDS

In 2017, ECU contracted with Noel Levitz to scan ECU's enrollment management status and efforts. Unless otherwise indicated, the data in this section is pulled from that report.

Universities across the country are seeing a decrease in enrollment. Total enrollment in degree-granting institutions has declined by more than 800,000 students in four years. The National Student Clearinghouse reported ten consecutive term of declines from spring 2012 to fall 2016. Additionally, the number of high school graduates is projected to decline over the next decade. However, one bright spot is that Oklahoma, Texas and Kansas are expecting increases in the number of high school graduates.

Noel Levitz also provided information on 'the competition factor', that is, how many high school graduates from a particular state attend institutions of higher education in *another* state. The chart below indicates the percentage and numbers of students in the surrounding states who attend out of state schools.

State	*Percentage* of students who leave the state to go to college	*Number* of students who leave the state to go to college
Arkansas	9.5%	1,940
Colorado	22.2%	7,826
Kansas	13.9%	3,181
Missouri	16.9%	7,118
Texas	10.6%	20,294

Two national opportunities for growth identified by Noel Levitz are growth in graduate enrollment (expected to increase 18% over the next decade) and growth of online enrollment.

STRATEGIC THEMES
Based on previous enrollment management evaluations, the information generated during the data-gathering stage of the strategic planning process, and data provided by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, three strategic themes have emerged: Planning, Recruitment, and Retention.

While the university needs to undergo strategic planning for enrollment management, some short term strategies for both recruitment and retention will need to be developed and implemented.

Immediate recruitment strategies could include identifying one target market (perhaps high school graduates in ECU's service area) and developing the elements of the larger strategic plan (marketing, communication etc.) for that target market. Immediate retention strategies could be identified and pursued such as identifying and eliminating process barriers, and providing faculty development for teaching, learning, and retention.

While these immediate strategies are ongoing, ECU needs to invest in developing a comprehensive enrollment management plan that has clear benchmarks and accountability. The plan should cover at least five years and include an annual goals, strategies and actions. The plan should include the following:
- Identified target audiences which may include
  - Potential students in ECU's service area, including historical top feeder schools
  - Students from Texas, particularly north Texas
  - Native American students
  - And other appropriate/relevant groups of students like legacy recruits, ACT scores, athletes, transfers, etc.
  - Identify market position relative to peers and competitors
  - Work with school counselors and other data sources to predict enrollment
  - Create realistic enrollment targets/goals
- Marketing plan
  - Targeted to identified audiences

- o Communicated to faculty and staff for consistent messaging
- o Improved website and other materials
- o Explore and use relevant media and technologies
- o Enhance and manage our brand
- o Tell our story
- o Showcase our students
- Communication plan
  - o Majors and quality
  - o Affordability
  - o Outcomes such as placement rates, graduate school acceptance, etc.
  - o Fit
  - o Addresses parents
- Referral plan – take advantage of loyal alumni, faculty, teachers, coaches, school counselors and other school personnel, etc.
- Academic Offerings
  - o Create realistic enrollment goals by program
  - o Identify possible new programs
  - o Revise or delete unsustainable programs
  - o Identify delivery methods that attract students
- Annual Marketing and Recruitment plan
  - o Measurable goals (for each identified audience)
  - o Strategies to support goals
  - o Action plan of how each strategy will be implemented and evaluated
  - o Continuously evaluate and monitor student satisfaction
- Retention Plan
  - o Identify and implement communication strategies for continuing students
  - o Identify and eliminate barriers to enrollment and persistence
  - o Implement student success relationship management based on the Noel Levitz model of student stages (i.e. develop success strategies appropriate– enrollment, year one, year two, etc.)
  - o Provide additional professional development for faculty in teaching, learning, and retention strategies
  - o Ensure students feel connected to ECU, being especially attentive to diverse populations (first generation, students of color, etc.)
  - o Improve student life, particularly food and after-hour activities
  - o Identify and use best practices and national trends (i.e. first to second year, etc.)
  - o Identify and use ECU data (i.e. application date, tiger alert results, satisfaction surveys, etc.)
- Organizational Issues
  - o Devise and implement a comprehensive customer service training program
  - o Create a culture of ECU!
  - o Investigate the optimal organizational structure
  - o Investigate the most optimal physical placement of offices/personnel (i.e. moving EOC geographically closer to financial aid, creating a visitor center)
  - o Develop communication mechanisms for staff involved in enrollment management
  - o Identify and eliminate silos
  - o Examine the relationship between recruitment and retention at ECU

- Leverage and align available and potential resources (NANTI, Trio programs, relationships with community, etc.)
- Investigate technologies that can assist in enrollment management, particularly retention.

The enrollment management committee should include (at a minimum) representation from:
- Admissions
- Financial Aid
- International Student Office
- School of Graduate Studies
- Records
- Academic Success Center
- Marketing and Communications
- Institutional Effectiveness
- Career Development Center
- Housing
- Athletics
- Deans
- Faculty

Additional representation may include:
- Employment Services
- Any/All TRIO programs (Student Success, Gear Up, EOC, etc.)
- Bursar
- Campus Involvement
- IT
- NASNTI grant
- Honors
- Foundation
- CETL

Additional representation may come through serving on designated working groups, rather than membership on the enrollment management committee. It is crucial that the committee
- Tie the plan to the budgeting process, by working with the executive team and the Resource Allocation Committee
- Collaborate and communicate with the divisions of the university (Academic Affairs, Student Development, Administration and Finance, Advancement, and Athletics)
- Ensure transparent communication of the committee's work throughout the planning process.
- Seek continuous input from students through focus groups, surveys, and additional mechanisms.

SHORT TERM
In the short term (6-12 months), ECU should establish an enrollment management committee with broad representation from both staff involved in enrollment management and wide-representation of faculty. The committee's three responsibilities would be to
1. Identify strategies the university could put into place immediately to improve recruiting (i.e. focus on prospective students in ECU's service area and working with an Online Program Management company).
2. Identify strategies the university could put into place immediately to improve retention (i.e. faculty development, managing relationships, inclusive culture, etc.)
3. Identify short term and long term customer service initiatives.
4. Consider contracting with external entities to evaluate academic programs
5. Develop an enrollment management plan

PROPOSED SHORT TERM BUDGET (FY19 or current fiscal year)
Costs are difficult to project since it depends significantly on what strategies are selected and how much external assistance is obtained.

- Bring per student recruiting spending to 80% of national average. Currently ECU spends ~$225/student. National median is $524/student. Move to $420/student. At 700 new students per year equals $300,000; $150,000 extra dollars during the short term for recruitment.
- Retention strategies could cost up to $150,000.
- Customer Service initiatives could cost up to $100,000 for training, salary adjustments, etc.
- External consulting could exceed $100,000.
- Development of the enrollment management plan could likely be completed in house with minimal cost.

LONG TERM
In the long term (12 months – 5 years), ECU should implement the enrollment management plan, continuously evaluating it for effectiveness and updating as needed. Accountability measures should be closely monitored at all administrative levels and adjustments made as needed.

PROPOSED LONG TERM BUDGET (future fiscal years)
Long term costs are even more difficult to project, but should be part of the enrollment management planning process.

- Bring per student recruitment spending to 100% of national average. After short term adjustment ECU would be spending $420/student. National median is $524/student. At 700 new students per year equals $370,000, a $70,000 increase from the year before and would continue every year.
- Additionally, we need to add costs for the rest of the enrollment management plan. These dollar amounts would need to be calculated as part of the long term enrollment management plan, but could be $200,000 annually for staffing and upgrades in all areas of enrollment management.