Information technology continues to have a major impact on the evolution of higher education, constantly creating new opportunities and challenges for all aspects of the institution. In the “IT Matters” department of EDUCAUSE Review, EDUCAUSE asks representatives of major stakeholder communities to reflect on how IT developments have changed their world and may continue to do so in the future and also on what those changes mean for their relationship with the higher education IT organization. In the following column, EDUCAUSE talks with Mike Reilly, Executive Director, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO).

Impact: How has information technology made an impact on your community?
I think all professionals in higher education enrollment services would agree that the way in which they conduct their business processes today does not at all resemble what they did when they first entered the profession. Even for those who have been in the profession for ten years or less, technology has completely changed the way we conduct transactions and communicate with students. Many institutions have migrated from paper to touch-tone phone to web-based registration just in the last decade. Admissions applications are now almost entirely web-based, degree planning and tracking is conducted through degree-audit systems, and student transcripts and records are increasingly shared electronically.

Technology has clearly improved the way we do business and has made it easier for students to navigate our campuses and complete their degrees. In many ways, enrollment professionals are some of the most technology-dependent staff (outside of IT organizations) at a college or university. A significant understanding of technology is an essential attribute of any enrollment professional seeking to advance in his or her career.

Need: What does your community need most from information technology?
The array of technology solutions available to enrollment services professionals is overwhelming. There are software-as-a-service options and applications for nearly every function that a registrar's or admissions office needs to perform. Even though “enterprise” student information systems theoretically have the capability to deliver student services from the first stage (prospective student) to the last (graduation), campuses have invariably found it necessary to bolt on separate solutions for everything from communications with students to class scheduling to degree audits. Many of these solutions, designed to address specific needs, fail to integrate with other business processes and applications in a systematic fashion.

The synergy created by the technical expertise that IT professionals offer and the functional expertise that enrollment services professionals provide is an essential element of a successful student services technology implementation. I’ll confess that I have done my share of head-butting with IT staff during the stress of a project implementation. The stakes are exceedingly high when it comes to getting admissions offers and financial aid letters out on time. Since a failed project could have severe consequences for a college or university, passions can run high (understandably) when crucial decisions need to be made as deadlines approach. But successful projects need the expertise of both technical and functional professionals, and the ability of each group to understand the other’s contributions to a project is critical.

Direction: Where does your community see information technology headed?
One of the biggest challenges I see for campuses is the need to deploy student services technology in a strategic, student-centered manner that considers the entire lifecycle of a student.
Many institutions have failed to take the time to define or document their business practices, thus neglecting a key step in implementing any new technology and in leveraging existing technologies. The result is the too-common occurrence of underutilization of existing student information systems and applications and multiple and conflicting business processes.

The gaps between business processes and student information and related systems can impair or slow the implementation and adoption of new technologies. In many cases, the oversight of the components of a student services technology system may reside in different campus departments with different reporting lines and priorities, making integration and success difficult even when the appropriate technology solutions are identified.

Where to begin these conversations is a challenge for the leadership in both the enrollment services organization and the IT organization. Campuses that get this right take the time to look at their services through the lens of student success. They bring together representatives of every unit that contributes to a student's experience, and they work to establish common goals and objectives. Representatives must leave behind any fixed notions of how they do or have always done their business processes and instead focus on how their efforts contribute to a comprehensive, strategic student services delivery.

IT professionals who participate in these conversations can gain a more complete picture of the student success goals and can help identify and leverage technology to efficiently meet students' needs.

**Message: What key message do you have for the IT community?**

The need for collaboration between higher education IT professionals and enrollment services professionals has never been greater. The completion agenda, accountability and transparency demands, and cost containment will continue to be at the forefront of the national conversation about higher education, and the leaders of our higher education institutions will look to us to propose ways to more effectively deliver our services and move students through to degree completion in the most cost-effective manner. Together, we can help our institutions navigate this new landscape and meet the challenges that lie ahead.

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