



THE CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETPLACE

**Presentation by Jon Boeckenstedt, Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management, DePaul University
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Background: On Oct. 1-2, 2009, the Center for Access and Attainment at DePaul University hosted Catholic higher education institutions from across the nation for a first-ever symposium titled “Balancing Market and Mission: Enrollment Management Strategies in Catholic Higher Education.” The symposium brought together enrollment and mission leaders to discuss the balance between mission aspirations and market realities as they shape enrollment strategies and outcomes. Also explored were commitments to diversity in enrollment strategy as a manifestation of mission as well as Catholic values and identity as revealed in institutional marketing. Institutions represented at the symposium included: Catholic University of America, Dominican University, Fordham University, Marquette University, Niagara University, St. John’s University, St. Joseph’s University, St. Xavier University, Santa Clara University, University of Dayton, University of San Diego and Xavier University of Louisiana. The Balancing Market and Mission symposium was made possible by a grant from the Vincentian Endowment Fund and the Division of Enrollment Management and Marketing at DePaul University. An extended version of this presentation was given on Oct. 2, 2009.

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

Through an interactive data presentation, Jon Boeckenstedt, associate vice president of enrollment management at DePaul University, mapped the landscape of Catholic higher education, revealing ways in which the almost 250 Catholic institutions across the nation are similar to and distinct from the rest of the higher education marketplace, and each other. His presentation demonstrated how four mission-based characteristics common to many Catholic universities’ commitment to institutional quality and student access—academic quality, graduation rates, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity—determine and are determined by an institution’s position in the market. The presentation illustrated the potential of market-centered analysis to shape mission-centered deliberations.

For his analysis, Boeckenstedt used the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data set as well as an additional variable—an academic index. This academic index, derived from a proprietary formula developed by Human Capital Research Corporation, is a composite measure of an institution’s market position based on criteria such as admission characteristics, student body profile and graduation rates. An academic index score was assigned to nearly every private university, enabling Boeckenstedt to illustrate the wide range of market positions within the family of Catholic colleges and universities and how they compare to private universities at large. Catholic higher education is demonstrably not monolithic.

Boeckenstedt then demonstrated how institutional commitment to access might be measured by looking at characteristics such as the socioeconomic and ethnic diversity of the student body. A reality of the marketplace is that institutions with higher academic profiles and a greater ability to attract students tend to charge higher tuition. Moreover, the market data reveal that institutions of greater wealth have fewer students with family incomes under \$60,000—a family income level often in range of Pell grant eligibility for students. However, many Catholic colleges and universities with higher academic profiles are distinct in that they are more likely to have tuition prices lower than the market norms given their comparable position. Catholic institutions also tend to have less institutional wealth than their public and private institutional counterparts at any academic index level; this is especially true for the smaller Catholic colleges.

With this in mind, enrollment managers must ask: What is the appropriate framework to discuss the role of mission as it relates to enrolling low-income students? Is there a price to pay in terms of revenue or prestige when an institution enrolls more students from modest family means?

Boeckenstedt then examined another measure of accessibility: the percentage of African-American or Hispanic students enrolled at an institution. His presentation of the market landscape showed how universities with greater institutional wealth have a lower percentage of African-American or Hispanic students enrolled. In addition, institutions with the highest academic indices also have lower proportions of students of color. Yet, many Catholic colleges and universities with higher institutional wealth reflect a higher propensity to enroll students of color. Throughout his presentation and again with this particular metric, Boeckenstedt contrasted the performance of the Jesuit and the Vincentian universities with the other Catholic institutions.

Perhaps the most striking part of Boeckenstedt's presentation was the concluding demonstration of how all four mission-based characteristics can be shown to interact as a reflection of mission attainment. Often, quality and access are competing priorities on college campuses. This is because there is a direct correlation between income and standardized test scores—as family income increases, so do test scores, access to Advanced Placement courses, better schools, and college preparatory classes. Additionally, as income increases, so does the family's college-going culture. All of these factors work against diversity goals, as students of color tend to be drawn disproportionately from lower socioeconomic groups.

That stated, Boeckenstedt demonstrated a way to determine the number of institutions that have achieved certain thresholds in balancing mission aspirations with market realities. Of the 1,995 institutions included in Boeckenstedt's analysis, there are 520 with an academic index of 60 or above. More than 640 have a graduation rate of at least 60 percent. Nearly 200 institutions in the country have at least 15 percent African-American or Hispanic enrollment. About 1,600 institutions have at least 15 percent of the students in the freshman class receiving Pell grants. Taken all together, there are only 37 institutions that meet all four criteria simultaneously. A disproportionately high number of these institutions, almost half of the 37 colleges and universities, are Catholic. Of the 12 Catholic institutions, four were represented in attendance at the Balancing Market and Mission symposium.

These four measures are by no means the only indicators of an institution's success in achieving its mission of student access, but they do give insight into the tensions in meeting mission aspirations as institutions strive to elevate academic quality. These indicators of access—ethnic diversity and the proportion of low-income students—are reflective of systemic structures and symmetries in the higher education marketplace in which Catholic institutions compete for position, reputation, and resources. Boeckenstedt's analysis demonstrated 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 the various elements of market position. Having this comprehensive picture of the structure of the market allows enrollment managers to take a stand at the center of these competing priorities and develop a strategic enrollment plan that truly balances market and mission.