

CHAPTER 8

ENROLLMENT, ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS, AND LIMITATION OF NUMBERS

WITH the purpose of illustrating the types of problems which can properly be controlled by trustee policy, and also to give some information as to common practice about these aspects of college administration, a considerable number of problems, frequently before the president and trustees, will be discussed at some length. As we have 1,700 different sets of conditions limiting our 1,700 institutions, no two are exactly alike, and much that follows will not be applicable to any particular one. However, reference by a trustee to a subject discussed here will enable him to enter on consideration of the matter as it applies locally, with some useful background.

College Students, Enrollment Limitation, and Admission Requirements

A college must have students; the whole operation revolves about the students. Naturally, there is much concerning students in which the trustees should interest themselves. In the first place it is highly desirable for the trustees to determine the number of students which the institution should enroll.

Who Should Go to College

This is a question that is much debated. Each parent is usually sure that his child should go, but he is doubtful about some of his neighbors' children. One school of thought urges that it is the duty of the college to offer courses suitable to the needs and ability of every youth, that the college should suit

its standards and requirements to the needs of youth. Another school urges that altogether too many are now going to college, that we are training far too many for white collar jobs and spoiling many laborers, tradesmen, and mechanics.

Combining the suggestions of the psychologists that about 10 per cent of all youth have the native ability to profit greatly by college training, with our experience at Iowa State College, it seems probable that about 15 per cent of youth would well repay the expense of college training. At present we have about 13 per cent of youth of college age in college. Of these probably a quarter lack the ability or the ambition necessary to profit largely. On the other hand, there are a great many youth not in college who would profit greatly from college training. If we are able to exclude the least worthy and replace them with others with the ability and eagerness for college but now excluded by lack of money, we will see the college enrollment increase somewhat further.

From the above we conclude that the present enrollment is not too large; in fact it probably should still increase slightly. On the other hand, it would be advantageous to all if those unqualified to profit from college were excluded and replaced by an equal number of able youth who are not now financially able to attend.

Size of Enrollment

There is no greater fallacy than that constantly growing enrollment is desirable. Each institution at a given time has a certain optimum enrollment which it can serve best. This optimum is fixed by income, physical plant, types of work offered, and size of faculty. It may be greater or less than the actual current enrollment. Its determination is important, and when the trustees fix the enrollment to be aimed at, this figure determines many others—the size of faculty, number and size of class and laboratory buildings, dormitories needed,

and income required. As time passes, the demands for service and the institutional resources change, and the trustees will be obliged to resurvey the situation and perhaps change the enrollment goal. However, they will serve their trust much better by keeping the enrollment at a carefully determined figure, than by letting matters drift and hailing every increase as a welcome gain.

The present enrollment in our 1,700 colleges and universities varies from less than 50 to over 16,000 in actual attendance at one time. It is evident that the matter of size has many aspects. These can best be considered by taking the different types of institutions separately.

In a *junior college*, covering two years of college work only, we have one type of problem. Most junior colleges are public institutions, administered as a part of the public school systems. Many are housed in the high school building. The usual tuition is \$100 a year. For reasonable efficiency such colleges should enroll as a minimum at least 100 students and preferably 200. With such an enrollment and with \$100 tuition they can be operated without great expense to the school system and with value to the community. On the other hand, in many of our large cities we have junior colleges enrolling several thousand students, and generously equipped with buildings. In every case the size will depend on the financial resources, the variety of courses offered, and the number of high school graduates living within convenient distance. The most common error is to open a junior college in a community too small to either provide a minimum number of students, or finance the enterprise.

Privately supported junior colleges usually limit their enrollment to numbers determined by endowment, fees charged, and the type of service they plan to render.

Another problem is presented by the *four-year colleges*. The great majority of these are liberal arts colleges with enroll-

ments from 200 to 1,500. While in some cases the tuition charged is as high as \$500, it is usually from \$150 to \$300. Maximum salaries range from \$1,500 to \$5,000 or \$6,000. Endowment income varies greatly. It is easy to see that within this group, widely varying conditions exist. In general it is most economical, and most efficient in other ways, to enroll at least 400 students. As educational practice now stands, a certain minimum number of different departments must be maintained in a college. Four hundred students permit this minimum number of departments, with adequate staff and reasonably sized classes. Up to 400, each additional student brings in tuition with no increase in expense. Above 400 the additional expense for added instructors, etc., is likely to be greater than the tuition received. An increase above 400 should be determined largely by the endowment income.

Some institutions maintain an enrollment that appears to be much below their financial resources because there the desirable number is fixed for some special purpose. Haverford College has always maintained very high requirements for admission and a small enrollment. Sarah Lawrence College is endeavoring to adapt its educational services very exactly to the needs of each individual student. This program cannot be carried out with large numbers.

Each institution justifies careful study. Size without quality is a poor basis for operation. It is far better to limit size and maintain creditable standards of admission and reasonable salaries for the staff.

It is also worthy of remark that in areas where other similar institutions are near at hand, a limited enrollment is more reasonable than in areas where no other institution is available.

Among the *universities* quite a different enrollment problem is faced. These institutions are made up of a number of sepa-

rate colleges or schools and many major departments. Each college and department presents an enrollment problem. It is essential that a certain minimum number, different in each case, be enrolled for reasonable efficiency. Also many schools and departments have maximum enrollment limits fixed by factors beyond control; for example, clinical and hospital facilities put a definite limit on the enrollment in a medical school. However, there are always numerous departments and colleges for which the enrollment must be determined by the trustees or left indeterminate. The tendency of any college in a university or any department left to itself is to increase its enrollment as much as possible and thereby magnify its importance in the institution.

In institutions laying stress on the graduate college, it is essential that the staff be adequate to carry both graduate and undergraduate work. This often raises a serious question whether undergraduate enrollment will be limited to allow for the development of the graduate college, or whether graduate work will be put in second place and undergraduate enrollment remain unlimited. This problem is now confronting all our larger state universities. The importance of graduate and research work carried by them is certainly increasing.

Privately supported universities usually have limited their enrollment. As examples we may note the data in table 7. As contrasted with the data in table 7, note the enrollment and expenditures of several leading state universities as shown in table 8.

In tables 7 and 8, the "expenditure per student" does not mean the amount spent on the education of each student. Expenditures in each of the ten institutions are made for a wide variety of objects. In the main the above private institutions pay higher salaries, and spend a larger percentage of their incomes on research than do the state universities.

TABLE 7

	Total Enrollment 1940-41	Current Expenditure	Expenditures per Student
1. Harvard.....	7,927	\$14,242,000	\$1,800
2. Chicago.....	6,063	10,567,000	1,740
3. Yale.....	5,349	9,000,000	1,685
4. Massachusetts Inst. Tech.	3,138	4,854,000	1,550
5. Princeton.....	2,680	3,960,000	1,480

Without question, however, the private institutions above do spend much more on each student than is spent by the public institutions.

In the above private universities only carefully selected students of good ability are admitted, and the number of entering freshmen is limited in each case. High tuition fees of \$500 to \$600 are charged, which also tend to limit students. However, numerous generous scholarships open to able students of limited means are provided. A very definite effort is made in each institution to secure the ablest students possible.

TABLE 8

	Total Enrollment 1940-41	Current Expenditure	Expenditures per Student
1. California (Berkley).....	16,946	\$10,205,000	\$600
2. Minnesota.....	15,167	11,050,000	730
3. Illinois.....	13,551	8,140,000	600
4. Michigan.....	11,952	10,716,000	895
5. Wisconsin.....	11,397	9,553,000	835

In the public universities listed in table 8 there is much less emphasis on admitting only students of high ability. These schools are state supported, so funds can be procured to care for increased enrollment, and it has been regarded as inexpedient to insist on high entrance requirements. Tuition is low, from \$60 to \$200. The private universities graduate a

large percentage of those admitted, but the percentage graduated from the state universities is much smaller; large numbers of those admitted are unable to do the work required. There is a growing sentiment that ample, publicly supported trade and technical schools above high school should be provided, and that public universities and institutes of technology should admit only students who have shown ability to do the required work. Such a limitation would result in better economy of operation and in higher standards in the public institutions.

In all universities, public and private, the question of optimum size is of serious concern to the trustees. These great and important institutions, costly and serving a wide variety of interests, should be studied constantly to determine what departments or colleges are too large or too small, what should be added and what should be discontinued, what are most expensive, and whether they warrant their cost. It is only as the president and trustees consider the results of such studies that they can wisely guide these institutions to their most valuable services to society.

Admission Requirements

Formerly, great stress was placed on the subjects an entering student had studied. This emphasis is still marked, but there is general recognition of the fact that the subjects studied are less significant than the quality of the student's mind and his interest and ability to apply himself to study. A student ranking in the upper one-fifth of his class in the secondary school has a very high probability of success in college, while students in the lowest third of their secondary school class can have little hope of graduation from college regardless of what they studied.

Of our 1,700 universities, colleges, teachers colleges, and junior colleges, by far the greater number accept any student who applies for entrance, provided he has been graduated by an accredited high school.

This results in the admission of a very large number who lack the preparation and the motivation to do creditable work in college, and to graduate. Depending on the type of institution and its standards, from 30 to 60 per cent of those admitted on high school certificates without any further requirement fail to graduate.

While at first thought this might seem a reflection on the high schools, it is really not so. The high schools are open to all who finish the grades, offer all types of work, and make no pretense that all their graduates are prepared to do college work. If the high school principal is asked seriously to recommend students for college entrance, he rarely recommends those who are graduated in the lower half or third of their class. The high school emancipated itself from the status of a college preparatory school several decades ago and prides itself on being the terminal school for many pupils, and to that end usually offers many courses which make no pretense of being preparatory to college.

The free admission of all high school graduates, where practiced, is based on one of the following reasons:

1. The institution seeks numbers regardless of quality.
2. The college is a democratic institution and therefore should be open to all.
3. Any taxpayer's child who is a high school graduate is entitled to enter a publicly supported institution.

None of these reasons is sound. Every college, however elementary, has standards, and when students are admitted who cannot and will not meet these standards and are forced to drop out, both the college and the student suffer.

In most cases publicly supported institutions hesitate to fix high admission requirements or to put a limit on enrollment. All students who are graduates of standard high schools are accepted in the freshman year on their certificates. Of course, the great majority of all those who rank in the lower half of

their high school classes fail to graduate, and many fail out during the first year. With everyone knowing that college is more difficult than high school; that the majority of those entering college were graduated from the upper one-third of their high school classes; and that students whose interest in learning is so slight that they are content to remain near the bottom of their high school classes for four years are extremely unlikely to do creditable work in college in competition with much more capable students; with all this common knowledge it seems strange that this policy of admitting all high school graduates is continued. It is doubtful whether students graduating in the lowest third of their high school class get any considerable benefit in college. It is surely doubtful wisdom to admit students to courses in which there is no chance of success. A much wiser plan would be to admit on certificate students graduating in the upper one-fourth or upper one-third of their classes and require those of lower rank to prove their ability to do college work by passing a reasonable entrance examination.

Not only is the admission of unprepared and weakly motivated students of very slight value to them, but it is a useless expense to the state or municipality, and it tends strongly to lower the general level of standards in the institution. It is probable that changes for the better will come about in this matter before many years pass. The theory that the state or the city will provide adequate funds to suitably instruct all who enter is less and less true.

Even now our publicly supported penitentiaries, insane hospitals, institutions for the feeble minded, and hospitals for treatment of tuberculosis, all have very strict requirements for admission, and state universities for quite different but equally important reasons should follow their example.

Of our 1,700 institutions about 30 have very high requirements for admission—graduation from an accredited school

in the highest 1/7 or 1/5 of the class or by passing the College Entrance Board examination. Of these institutions a number admit from those thus qualifying only a limited number who through a personal interview by a staff official seem most promising. As most of these institutions strictly limit the number of freshmen and as they have two or three times as many qualified applicants for admission, such requirements are wise and very reasonable.

Between these two extreme groups a few hundred institutions require something more than mere graduation from high school.

As has been remarked in other connections, far too many American colleges and universities pride themselves on numbers to their serious disadvantage. At least moderate entrance requirements beyond mere graduation from high school, such as limiting admission on certificate to those in the upper half of the class, would be reasonable and would exclude those who could profit least. It would tend to raise standards and reduce costs, and would relieve administrative officers, parents, and students of many unhappy hours. The time must surely come when there is better vocational guidance and better cooperation between secondary schools and colleges to the end that students in the secondary schools who lack qualifications for college work will become fully aware while in the secondary school that college has nothing to offer them. At the same time our country needs widely distributed vocational training schools, accepting students at high school graduation or possibly after two years in high school, and giving them training for specific employment, somewhat below the level of college graduates and in lines which require youth with some special training for useful employment. The junior colleges may develop so that they will meet this demand. However, at present the typical junior college merely duplicates the first two years of a liberal arts college.

It is certainly a very important duty of trustees to maintain a carefully defined policy relative to admissions, such as will best conserve the standards of their institution and give the best service to their constituents. This will usually involve (1) a determination of the number of entrants that the institution can most advantageously accept and (2) fixing entrance requirements that will secure the most competent among the applicants to fill that number.

The Limitation of Enrollment

Many institutions have a definite numerical limit to the number that may be admitted to the first-year class, either in the whole institution or in one or more departments. Such a fixed limit usually operates so that only the best prepared applicants are admitted.

As standard requirements for medical school instruction now stand, the first-year class in every good medical school is definitely limited to the number who can be well accommodated with clinic and hospital facilities. Admission to each of the ten veterinary colleges in the country is limited by similar factors. Admission to other university colleges could well be limited to a number who could be placed in professional positions on graduation.

Limitation of enrollment in the graduate school of every institution could well be imposed. This applies especially to those entering on the work for the Doctorate. While admission to study for the Master's degree should be reasonably liberal, there seems to be little reason to admit any but very able students to study for the Doctorate where high scholarship and real competency in research are supposed to be required. The fact that 90 institutions conferred the doctorate in 1940-41 on over 3,500 persons would seem to indicate that in many cases high ability was not required. Each institution could well redefine its purpose in maintaining a graduate

school; re-evaluate its degrees and the fields in which they are conferred; and consider the demand for graduates with advanced degrees, and the institutions offering graduate work similar to that which it offers. In the light of such a study an institution could determine what limitations on graduate work would be wise for itself.

The trustees of every institution should concern themselves with problems of enrollment, not just inquire as to whether the total enrollment has increased—such inquiries are very common—but insist on constant studies of the desirable enrollment in each college, school, and department with a view to determining what specific enrollment, under existing conditions, will result in the best results for the students, for the institution, and for service to the public.