Achieving Graduate Enrollment Goals Through Smart Graduate Program Design

CGS Summer Workshop 2023
Today’s Presenters

Beth Donaldson, MPA
Managing Director, Adult Learner Recruitment
EAB

Mark Garrison, PhD
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies
Morgan State University
About Morgan State University

- HBCU founded in 1867
- The School of Graduate Studies enrolls about 1,500 students
- Program offerings include:
  - 29 doctoral programs
  - 42 master’s programs
  - 11 certificate programs
- Morgan seeks to ensure that the doors of higher education are opened as wide as possible to as many as possible
- In a phase of rapid growth at the undergraduate level, impacting the graduate school as well
The Program Planning Imperative
Program Planning Is a Core Element of GEM

Key Pieces of Graduate Enrollment Management

- Tuition and Financial Aid
- Student Success and Retention
- Environmental Scan
- Faculty and Resources
- Marketing and Recruitment
- Program Development

GEM Plan
Discussion Question
By a show of hands...

Are you in charge of program development at your institution?
Betting on Allied Health, Business, and Nursing

Q: Which program areas do you believe have the greatest enrollment potential?

- **Allied Health**: 61%
- **Nursing**: 45%
- **Business**: 55%
- **Education**: 34%
- **Engineering**: 22%
- **Other**: 20%

Most common “other” responses include leadership, criminal justice, cybersecurity, and data analytics.

Findings from 2022 EAB survey of presidents, provosts, and VPEMs
Already in Demand, CS Degrees Take Off in 2020s

Grad enrollment surges in computer & information sciences, but for other core programs, pandemic enrollment growth is all but dissolved.

*Change in Estimated Master's Degree Enrollments by Major From Fall 2019 to Fall 2022*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comp. &amp; Info Sciences</td>
<td>+3%</td>
<td>+22%</td>
<td>+21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td>+6%</td>
<td>+5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Professions</td>
<td>+5%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Admin &amp; Social Work</td>
<td>+2%</td>
<td>+3%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business, Mgmt. &amp; Mktg.</td>
<td>+6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>-6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>+4%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>-6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 'COVID-19 Stay Informed Fall 2022', National Student Clearinghouse, Oct. 20, 2022; EAB interviews and analysis...
Principles of Program Design
Before We Get Started…

Who is responsible for program development at your institution?

Who drives the program development process?

Who is the skeptic in your program development process?

What do you base the go/no-go decision on?
Discussion Question

What challenges do you commonly encounter when developing new programs?
## Start by Conducting a SWOT Analysis

Sample from Morgan State University

### Strengths

- Holistic approach to student support
- Morgan Completes You Initiative: affordability through degree completion
- 36-60-30 new program development requirement to eliminate roadblocks
- Strong sense of community and emphasis on diversity

### Weaknesses

- Legacy technology issues
- Organizational structure
- Unchecked accelerated growth
- Lack of career pathing for staff

### Opportunities

- Build upon employer partnerships (e.g., Amazon)
- Targeted program growth opportunities, e.g., nursing, public health, social work
- Alternative credentials growing in popularity

### Threats

- Enrollment cliff
- Avoiding duplication among local competitors
Strengths

Build Strengths Upon Strengths

How Will You Bowl Them Over?

Where Do You Have:

• Strengths among the faculty
• Strengths in other resources
• Strengths in your history and core brand
• Associations with your core mission

What is your Unique Selling Principle?

• Which of your resources and capabilities are truly special?
• What will be special about the student experience?
• What can students expect as program outcomes?

Look for clues in your student evaluations and your course registrations
Think Strategically: Rankings, Awards, Grants

Harmonize Actions With Your Strategy

Long-term actions you take to improve your rankings and awards should be compatible with long-term improvement of your program.

Build consensus among the faculty and staff about priorities and actions to be taken.

Learn How Your Awards Work

Each ranking and grant has its own data and its own formulas. Know these thoroughly to avoid mistakes or omissions.

Find help on campus to ensure the accuracy of data. And don’t “massage” the numbers.

Watch Out For Negative Impacts

Rankings have been criticized as being subject to various forms of bias. Don’t let the quest for rankings hurt program diversity.

Test new ideas against prior entering classes. What impact(s) would this change have had?

Think Long-Term For Sustainable Gains
Leverage Strengths in Marketing
Weaknesses

Program is Only As Strong as Your Weakest Link

Potential Weaknesses Can Be Wide Ranging

Alumni Success
When prospective students are searching your program, do they find that alumni have been successful?

Adult Student Support
Do you have intentional adult student support services in place? Would a current student confirm this?

Faculty Expertise
Does your faculty have the expertise necessary or the accolades to back up the legitimacy of the program?

Public Perception
Is your program ranked? Is your program well regarded? Are public reviews positive?

Industry Networks
Do you have employer partnerships in place that connect your students to good job opportunities post-grad?
Finding Right-Fit Programs to Launch

Require Data-Driven Market Analysis Prior to Launch

Prioritize Market Demand Analysis

1. Assess real-time labor market data

2. Assess structural labor market data

3. Assess intensity of competition

Questions to Ask About Labor Market and Consumer Demand Data

1. What degree level is necessary to obtain in-demand jobs?
2. Is employer demand apparent in target geographic markets?
3. What is the expected growth rate of students’ target industry or occupation?
4. What modality is most in demand for target program?
Using Market Research to Identify Opportunities

Portfolio Health Check by EAB for Morgan State

Identifying Program Opportunities Based On...

- Labor market demand
- Regional job growth over time
- National projected job growth
- Saturation in your regional market
- Degree completions
Opportunities

Setting the Stage for Successful Employer Partnerships

Do You Have a Coordinated Approach?

- Has an institutional imperative been established and clearly communicated?
- Is there a central point of contact for potential partners?
- Do you have a task force or coordinating committee?
- Have you developed a coherent strategy for developing and supporting partnerships?

What Opportunities Exist?

- What aspects of your institutional mission can you emphasize with potential partners?
- What is the labor market condition in your target market—what needs can you help partners address?
- What avenues have been established for outside contact and advice? Alumni links? Advisory boards?
Consider These Questions When Analyzing Competitor Programs

- **Prerequisites**: What is the minimum education needed to succeed?
- **Program Length**: Is your time to completion as short as it can be while still conferring necessary skills?
- **Electives and “Stackability”**: How do competitor programs support students’ needs and preferences for flexibility?
- **Starts**: Do competitors offer multiple start dates?
- **Pricing**: How do your tuition and fees compare to your competitors’?

What are your competitors offering which could hurt your program’s success?
Changing Demographics, Changing Needs

The Rise of the Stealth Prospect

Stealth the Norm

20% in 2012

80% in 2022

Stealth prospects as a percentage of total applicant pool

Traditional High-Touch Recruiting

- Request information
- Speak to recruiter
- Attend info session
- Submit application
- Register for first term

Today’s Stealth Prospects

- Independently browse
- Start application
- Submit application
- Register for first term

- Unable to find preferred course
- Concerned about financing degree

- Many silent prospects likely never apply
- High volume of late inquiries may overwhelm staff
- Difficult to forecast enrollments and plan instructional capacity

Source: EAB interviews and analysis
Activity
Reflect on the slides we reviewed. Did any of the SWOT examples stand out to you?

Consider the following questions about your program:

- What are your programs strengths and weaknesses?
- What are its biggest threats and opportunities?
- Which aspect is hardest to pinpoint?
- Who else should you involve in this conversation?

Reconvene to discuss as a group.
Questions to Consider

1. What is one **strength** you can build upon?

2. Which **weakness** feels the least moveable?

3. Which, if any, **opportunity** have you already begun to explore?

4. How can you proactively reduce one **threat**?
Key Takeaways

1. Build new, improved strengths on top of the strengths you already possess.

2. Take a multi-dimensional view of the market opportunities.

3. External partnerships require a concerted strategy and cross-campus collaboration.

4. To make progress on rankings, don’t let your long-term priorities be overtaken by short-term moves.

5. Employ a disciplined approach to program review and approval.
We partner with 2,500+ institutions to accelerate progress and enable lasting change.

95%+ of our partners return to us year after year because of results we achieve, together.
Interested in More?

Complete the Program Planning Diagnostic

EAB experts are available to walk through the diagnostic with you and/or discuss results
Thank you!
Graduate and Online Program Planning Diagnostic

Does Your Program Design Support Enrollment Growth?

Adult Learner Recruitment
Executive Overview

With widespread declines in traditional undergraduate enrollment projected over the next decade, many institutions seek to grow enrollment in graduate, online, and adult-serving programs. But growing graduate programs will be challenging, as the NCES estimates less than 1% average annual increase in graduate enrollment across the next decade.

The first step to increasing enrollment in this competitive market is to ensure programs are optimized for growth. When trying to expand existing programs or launch new ones, institutions often overlook important program planning and design factors, preventing programs from reaching their full enrollment potential.

How Program Design Choices Can Impede Graduate and Online Learner Growth

*Three Commonly Overlooked Factors*

1. **Program offerings are not backed by robust data indicating market demand.**

Without a rigorous investigation of labor market demand and existing program competitors, institutional growth plans may be misaligned with actual opportunity in the market. This process is becoming increasingly critical as the graduate and online market matures.

2. **Program features are not rigorously assessed in comparison to competitors’ offerings.**

Prospective students compare programs across a range of factors, including price, admissions requirements, modality, time to completion, and more. Without conducting a similar self-assessment, institutions may inadvertently miss out on enrollment opportunities.

3. **Program features are misaligned with graduate and online learners’ preferences and lifestyles.**

Today’s graduate and online learners are increasingly pragmatic, cost-conscious, and require flexible options. To build a competitive program, institutions need to ensure that they can market offerings based on the factors that matter most to prospective students: affordability, flexibility, and time to completion. When admissions and enrollment processes are not sufficiently student-centric, institutions lose out on potential enrollments.

Use This Resource from EAB to...

- Understand common ways in which program design choices can inadvertently hinder enrollment growth
- Assess your own program planning and recruitment practices
- Identify areas to critically evaluate in support of growth goals
# Program Planning Diagnostic

To successfully expand graduate and online enrollment in a competitive environment, academic leaders must consider numerous factors related to program design, admissions requirements, and more.

This diagnostic is designed to evaluate the following questions:

1. In your program and curriculum design, to what extent do you consider graduate and online learners’ enrollment preferences and your market environment?
2. Are your admissions policies and practices student-centric and informed by your market environment?

## Section 1: Program and Curriculum Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This statement describes my institution.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part-Time</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our program(s) schedule courses to accommodate students who want to study part-time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Partially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Modality**                           |
| The college or program considers the best modality or modalities for its program(s), whether that be fully online, hybrid, or in-person. |
| □ Yes                                   |
| □ Partially                             |
| □ No                                    |

| **Time to Completion**                 |
| Our program(s)’ time to completion is as short as it can be while still conferring necessary skills and remaining competitive with other programs of this type. |
| □ Yes                                   |
| □ Partially                             |
| □ No                                    |

| **Course Length**                      |
| The college or program evaluates course length, and for online courses, considers half-semester and full-semester courses. |
| □ Yes                                   |
| □ Partially                             |
| □ No                                    |

| **Experiential Learning**              |
| Program curriculum includes options for students to gain real-world professional experience (e.g., via an internship, project). |
| □ Yes                                   |
| □ Partially                             |
| □ No                                    |

| **Curricular Flexibility**             |
| Our programs are flexible to allow for customization, including stackable credentials, concentrations, and electives. |
| □ Yes                                   |
| □ Partially                             |
| □ No                                    |

| **Market Relevance**                   |
| Leadership evaluates the program on a regular basis to ensure market relevance (e.g., based on labor market demand data). |
| □ Yes                                   |
| □ Partially                             |
| □ No                                    |

| **Program Name**                       |
| The program name is optimized for search engines, resonates with employers, and is on par with competitor programs’ names. |
| □ Yes                                   |
| □ Partially                             |
| □ No                                    |

| **Tuition**                            |
| The college or program evaluates tuition based on the peer and competitor pricing for the particular credential. |
| □ Yes                                   |
| □ Partially                             |
| □ No                                    |

**Total “No,” “Partially,” and “Yes” Responses**
# Program Planning Diagnostic

## Section 2: Admissions Policies and Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This statement describes my institution.</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Partially</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Start Dates</strong> The college or program admits students at least three times per year (i.e., fall, spring, and summer).</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Application Review</strong> Completed applications are reviewed by the college or program on a rolling basis.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Admissions Decisions</strong> Upon reviewing completed applications, the college or program makes prompt admissions decisions on a continuous rolling basis.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prerequisites</strong> The college or program ensures that prerequisites are truly necessary for students to succeed in the program and are clearly communicated.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standardized Tests</strong> The college or program only requires test scores if they are expressly considered in the admissions process—and regularly evaluates if standardized test requirements remain necessary.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Admissions Competition</strong> All admissions requirements have been evaluated against those of peers and competitors.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Admissions Criteria</strong> Admissions criteria have been evaluated for usefulness and relevance.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Admissions Transparency</strong> Admissions requirements are clearly published and comprehensible.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total “No,” “Partially,” and “Yes” Responses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Interpreting Your Results

Fill in the section totals below to identify where your institution has the greatest gaps.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>“No” Responses</th>
<th>“Partially” Responses</th>
<th>“Yes” Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Program and Curriculum Design</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Admissions Policies and Practices</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If your results include many “No” and “Partially” responses, you may want to evaluate new approaches to program design.

To learn how EAB can help you plan for growth and meet your graduate and online learner enrollment goals, visit [EAB.com/ALR](http://EAB.com/ALR) or email eabalrcommunications@eab.com.