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Enrollment Management Leadership Response to System Changes: Case Study

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ENROLLMENT MANGEMENT LEADERSHIP RESPONSE TO SYSTEM CHANGES: CASE STUDY

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Executive Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By

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Bowling Green, Kentucky

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2024

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

ENROLLMENT MANGEMENT LEADERSHIP RESPONSE TO SYSTEM CHANGES: CASE STUDY

While the impact of government funding for institutions of higher education has been researched extensively, little research looks at the impact of students as a funding source. This is important because students are one of the greatest contributors to higher education budgets. Within the Commonwealth of Kentucky, there has been a decline in high school graduates as well as state funding since the Great Recession in 2008.

This study uses systems theory as a theoretical framework to help understand the dynamic relationship between the external environment and institutions of higher education, as well as frame how leadership at regional institutions within Kentucky have responded as state funding and the number of traditional-age students have declined. The study included interviews with the chief enrollment management officers at three regional comprehensive institutions within the Commonwealth of Kentucky and document review.

Analysis of these data identified four themes, as discussed below: a) organizational challenges and responses; b) strategic resource management; c) adaptive organizational strategies; and d) culture adaptation. The specific strategies and plans at each of the three institutions were different, but commonalities were found between the case study sites as well. All the institutions have faced organizational challenges over the last five years that have impacted their respective institution. Each institution was impacted by the effects of COVID-19, the long-term impact of which is still unknown. Additionally, sociopolitical factors created enrollment challenges that had to be overcome by each institution. The impact of the organizational challenges put a strain on resources, requiring each chief enrollment management officer to strategically manage those that were available. Priorities had to be placed on strategies and services that would meet the goals and mission of each institution. Each of the leaders talked about the need for their organization to be adaptive. The challenges of the last five years have proven that institutions of higher education will need to be able to react quickly to environmental challenges if they are going to be successful. Finally, this study demonstrated the impact that culture has on an organization. All the chief enrollment management officers stated that culture needed to change for their institution to be successful moving forward.

KEYWORDS: Enrollment Management, Administration, Funding, Regional Comprehensive University, Systems Theory

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ENROLLMENT MANGEMENT LEADERSHIP RESPONSE TO SYSTEM CHANGES: CASE STUDY

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In the loving memory of my mother, Gail. You were always a constant source of encouragement. Though you’re not here to witness the completion of this journey, I know you are proud of this accomplishment.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Under the United States Constitution, individual states are responsible for higher education. The educational roles of colleges and universities in American society were redefined when the federal government began having an impact on higher education with the emergence of land grant colleges in the 19th century. It was not until World War I that the emergence of federal assistance was present with student financial aid and research support (Zumeta et al., 2012). The rapid expansion in institutions of higher education occurred with the return of World War II veterans (Zumeta et al., 2012). Funding, policies, and a broad range of programs from the government were implemented with the aim of increasing access and the number of students pursuing education (Kallison & Cohen, 2010). Federal programs like the GI Bill and the National Defense Education Act (1958) are long-standing policies still in place today that demonstrate interest from the federal government in higher education.

While the federal government has a vested interest in higher education, the individual states have the responsibility of providing oversight of higher education. Each state subsidizes higher education to keep the cost of education relatively low (Archibald & Feldman, 2006). As overall state appropriations for higher education have increased since World War II, an increase in enrollments and growing institutional budgets have outpaced funding. Budgets increases are, in part, due to the expanded services students have come to expect, coupled with increases in institutional operating costs. The Great Recession of 2008 had a dramatic impact on state higher education funding. From 2008 to 2013, higher education saw a 28% decrease in funding (Oliff et al., 2013). With the decrease in state appropriations, student tuition dollars have become a larger portion of institutional budgets. In the 1980s, the student's share of revenue was 20.9%, and by 2022 that number increased to 41.7% (Kunkle & Laderman, 2023).

Although funding for institutions of higher education in the nation decreased, the state of Kentucky experienced enrollment growth. Undergraduate enrollment at institutions of higher education have seen an increase in enrollment from the 2008 recession till 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. Enrollment in higher education increased in 2008 from 186,423 to 258,251 in 2020, according to the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE, 2023). The increase in enrollment was a result of non-traditional students displaced from work, enrolling in higher education. As the economy began to recover, students left higher education in pursuit of employment, and this, coupled with declining high school graduates, has resulted in a decline in undergraduate enrollment of 183,015 at Kentucky institutions of higher education in 2016 (CPE, 2017). Throughout this decline in enrollment, state funding for higher education within Kentucky has continued to decrease per student. Hovey (1999) argued that higher education suffers more than other governmental agencies for funding during difficult financial conditions. This poses a large problem for higher education within Kentucky when the largest portion of institutional budgets comes from student enrollments that drive government aid and tuition payments (Mitchell et al., 2014).

Overall, most institutions of higher education were able to sustain themselves by increasing tuition and fees for students, budget management, program changes, and increasing other sources of revenue. In addition, institutions attempted to increase revenue by finding outside funding from development, contract research, scientific research and development, real-estate investing, and land development (Phillips et al., 1996).

Results of Decline in State Funding

The reduction of higher education funding has major consequences for public, four-year colleges, and universities. Due to reductions in appropriations, institutions are often expected to fill the gap in funding by other means. If institutions cannot meet these financial demands, colleges and universities typically must cut staff, educational programs or other services, or raise tuition to be able to cover the losses (Mitchell et al., 2014). These potential ramifications lead administrations to create new, alternative funding streams to ensure they can create a balanced budget.

Following the recession of 2008, colleges and universities within the United States increased tuition at a rate greatly outpaced by inflation; accounting for inflation, it is estimated that since 2008, tuition has increased by 28% nationally and 23.2% in Kentucky (Mitchell et al., 2014). These large increases in tuition have reduced student access to four-year schools. From 2013 to 2023 average inflation-adjusted tuition and fees have declined by 1% at public four-year institutions (Ma & Pender, 2022). Even as tuition and fees have plateaued over the last decade many students and families are struggling to afford higher education. Within Kentucky, the increase in tuition has resulted in a large number of traditional-age (under 23 years) students starting at a community or technical college in the hopes of reducing the cost of higher education.

The increase in student tuition has not been able to make up for the decrease in state funding. For this reason, administrators at many colleges and universities developed strategies including decreasing faculty and staff to reduce budget expenses. Furthermore, some campuses have closed, eliminated courses or majors, and reduced student services (Mitchell et al., 2014). As the economy rebounds from the 2008 recession, many states have increased the amount of funding spent on higher education. However, eight states, including Kentucky, continue to see declines in state funding for higher education. From 2008 to 2020, Kentucky saw a per student funding change, adjusting for inflation of $3,104.89 (National Education Association, 2022). Within Kentucky, public colleges and universities must explore means of increasing funds in order to survive.

Alternative Funding

Even as some states begin to restore funding that had decreased from the great recession of 2008, funding for higher education when adjusted for inflation is nearly $10 billion below pre-recession levels. For most institutions, this means they have had to respond to the reduction in funds. Phillips et al. (1996) noted that higher education can respond to a reduction in higher education by managing budgets, changing programs, increasing other sources of revenue, and/or redefining ways of doing business. Looking ahead, institutions of higher education must change historical means of operations as the demand of governmental funds at the state and national level, as healthcare, elementary and secondary education, criminal justice, and transportation show no signs of needing additional funding moving forward (Zumeta et al., 2012).

When faced with declining funds, one of the most typical responses of institutions of higher education is to tighten expenditure and control expenses. Other means of controlling the budget include, according to Phillips et al. (1996), “across-the-board budget cuts, deferred maintenance, slashing budgets for particular units or line items, and setting new rules for budgeting" (p. 10). Throughout Kentucky, institutions of higher education have been in the news as they have reduced and reallocated budgets to make sure they are meeting their missions and goals. However, such actions beg the question: what happens when budget management is no longer able to solve the budget problems of today's complex institutions of higher education?

One common strategy to free up funds at institutions of higher education is to change academic programs, which could mean combining academic departments, eliminating majors and programs, or introducing new programs with the hope of increasing enrollments (Phillips et al., 1996). Within Kentucky, institutions have tried a combination of all the aforementioned strategies. However, nationally, many institutions of higher education have had to reduce faculty positions, eliminate course offerings, close campuses, and reduce student services (Mitchell et al., 2016).

Increasing revenue is the last means to deal with declining funds. One means of increasing funds is philanthropy, which has been a part of the higher education landscape since its inception. After World War II, development offices became common at institutions of higher education with large staffs and budgets (Worth & Asp, 1994). However, the decline in the national economy and the widespread lack of confidence in the economy's future have had an adverse effect on fundraising and donations (Betts et al., 2009). While development offices will continue to be part of higher education infrastructure, institutions are looking at other means of generating revenue. Research and development activities have increased at institutions of higher education, and while typically conducted at research-intensive institutions, other institutions are also looking to research for funding. In 2016, the federal government allocated over $142.6 billion for all research and development obligations (Yamaner, 2017). A third means of generating revenue comes from student tuition dollars tied to alternative student recruitment, including international students, non-traditional students, online students, and transfer students.

International Students

Of the more than 18 million students enrolled in higher education in the U.S., over 850,000 students in the academic year 2022-2023 were international students (HEIP, 2024, NCES, n.d). Institutions of higher education have sought to increase the number of international students not only for diversity and knowledge but also for funding (Altbach & Knight, 2007). International students pay more in tuition than domestic students, and it is estimated that they contribute $40 billion to the U.S. economy in 2022 (Stewart, 2023). This number is projected to increase in the coming years as international student numbers continue to rebound after COVID-19 declines. Due to their financial contributions, international students remain a viable option to increase funds within higher education institutions.

Non-traditional Students

Another alternative to traditional-age student recruitment is *non-traditional* students. Non-traditional students are characterized as being any of the following: a) financially independent; b) having one or more dependents; c) being a single caregiver; d) not having a traditional high school diploma; e) delaying postsecondary education; f) attending part time; or g) being employed full time (Choy, 2002). According to the U.S. Department of Education (NCES, 2015), at least 70% of undergraduates possess at least one non-traditional characteristic. The number of adult and non-traditional learners is anticipated to increase in the coming years as the work sector continues to require greater skills, including the need for higher education (Betts et al., 2009). Additionally, the American Council for Education reported that an increasing number of adults aged 55 to 79 are entering a phase of life that will be defined by achievement and learning for self-development (Larkin et al., 2007). For the aforementioned reason, there are extensive opportunities for institutions to recruit and receive the tuition revenue of non-traditional learners.

Online Students

Another growing alternative strategy for student recruitment is online leaners. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), two-thirds of two-year and four-year institutions offer online, hybrid/blended, or other distance education (Parsad & Lewis, 2008). In the fall of 2022, U.S. higher education saw student declines of 1.1% nationally, however primarily online institutions saw a 3.2% increase in enrollment (Cassell, 2022). In the fall 2020, online learning saw record high enrollments due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, according to a study by McKinsey, enrollment will continue to climb (cited in Diaz-Infante et al., 2022). Online education allows institutions to meet students where they are, creates new opportunities to connect with employers, helps upskill credential workforces, and assists those looking to change careers (Diaz-Infante et al., 2022). Due to the increased demand by the market, online education presents itself as another logical demographic for institutions of higher education to consider as an option for increased funding.

Transfer Students

Transfer students are another critical alternative student recruitment source. As of Spring 2024, community and technical colleges across the Unities States enrolled 4.4 million students (NSC, 2024). Only one in three community college students tend to transfer to a four-year institution, however, resulting in 1.46 million enrollments. While this number might seem small or insignificant, studies have shown that 71% of students who transfer earn a bachelor's degree within four years (Fain, 2012). As states become more outcome driven with funding (performance funding), it is imperative for institutions to increase graduation rates. Transfer students graduate at a rate higher than the national graduation rate, so institutions must begin looking to transfer students as a means of increasing revenue from tuition and from performance funding.

Significance and Need for the Study

While the impact of government funding for institutions of higher education has been researched extensively, little research looks at the impact of students as a funding source. This is important because students are some of the greatest contributors to higher education budgets. Within the Commonwealth of Kentucky, there has been a decline in high school graduates as well as state funding since the 2008 recession. Educational administrators across Kentucky must make changes to reflect the decrease in state funding and reduction in traditional-age students. The current study uses systems theory as a theoretical framework to help understand the dynamic relationship between the external environment and institutions of higher education, and to frame how leadership at regional institutions within Kentucky may have changed their student recruitment as a means of generating student tuition revenue as state funding and the number of traditional-age students have declined.

Theoretical Framework

Systems theory has a long history in both the social and physical sciences. Early theorists observed the idea that an organization, or system, occurs within an environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). However, early analyses of education viewed the system as not being impacted by the external environment, or as a closed system. Over time, this view changed, and fewer organizational theorists believed education organizations are immune to influences from external environments (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

Open-systems perspective developed from the unrealistic assumption that organizations could be isolated from external environments and forces. An open-systems perspective is one where organizations, such as institutions of higher learning, are not only *impacted* by the environment, but they are also *dependent* on them (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Institutions of higher learning are dependent on external factors, such as students, state legislatures, and the federal government, for acquiring the funding necessary to remain open. These external funding sources are necessary for institutions to fulfill their missions of creating knowledgeable students and producing new research.

In an open system, organizations can adapt, and change based on external factors within the environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The environment refers to anything outside the system that can affect or change the internal components of the organization (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). An open system is based on the interaction of external elements or inputs coming into the system and being transformed, thus creating an output. Within higher education, for instance, students and funding are the two main inputs, which are transformed within the educational setting to create outputs of knowledge and information (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Within the cycle of input, transformation, and output, it is important to create a means of feedback to make sure the system meets the demands of the environment. This feedback can come from within the system or from an external source. Without feedback, however, a system cannot correct itself to meet the changing demands of the environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

Most organizations try to reduce uncertainty and control the environmental factors that impact them. Higher education is no different (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Thus, administrations work to mitigate the impact of external effects on the organization. However, if the external group is organized and strong, like the government, the system of higher education will typically comply with the demands of the environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Lastly, institutions of learning compete in an environment made up of various resource pools; if one becomes scarce, then the organization will develop to find ways to acquire necessary resources (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

For this study, systems theory will be utilized to examine how higher education organizational leaders react to a decline in the number of traditional college students and state government funding (input). To address these external factors, administrators may have to create changes in recruitment and retention practices (transformation process) to make sure institutions are able to continue to meet their missions (output).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand how the leadership of chief enrollment management officers within Kentucky have changed their recruiting practices to increase student enrollment while traditional-age students and government funding have decreased. The research questions are as follows:

1) How has the decline in traditional-age college students impacted budgets in regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?
2) How has the decline of state funding impacted the university budgets of regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?
3) How has the decline in state funding and high school graduates impacted the recruitment of non-traditional students (e.g., international, adult, and transfer students) at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?
4) How have chief enrollment management officers at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky responded to the decline in traditional-age students (i.e., environmental change) and the decline in state funding (i.e., system change)?

Study Design Overview

This study used a case study approach, which can be used by researchers when they are concerned with exploring, describing, and explaining a phenomenon (Joyner et al., 2013). According to Creswell (2013), a case study approach should be used when "exploring a real-life, contemporary bounded system or systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (p. 97). The current study aims to explore how some public universities that award advanced degrees within the Commonwealth of Kentucky have reacted to a change in environment caused by a decline in traditional-age students and change in state funding models. Multiple forms of data must be collected and analyzed to provide a detailed description of the phenomenon within the case study (Creswell, 2013).

A two-pronged approach for data collection was utilized for this study. First, relevant documents from each institution were collected, followed by interviews conducted with leadership at the institutions. Creswell (2013) asserted that a case study should include an array of purposeful sampling. For the aforementioned reason, leadership within different divisions of each institution were interviewed to gain a better understanding of the issues and problems that arose due to a changing environment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with leadership at all case sites, which included the public institutions of higher education within Kentucky that have the Carnegie Classification of Master's College (M1-M3). The Carnegie Classification defines a *Master's College* as an institution that "awards at least 50 master's degrees and less than 20 doctoral degrees during an academic year" (Carnegie, 2024). Within the Commonwealth of Kentucky, there are five public Master's Colleges that will be examined within this study: Eastern Kentucky University, Morehead State University, Murray State University, Northern Kentucky University, and Western Kentucky University.

In addition to conducting interviews at each institution, old documents, speeches, policies, meeting minutes, news stories, and any other relevant information pertaining to policy and procedural changes related to decreases in government funding, will be examined. By examining multiple sources, known as *triangulation*, validity will be possible when examining the data for themes (Creswell, 2013).

Analyzing qualitative data is not an easy task (Upcraft, 2008; Yin, 2014), and requires the researcher to use a constant comparative method. In other words, the researcher continually compared the interviews and other artifacts to discover the themes within the data (Schuh et al., 2016). After the data was collected, the information was categorized into themes and presented in discussion format.

Potential Limitations

This case study will explore how chief enrollment management officers at regional comprehensive institutions within Kentucky have responded to changes in funding and enrollment trends. The research study is limited to only master's level public institutions in Kentucky. It should be noted that all public institutions have faced the same challenges of decreased state funding and a dwindling pool of traditional-age college students. Each public institution in Kentucky was not included because the two research one (R1) classification institutions, University of Kentucky and University of Louisville, had different opinions regarding how to handle declining funds and traditional-age students. Additionally, the community colleges and other public institutions were not explored because of the magnitude of students and other challenges unique to these institutions.

The current study limits the interviews to upper-level administration mainly within divisions of enrollment management. This was done to ensure that the study was feasible. Faculty and other staff members could provide insight into the challenges posed by reduced state funding and declining traditional-age college students, but if others had been considered, the study would have quickly grown to a size that would not be manageable and would have included information not pertinent to the study.

The last delimitation was not examining the use of outside funding initiatives by institutions to make up budgetary shortfalls. All the institutions involved in the research study have offices of advancement that solicit large gifts. When shortfalls are present, institutions can secure outside funding. While this could be a strategy for addressing the challenge of reduced state funding, typically this function and the setting of advancement goals would not fall to enrollment management.

While chief enrollment management officers play a significant role in determining how an institution responds to a change in funding and recruitment, they are not the only institutional administrators involved in such decisions. Institutional priorities are set by the president, boards, and other stakeholders, which can impact how chief enrollment management officers make decisions. This study did not consider the impact of other leadership on how institutions respond to environmental changes. For this reason, additional exploration should be done on how all institutional leaders, as well as units, impact how institutions respond to a change in funding and recruitment.

Dissertation Organization

Chapter Two provides a review of literature on the origin of enrollment management and its place within higher education. Enrollment management will face environmental changes within the areas of funding and high school graduation rates that will impact enrollment within higher education moving forward. Such emerging trends will be explored at the national and state level. Systems theory, which is used as a theoretical framework for the study, will also be presented.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology used to conduct the multiple-case study. Site selection criteria are presented as well as a description of the regional comprehensive institutions within the study. Research protocol for the protection of human subjects will be outlined. Data analysis techniques utilized for the study will also be discussed, as well as quality assurance of the data. Additionally, the role of researcher is presented.

Chapter Four presents findings within the study, guided by the research questions and overarching emergent themes. Chapter Five discusses the researcher's conclusions, implications for enrollment management, and offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emergence of Enrollment Management

American higher education has always been involved in managing enrollment, dating back to the founding of the colonial colleges. Early on, enrollments were low and limited to elite male students (Tewksbury, 1965). As higher education faced enrollment or financial crises, institutions could diversify and increase the number of students that were admitted. Over time, higher education grew to include more groups of diverse students, including females, and they lowered some admission standards. Each time higher education opened the doors for admission a little wider, they experienced prosperity and growth. However, by the early 1970s, higher education realized an enrollment crisis was looming as high school graduate numbers were declining (Henderson, 2001).

For example, Boston College was one institution facing increased competition in addition to declining retention rates. Such issues brought serious budget shortfalls, causing tuition increases that resulted in a student strike (Henderson, 2001). Boston College needed to find a way to secure its future and ensure it was able to attract new students as well as retain current students. In the midst of the crisis, Boston College hired a new dean of admissions, John Maguire, and a new executive vice president, Frank Campanella. These men have been credited with the creation of *enrollment management* within higher education (Henderson, 2001). Campanella and Maguire believed enrollment needed to be seen from a broader perspective than just admissions. Instead, enrollment should look at administrative oversight, faculty course loads, and sources of tuition generation.

Enrollment management’s core mission is to use a wide range of applied social science research methods and models of strategic planning and analysis to achieve its enrollment goals (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). To accomplish these tasks, institutions must examine how they recruit, fund, track, retain, and replace students as they move within an institution (Henderson, 2001).

Campenella and Maguire quickly saw success at Boston College with the implementation of an enrollment management strategy to reach institutional goals. Other institutions soon took notice and started to implement versions of enrollment management on their campuses across the country. As early as 1987, a survey conducted by Peat Marwich indicated that 55% of institutions were utilizing some form of enrollment management on their campuses (cited in Henderson, 2001). Enrollment management was able to help institutions handle the decline in state funding that occurred in 1989, which resulted in enrollment management being seen as a high-profile function of higher education institutions.

While enrollment management has seen success over the years, it has also been faced with challenges since 2010. Between the fall of 2010 and fall of 2014, total enrollment in higher education saw a decline of 800,000 students, which was the largest decline of enrollment in the post-WWII era (Crockett, 2016). The challenges continued with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, as institutions of higher education across the country saw large declines in enrollment (Hutton, 2021). Starting in 2025, the number of high school graduates are expected to decline for the next 5-10 years, creating additional challenges (Bauman, 2024). Today’s enrollment management officers are tasked with increasing enrollment, retaining students, and making sure budgets are met in a time of increased competition nationally, while also navigating environmental impacts outside of their control.

Strengths of Enrollment Management

Enrollment management has used financial and economic models to create pricing, and financial aid models to influence students’ decisions to enroll in higher education. This modeling has allowed for increases in access and diversity on college campuses, which is one strength of enrollment management (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). Furthermore, this has allowed institutions to grow enrollment of low-income and/or first-generation college students to meet the goal of increasing access and educational opportunities for more students.

Although enrollment management has helped with access for traditional-age college students, it has also focused on non-traditional students. Since the emergence of enrollment management, higher education has seen a surge in adult learners pursuing higher education. This surge was caused by targeted marketing aimed at recruiting adult learners and the creation of programs that met the needs of adult learners. Enrollment management has had to work with faculty to create programs that can be offered online or at more convenient times to continue to gain adult learner enrollments (Henderson, 2001). Additionally, enrollment management has focused on recruiting international students to help fill budget gaps.

In addition to recruiting students, enrollment management has placed a focus on student retention. It is no longer enough to *recruit* students; institutions must be able to *retain* as many students as possible until graduation. To meet this goal, institutions have made substantial investments in student support programs. Along with support programs, financial resources have been allocated to help students afford to continue their higher education endeavors (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013).

Another strength of enrollment management is that it brings together campus offices that have typically operated in silos. This has resulted in the provision of a more seamless student experience. Today, many enrollment management divisions are creating one-stop service centers where students can handle all of their university business (Henderson, 2001). When all the offices are brought together and working for the same goal, it becomes easier to respond to external influences impacting higher education—for example, the media questioning the value of higher education for the cost. If enrollment management is done correctly, institutions can adapt and respond to external influences quickly.

Limitations of Enrollment Management

Since the inception of enrollment management, institutions of higher education have succeeded in expanding access to higher education and in the recruitment of students. However, meeting enrollment goals comes at a cost for the institution in the form of additional staff, marketing, and provision of merit- and need-based scholarships. Institutions have had to hire higher-level administrators to oversee enrollment management resulting in more cost. Finally, enrollment management has created services to retain students, such as success centers, tutoring centers, and one-stop service centers, but all of these services have cost institutions a great deal of money. To be able to meet financial obligations, institutions have had to increase tuition or reallocate resources.

Furthermore, competition on campuses has become prevalent, as individuals fight for scarce resources, resulting in higher-level administration having to decide who will get what (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013).

The success of enrollment management has resulted in increased competition for students. Over enrollment management's 40-year history, institutions have worked to replicate the successes of other institutions, resulting in increased competition for students. An example of one such replicated success is online student programs. After a few institutions experienced success, other institutions of higher education began creating online learning programs to recruit additional students. When successful initiatives or programs are replicated by institutions, success can be short-lived, and many are unable to sustain the increased growth as competition grows. Therefore, competition and the replication of ideas is a weakness of enrollment management. Since 1970, higher education has seen many enrollment and recruitment fads that have not been sustainable long term (for example, international recruitment, online learning, massive open online courses, etc.). For this reason, enrollment management has had to change and reinvent itself every couple of years to stay ahead of others and recruit more students.

Many institutions have offices and divisions of enrollment management, however, Huddleton (1999, as cited in Henderson, 2001) argued that few institutions are actually doing enrollment management. Instead, most institutions are doing admissions marketing. Most other offices within enrollment management continue to run independent of their counterparts. To truly *do* enrollment management successfully, institutions must bring together multiple functional areas. Bringing together multiple units can become extremely political, making institutions hesitant to do so (Henderson, 2001). Such a lack of *true* enrollment management has resulted in the closure of colleges across the United States, with closures anticipated to increase in coming years (Berman, 2015)

While most of the literature on enrollment management has studied the field in general, it is important to examine the limitations of practice at regional public institutions (RPUs). One agreement within education has been that regional public institutions lack a true identity and are trapped between community colleges and flagship universities (Henderson, 2013). The aforementioned narrative has created the idea that RPUs are abandoning their missions to increase prestige. With an increase in prestige, the idea has emerged that RPUs would be able to raise admissions standards and increase research activity in order to raise to a higher Carnegie classification and increase funding (Orphan, 2020). The lack of identity creates a challenge for enrollment management and institutions on how they should create effective programs and retain students.

Future of Enrollment Management

Due to the economy and increased accountability of higher education institutions by the general public, the affordability of a college education has been called into question (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). Higher education has been faced with the challenge of decreased funding per student at the federal and state levels, while family incomes have remained flat. Enrollment management has been charged with meeting the challenge of raising costs to meet financial demands of institutions and assuring the public that higher education is worth the increased cost (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). Higher education has been heavily criticized by financial experts, claiming that college student debt upon completion is rising to unmanageable levels (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). Therefore, enrollment management must address the issue of rising costs and identify new ways of ensuring student success that do not result in students accruing additional financial debt.

A second issue facing higher education is slowing enrollment growth. Between 1964 and 2014, higher education enrollment went from 5.3 million to 20.2 million, a 283% increase over a 50-year period (Crockett, 2016). This expansion shows an annual compounded growth of 2.7% due largely in part to the expansion of two-year institutions in the 1960s and 1970s, and expansion in the for-profit sector (Crockett, 2016). According to the National Center of Education Statistic (NCES, 2016), total enrollment of higher education from 2014 to 2024 will have increased from 20.2 million to 23.1 million, a growth of 1.4% annually. If this slowing of enrollment growth is proven to have occurred, many institutions will have to change their practice of using enrollment growth to fund campus improvements (Crockett, 2016). Even more concerning is that some regions of the United States might experience enrollment *decline* over this time period due to demographic shifts.

Higher education is not only facing difficulty due to changes in the financial environment and demographic shifts, but also due to an increase in public accountability (Crockett, 2016). For instance, the Obama administration wanted to see an increase in bachelor's degree obtainment. In 2009, 41% of young Americans had a degree and the administration wanted to see an increase of 19% by 2025 (60%). The administration wanted to see an increase of 19% because projections showed that by 2020, two-thirds of jobs would require a college degree (Crockett, 2016). To ensure that higher education met the demand for college-educated individuals in 2020, large foundations, such as Lumina and Gates Foundation, invested large sums of money in higher education

(Crockett, 2016). Funds typically come with accountability from those providing them, which means higher education would have to increase degree production. Accountability also came from state legislators and higher education coordinating boards. As a result, many states, including Kentucky, moved to performance-based funding to increase the accountability of higher education (Crockett, 2016).

To increase degree obtainment, higher education must also consider delivery methods. Not until recently did the NCES begin tracking portions of online education. For instance, over a one-year period from 2013 to 2014, there was a 4.1% increase in the number of students taking distance courses and a 6.2% increase in the number of students exclusively taking online courses (NCES, 2016). Furthermore, there has been growing data to show that students are going to continue to demand online courses (Crockett, 2016). Enrollment management divisions will be faced increasingly with the challenge of changing the modalities of learning, while continuing to provide support to ensure students persist to graduation.

The environment within and surrounding higher education has continued to change at a rapid pace. In the future, institutions will continue to encounter high expectations from the public, government, and those working within higher education. To keep pace with a changing environment, enrollment management must learn to adapt and change quickly. Lingrell (2014) asserted that the future of enrollment management will be data and collaboration. Data will provide leaders with the information that is needed to create collaborative relationships and solve complex institutional issues that will impact student enrollment, retention, and graduation.

Our society and institutions of higher education are becoming more complex, resulting in difficult decisions for enrollment management. Institutions are facing pressures from “decreased enrollments, decreased funding, increased costs, increased diversity, changing expectations from learners, and changing expectations of employers,” according to Smith et al. (2020). Moving forward, it will not be enough to just have the data; chief enrollment management officers, as well as administration within higher education, must quickly interpret the data and use that data to make decisions that will shape the provision of services to ensure student success. In short, institutions that can use data-driven decisions to meet the expectations of students, the public, and the government, will thrive in the future. If data do not drive decisions, some institutions of higher education will likely close, as several did in the 1970s, which was the last time funding and enrollment declined within higher education (Henderson, 2001).

Most institutions of higher education strive to increase or maintain current student enrollment. Data show that the pipeline of high school graduates is slowing and, in some areas, narrowing, so enrollment management will be faced increasingly with the challenge of finding additional student streams (Huddleston, 2000). This will mean that institutions must consider how they market and recruit students going forward. Institutions must improve efficiency of enrollment management units to expand their market capabilities, find more quality new students, and find means to create stronger internal and external communication to perspective students (Huddleston, 2000)

Undoubtedly, implementation of successful retention strategies will continue to be a challenge of enrollment management at most colleges and universities (Huddleston, 2000). Data must continue to drive decision making and determine how institutions can support students so that they are retained. Retention initiatives must continue to evolve as demographics, access, pricing, and institutional budgets change at institutions. With the aforementioned challenges, it is likely that enrollment management will continue to create new student services and academic initiatives to address changing student and institutional needs.

Data-driven decisions are the easier of the two trends that we will see with enrollment management in the future; collaboration will be much more difficult. Enrollment management will be, as it is currently, extremely political since it combines and integrates others' *property* (Henderson, 2001). Students will expect to have convenient, integrated services, which will mean that institutions must combine services that have typically been separate (Blake, 2007). To accomplish what students expect, enrollment management must break down barriers in enrollment areas. Moving forward, many of the functions of enrollment could be part of a *one-stop service center*, meaning that many service offices' functions could be housed in one location (Henderson, 2001). In addition to the one-stop service center, enrollment management could also see the introduction of a self-service center, where students have access to all the services and information they need in real time via the internet (Henderson, 2001). Such service centers would drastically change the way that enrollment management has operated over the last 50 years.

Partnerships within enrollment management will continue to be important as we see unit lines break down. Faculty partnerships will also be important to enrollment management in the future. Moving forward, we could see *instructional management* emerge within higher education. Instructional management represents the delivery method of the curriculum, which will impact enrollment within higher education institutions (Henderson, 2001). Enrollment management must work strategically with faculty to develop academic programs and policies that entice students to attend a particular institution. Furthermore, enrollment management must work with faculty to create instructional modes that meet the expectations of today's consumers. Alternative delivery methods include hybrid courses that meet in person and online, solely online, competency-based, and web-facilitated (Allen et al., 2016).

Enrollment management of the future, according to Henderson (2001), will be responsible for exceeding students' expectations. As a division, enrollment management must find ways to optimize resources, improve student services, increase access for students, and improve the overall quality of higher education in a time when funding from states and the government is uncertain. This will be imperative as institutions face increased competition as the number of students entering higher education slows.

The last hypothesis for the future of enrollment management is derived from the research on this emerging division within higher education. Enrollment management must create a more structured definition of the field. At the current time, enrollment management tries to be all things to all institutions, and, although this is working in the short term, it is not sustainable. In the future, enrollment management will have a more defined mission and standard of practice than just simply saying data and collaboration will solve enrollment issues. As the field currently stands, most institutions use enrollment management to experiment with strategies to determine what will garner the best results. As accountability of higher education increases, enrollment management must create a structure that delivers solid enrollment results.

Higher Education Funding

All organizations, including higher education, are in constant interaction with and dependent on the environment (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Funding for higher education is an environmental factor that has had profound implications on higher education since the 2008 recession. Regional Public Universities (RPUs) have had to learn to adapt in order to be able to survive in an ever-changing environment.

Public higher education is funded by three primary sources: a) students; b) states; and c) institutions (Doyle & Delaney, 2009). Significant declines in state financial resources have led to a change within organizations at RPUs, as well as the way they interact with the external environment. In order to examine how RPUs have adapted in an environment with decreased funding support, it is important to examine funding trends within higher education in recent years, both nationally and in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

National Trends in Funding Public Higher Education

The housing crash that started an economic decline in 2007, known as the *Great Recession*, had a large impact on funding for higher education that can still be felt almost 20 years later. States and the federal government have been the largest contributors to public higher education. Since the Great Recession, state funding for public higher education at two- and four-year institutions in most states has not reached pre-recession levels (Mitchell et al., 2017). Nationally, state appropriations per student have seen a 19% reduction since the recession due to reduced funding and increases in the number of students enrolled in higher education. Historically, funding for higher education was largely provided by states; in fact, from 1987 to 2012, the states provided 65% more than the federal government.

Many states have reduced subsidies to public institutions or to the state financial aid program. Additionally, some economists have predicted a reduction in Pell Grant funds and federal aid as the federal deficit increases (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). Clearly, the federal government's support of higher education has changed over the years. The federal government currently supports higher education by supporting individual students via financial assistance and funds for specific research projects (Urahn et al., 2012). With the limited scope of funding at the federal level, general operations funds are typically supported at the state level. The national COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 resulted in reduced budgets at the state level due to decreased tax revenue (Rubin et al., 2023). Funding for higher education likely will be impacted at the state level since 40 states saw revenue lower than projected in fiscal years 2020 and 2021 (Rosinger et al., 2022). Although research is currently being conducted on the pandemic's impact on funding at multiple levels, it will be years until the full impact is understood (Rosinger et al., 2022).

In the past, higher education has dealt with reductions in funding by increasing tuition; however, tuition has risen to a point where college is no longer affordable for all students. Enrollment management has been dealing with the issue of affordability for years, but the convergence of many factors has made the crisis worse than in the past (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013).

Kentucky Funding for Higher Education

Across the United States, state funding is distributed in one of three main approaches: a) incremental distribution; b) distribution by formula; and c) performance-based funding distribution (Wall et al., 2008). In Kentucky, the funding model has evolved over time. Prior to 1980, for example, Kentucky used an *incremental* model approach, where institutions received their prior year funding, plus or minus a percentage based on the state budget. During the 1982-1984 biennial budget, however, Kentucky switched to a *formula* approach that moved away from a fixed rate per student to a more complex funding model that considered students, programs, research, and stewardship (Wall et al., 2008). Then, as part of the 2016-2018 state budget, Kentucky moved to a *hybrid* model that was partly a formula-based and partly performance funding-based approach (Wall et al., 2008; CPE, 2024a). The hybrid approach aimed to ensure that colleges and universities received state funding for student success and operational support.

Most states spend less on higher education, adjusting for inflation, than they did prior to the 2008 recession. In fact, Kentucky had the ninth largest drop in state funding per student over the last decade. From 2008 until 2018, funding appropriation per full-time student decreased by 36%, which equaled a $2,762 deduction from $9,233 in 2008 to $5,941 in 2018 (Mitchell et al., 2019). From the 2018 budget through 2022, funding for higher education in Kentucky remained unchanged. Institutions continued to experience challenges with state funding as operating costs increased, resulting in higher tuition costs for students. Many colleges and universities sought alternate funding sources, such as soliciting monies from donors as a way to offset the reduced state funding (Schlemmer, 2019).

While Kentucky experienced larger decreases in FY 2022-2023, the commonwealth's budget called for a 12% increase in higher education funding, which was the largest increase in a decade. The increase in funding was used for capital campaigns and an increase to the state performance funding (Beshear, 2022).

Enrollment Management Response in Kentucky

Most institutions within Kentucky have a division or department of enrollment management. Although enrollment management is typically held responsible enrollment, the entire campus community must be involved in enrollment management for it to be successful (Henderson, 2001). A strategic plan is one way of making sure that an entire campus community is focused on the same goals and objectives. When done correctly, a strategic plan aims to improve conditions by means of "hiring better faculty, recruiting stronger students, upgrading facilities, strengthening academic programs and student services, and acquiring the recourses needed to accomplish these things" (Dooris et al., 2004, p. 6. While the strategic plan hopes to change conditions over a 5-10-year period, enrollment management must also deal with short-term challenges (Gowen & Owen, 1991). The tension between long-term and short-term challenges can create a system where enrollment management leadership must decide how they support the strategic plan of the institution. To gain a better understand of the long-term goals of Kentucky, the strategic plans of the Council on Postsecondary Education, Eastern Kentucky University, Morehead State University, Murry State University, and Northern Kentucky University are explored in the current study.

Council on Postsecondary Education Strategic Agenda

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) is the convening body that coordinates the institutions of higher education to promote change and improvement. Currently, the CPE is at the tail end of its six-year strategic plan called *Stronger by*

Degrees, which has implications for regional public institutions within the Commonwealth and their divisions of enrollment management. The CPE's strategic plan contains the largest push—for 60% of adults in Kentucky to obtain a post-secondary degree or certificate by 2030 (CPE, 2016). Such a goal would be achieved with the following priorities: a) encouraging more individuals to pursue postsecondary education (*opportunity*); b) increasing obtainment of credentials to fill workforce shortages (*success*); and c) creating economic growth to benefit the state (*impact*) (CPE, 2016).

To meet the priority of increasing opportunities to access postsecondary education, the CPE set out the following objectives and strategies. The first objective was to improve diversity and inclusivity on Kentucky's campuses through a diversity planning process. To achieve this objective, the state wanted to increase cultural competency among students at the postsecondary level and staff through a new diversity, equity, and inclusion plan. The second objective was to increase partnerships with the PK-12 system to increase the number of students that are prepared to matriculate to postsecondary education. To achieve this objective, the CPE planned to work with various teacher stakeholders to ensure funding to professional development, increase dual-credit opportunities, and improve academic instruction. The third objective focused on increasing the number of individuals participating in postsecondary education by traditionally underserved populations, such as low income, adult learners, and rural Kentuckians. To achieve this third objective, the state focused on working with state entities that traditionally served underserved student populations, while increasing access to education through modality and creating college centers in the rural Appalachian region. The final objective was to increase financial access to postsecondary education by advocating at the state level to increase funding, moderating tuition levels, and encouraging students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) form (CPE, 2023).

Success within postsecondary education is the secondary pillar to reach the goal of 60% of adult Kentuckians obtaining a postsecondary degree or certificate. To increase success, the plan focused on looking at increasing persistence and timely completion for all students but took a special look at low-income and underrepresented minority students. Through refined academic advising, course redesign, and greater collaboration between academic and student affairs to promote persistence and on time graduation. The second objective housed with success was to increase the number of students within the state community college system who completed career-preparation programs or an associate's degree with the intent to transfer to a four-year institution. The crux of this objective was to increase academic advising and pathways for students who start in the community college system so they can achieve career aspirations or seamlessly transfer to universities within the Commonwealth to complete their academic pursuits. The final objective tied to success was promoting academic excellence through improvements in teaching and learning. With appropriate assessments for students and for faculty, teaching institutions can find ways to strengthen practices to ensure that students are progressing and completing their degrees (CPE, 2023).

The last pillar of the CPE's strategic plan looked at how education could be used to impact the economy to promote development and growth. An impact on the economy would be achieved by ensuring students that graduate with a postsecondary credential were employable and career ready. To meet this objective, the state planned to contact employers to assess the career readiness of graduates, while also evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs to prepare students for the marketplace. Second, through applied research and knowledge creation, institutions of higher education could impact the economy. Finally, the plan called for institutions to partner with communities to improve health and quality of life. Regional outreach activities, extension services, and health programs were planned to be used to impact communities.

Eastern Kentucky University Strategic Plan

Eastern Kentucky University's (EKU) strategic plan (*Make No Little Plans: A Vision for 2020*), was in effect from 2015-2022. The plan's focus was building on the success of the institution around the areas of faculty and student success while addressing enhancements in academic excellence, commitment to student, institutional distinction, financial strength, campus revisualization, and service to the communities and region (EKU, 2015).

Academic excellence has been the cornerstone of EKU's mission of fostering personal growth to prepare students to contribute to the success and vitality of its community. To ensure this mission is achieved, EKU has strived to ensure faculty excellence by "recruiting. retaining, and supporting innovative faculty and through continuous assessment and strengthening of academic programs" (EKU, 2015). EKU planned to invest in faculty through professional development. Additionally, the tenure process would be modified to promote the engagement of students within the classroom, reward innovative teaching and advising with the hopes of improving student success. Lastly, efforts were placed on recruiting a diverse and highly qualified faculty (EKU, 2015).

In addition to commitment to the faculty, EKU's strategic plan focused on student success. According to the plan, the commitment to student success would be demonstrated by investing in the students that enroll at EKU by emphasizing student learning outcomes, academic support, and co-curricular retention programs (EKU 2015). Support would start prior to the arrival of the students on campus and continue until post-graduation. Furthermore, students would receive support to prepare them for the workforce by providing internships and career advising. Finally, students would be supported outside of academics with community engagement and activities that focused on wellbeing (EKU, 2015).

The strategic plan focused a great deal on recruitment and graduation within the student success section. Typically, enrollment management in conjunction with academic affairs are charged with creating an inclusive strategic enrollment plan. In addition to recruiting an academically capable class, the plan focused on increasing international student enrollment. Ensuring student retention and graduation was to be driven by data-informed interventions, which provided services on campus to help increase student success. Students were to be encouraged to participate in living learning communities, student organizations, and student life programs to ensure that they were connected to the university. Finally, policies and procedures were to be reviewed in an effort to reduce barriers to retain and graduate a greater number of students (EKU, 2015).

Institutional distinction was planned to be achieved by defining the EKU experience. People are the greatest asset to an institution, so investments was to be made into individuals through professional development, strategic pathways for employment, recruitment and retention, and detailed evaluation process. Distinction was also to be created by developing a marketing plan that promoted the value of higher education, while promoting the EKU brand (EKU, 2015).

EKU's strategic plan stated that financial strength was needed within all parts of the institution to ensure they would meet their mission and goals. To attract the best faculty and students, financial stability was needed. To achieve this goal, EKU planned to optimize campus resources using a baseline budget to allocate resources across the institution. Additionally, EKU planned to increase the amount of external funding by eliciting external donors and also increasing the amount of grants awarded (EKU, 2015).

Physical spaces play a large role in the collegiate experience. For the aforementioned reason, EKU planned to reshape and remake the campus, focusing around student life and the student experience. Existing buildings were to be rehabilitated and new facilities were planned to be created in an effort to support the entire student (EKU, 2015).

Although a large part of EKU's strategic plan discussed the commitment to faculty, staff, and students, EKU focused on service to surrounding communities and regions, as well. EKU's strategic plan highlighted the need to actively seek out strategic opportunities that benefited the Eastern Kentucky region. The university wanted to be the choice partner for regional education and economic, cultural, and social development for individuals within their service region. By bringing EKU out to the community through programs and service, and bringing people to campus, EKU would be able to provide benefit to Eastern Kentucky (EKU, 2015).

Morehead State University Strategic Plan

Morehead State University's (MSU) strategic plan, *Come Soar With Us 2018-2022*, focused on how MSU would move forward with the shift to performance funding in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Through changes, MSU aspired to increase their ranking within the south among public regional universities by focusing on the goals of student success: a) outcomes; b) academic excellence; and c) ranking, reputations, and regional responsiveness (MSU, 2018).

To achieve student success at MSU, the university first planned to recruit and retain a more diverse and engaged student population. To achieve their goal, focus was placed on expanding the pipeline for underrepresented minority students. Predictive analytics were to be utilized to inform recruitment practices in addition to identifying at-risk students who might not be retained. The student experience was to be enhanced by expanding the use of high-impact practices across the university. First-year and sophomore experiences were to be utilized to connect in and out of the classroom experiences. The university also planned to expand career exploration to get students connected to their academic major. Financial aid options also were to be explored for students who were close to graduating and might not have had the money to complete their degrees. Finally, communication plans were to be created that would include a campus-wide calendar to keep students better informed (MSU, 2018).

While recruitment and retention played a large role in funding for Morehead State University, a second driver was performance-based funding at the state level. By aligning priorities and outcomes with the performance-based funding model, MSU hoped to strengthen their financial position. Resources were to be directed to initiatives with the highest return on investment in the areas of retention and progression. MSU wanted to optimize facilities footprints and generate new funds with more efficient use of space. The plan was to increase enrollment and retention, which were mentioned in early goals of the strategic plan (MSU, 2018).

Academic excellence was another important aspect of MSU's strategic plan. Recruiting and retaining a well-qualified, diverse faculty to the institution was the first strategy to achieving academic excellence. After the faculty was in place, the university planned to examine the programs and course delivery to ensure they met the needs of their students while promoting academic success. Although the in-classroom experience plays a large role in academic excellence, MSU also strived to provide a high-quality co-curricular, and experiential learning opportunity. These opportunities would include high-impact experiences that would help bolster student success across the university. Faculty and experiences play a large role in academic excellence, but MSU also strived to have physical learning environments that promoted success. MSU planned to create and maintain high-quality learning spaces coupled with technology that supported their academic programs. Finally, MSU planned to create a culture that promoted outreach and served external partners, especially those that included students (MSU, 2018).

During the five-year strategic objective, MSU planned to actively seek and work with external constituents in order to increase the rank, reputation, and regional responsiveness of the institution. MSU aimed to identify and communicate with alumni and the greater community about what made the institution *distinctive*. This information would then be used to cultivate external financial support with the purpose of supporting the initiatives within the strategic plan. MSU planned to support the region by identifying and supporting economic development that would improve the standard of living within Eastern Kentucky. Finally, MSU aimed to elevate their ranking nationally by providing resources to campus units that could have a direct impact on this message. Furthermore, they would seek to increase alumni giving as a means to improve rankings (MSU, 2018).

Murray State University Strategic Plan

Murray State University (MuSU) is currently in the midst of their five-year strategic plan (2020-2025) called *The Finest Place We Know.* The plan focused on continuing past work to meet the university's mission statement:

> Murray State University places our highest priority on student learning and excellent teaching, blending the range of educational opportunities often found at research institutions with the nurturing student teacher interactions usually found at smaller universities. (MuSU, 2023, p. 1)

The strategic plan included five initiatives: a) strengthen a culture of academic excellence; b) create a dynamic and diverse university community for student success; c) advance knowledge to benefit society; d) improve the quality of life for our region; and e) monitor, focus, and enhance parameters of the Kentucky performance-based model in order to advance academic programs and to ensure student success. By focusing on these initiatives, MuSU would continue to see growth in the number of new undergraduates (8,215), graduates (1,354), and transfer students (863) (CPE, 2024b; MuSU, 2019). Each of the strategic initiatives will be explored below.

To create a culture of academic excellence, the university strived to see an increase in in academic quality rating according to national publications, first- to second-year retention rates (79.3%), salary rates for faculty and staff, graduation rates (6-year 54.5%), demand for degree awarded, and program offerings that meet the needs of a changing economy (MuSU, 2019; MuSU, 2023).

MuSU planned to create a dynamic and diverse university community for student success, which would be accomplished by using predictive analytics to guide student recruitment for the university. Students would be yielded at a higher rate with a communication plan for students and families. Advising would then be used to retain students by providing timely and accurate information to students. The university then planned to promote internationalization across the enterprise, including education abroad, study away, and recruitment of more international students, all while encouraging additional individual faculty to participate in these programs (MuSU, 2019).

The university's *Strategic Initiative III, Advance Knowledge to Benefit Society*, was important to the strategic plan, but had limited impact on enrollment management. Indirectly, by increasing external grants and increasing the numbers of undergraduate and graduate students, scholarly projects can have an indirect impact on enrollment (MuSU, 2019). The aforementioned information could be used as recruitment information to increase the numbers of students that apply to MuSU.

Northern Kentucky University Strategic Plan

Northern Kentucky University's (NKU) four-year strategic plan, *Success by Design*, focused solely on student success. The 2019-2022 plan focused on three key areas: a) access; b) completion; and c) career and community engagement. By concentrating on these three key areas, NKU believed they would be able to "better serve learners and the region, building on the strong legacy and foundation set by our founders" (NKU, 2024).

The first pillar of NKU's strategic plan is *access*; specifically, the university aimed to become the preferred destination of learners within Kentucky, but also the nation and the world. To improve access, NKU planned to reduce barriers for a diverse population so more students could apply and be admitted to the school. NKU also planned to seek new and innovative ways to address educational affordability. Furthermore, NKU planned to expand outreach and recruitment by targeting partnerships with K-12 schools, community colleges, and business partnerships. By expanding access, NKU hoped to see an increase in marginalized student populations, including first-generation, post-traditional, international, and underrepresented students (NKU, 2024).

Completion was the second pillar of NKU's strategic plan. By aligning institutional priorities and policies around this pillar, NKU hoped to increase the number of individuals who obtain degrees, certificates, and credentials. Creating a service-oriented culture across campus with emphasis on wellness, advising, financial aid, and career services would aid in persistence toward an academic credential. Within academics, the university planned to examine ways to create flexibility within programs such as modality, modular learning, and competency-based education to reduce time-to-degree. NKU planned to impact retention using predictive analytics and technology-based student success tools. Finally, the university planned to align policies and procedures to encourage innovation that advances students success (NKU, 2024).

The final pillar of NKU's strategic plan was *career and community engagement*, in which NKU planned to increase its contribution to the economy of the region through talent development, research and innovation, and stewardship of place (NKU, 2024). NKU planned to build experiential and co-curricular learning into all majors offered. The undergraduate experience at NKU would foster creativity, global awareness, cultural competence, and literacy in technology and data in all students. NKU planned to expand their reach with private and public partnerships in the hopes of helping to accelerate innovation and entrepreneurship. Last, the university aimed to improve post-graduate outcomes for their students to assist with economic and social mobility (NKU, 2024).

Leadership in Higher Education

The structure of an organization has a large impact on its leadership. To examine leadership in higher education, it is important to understand the organizational landscape. Burns and Stalker (1961) outlined two types of leadership systems that described how organizations are structured to meet demands. The first was the *mechanistic system*, which was deemed appropriate in stable conditions. Mechanistic organizations are built on the ideas of Frederick Taylor (1911), Max Weber (1947), and Urwick and Gulick (1937) and were defined by individuals having specialized work functions (Burns & Stalker, 1961). Within a mechanistic system, the structure is hierarchical, allowing for top-down decision making and communication of information. Leadership is in charge of deciding what work is completed within this system, and leadership feels more in control of the organization and able to deal with stable environments (Burns & Stalker, 2011). At the other end of the organizational spectrum is the *organic system*. The organic system was described as less structured, allowing organizations to quickly change and adapt to environmental changes. Characteristics of the organic system include a) individuals assigned to tasks based on knowledge; b) lateral rather than vertical communication; and c) control and communication defined by a community of interest. Notably, the organic structure does not allow for as much control by leadership as mechanistic systems. Mechanistic and organic systems are two extremes of organizational structures (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Higher education, according to Bolman and Deal (2021), is an example of professional bureaucracy, which is a combination of both mechanistic and organic systems. Within a professional bureaucracy, there are very few levels that exist between leadership and others, creating a flat, decentralized structure (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Control within the higher education system comes from indoctrination or norms, values, and beliefs that have become part of higher education over time. Due to indoctrination, the acculturation process present in higher education, the system experiences change at a glacial pace, which creates challenges for leadership.

Within organizations like higher education, leaders do not gain influence by the position they hold within the organization; rather, leaders must be granted influence by those being led (McNally, 2018). Power refers to a leader's ability to get an individual to do something (McNally, 2018), and leaders can secure power in three different types: a) position power; b) personal power; and c) political power. *Position power* is derived from a person's position or title within an organization. This form of power allows an individual to have control with legitimate authority, control of resources, information, or by punishing individuals. *Personal power* comes from an interpersonal relationship between leaders and their subordinates. For example, personal power includes expertise, friendship, and charisma. Finally, *political power* comes from the political processes within an organization and can include coalition forming. Coalitions are central to developing a power base, since more power can be attained, and more resources can be acquired by acting as a group rather than as a single individual. Typically, coalitions are formed around specific interests. For them to be effective, bargaining, negotiating, coercion, and compromise must be a part of everyday organization life (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Indeed, popular belief leads individuals to believe power comes from having formal authority, but this type of power alone is rarely enough to get the job done within an organization. The aforementioned phenomenon is referred to as the *power gap* (Kotter, 1985). To have true power within an organization, leaders must use multiple forms of power or tactics to influence others within the organization. In the 1960s, the research of French and Raven (1959) identified five sources of influence or power that enable leaders to lead members of an organization: a) referent power; b) expert power; c) legitimate power; d) reward power; and e) coercive power.

The concept of *referent power* is achieved when leaders can attract followers due to their personality, the respect they gain from followers, or the followers agree with their ideas. Leaders achieve *expert power* when others within the organization depend on their knowledge or abilities. *Legitimate power* is associated with the leader’s official position, formal authority, and it is based on the understanding that the leader can tell those in lower positions what to do. Unlike legitimate power, which tells individuals what to do, *reward power* is based on the idea of providing remuneration to subordinates. Some examples of rewards might include increased salary, public praise, and promotions. The final source of power or influence identified by French and Raven (1959) is *coercive power*. Using the threat of punishment for noncompliance, the opposite of reward power, is the premise of coercive power (French & Raven, 1959). Within higher education, the success of the leadership is dependent on the leader’s ability to use the appropriate form of influence or power in a given situation.

Many leaders have assumed organizations must have clear goals and a hierarchy of authority to operate effectively. However, Cyert and March (1963) rejected the traditional top-down systems and instead asserted that decisions within an organization should be made by *coalitions*, which emerge out of a bargaining and negotiations process among coalition members. Kotter (1985) identified four basic steps for handling political dimensions and building coalitions within work environments; a) identify relevant relationships, or who needs leadership; b) assess who might resist cooperation; c) develop relationships with others to increase communication, and educate others in an effort to reduce resistance, and d) if the prior steps have failed, use other subtle or forceful methods to build a coalition (Kotter, 1985). Power is achieved when the leader can gain support from a large number of individuals, or in other words, create a coalition within the organization (Kotter, 1985).

Coalition building is one way to create change within higher education. At any given time, higher education is faced with multiple problems and solutions, and leaders must decide what issues deserve attention. This is best illustrated using the "garbage can model," which posited that within an organization there are problems and solutions generated by participants, all changing over time (Cohen et al., 1972). Higher education has created a structure that prevents large systemic change from occurring. Instead, leadership uses position power and coalitions to create small incremental changes that slowly change the culture of an institution.

Reframing Organizations

Within management and leadership, it is important to look at ideas and situations from multiple perspectives. Bolman and Deal's (2021) book, *Reframing Organizations*, suggested that leaders and managers often have limited ideas and thoughts when it comes to organizational issues. The authors stressed that it is important to look through multiple lenses, or *frames*, when examining a situation within an organization to develop alternative strategies (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Bolman and Deal (2021) presented four specific frames: a) structural; b) human resource; c) political; and d) symbolic. While each frame is effective individually, the situation and context will help leaders determine the frame(s) that should be used to develop solutions.

According to Bolman and Deal (2021), frames are mental models or a set of ideas and assumptions that help an individual make understanding of a situation. When correct frames are used, managers and leaders can understand more easily the challenges they are facing and ultimately what can be done to solve those challenges. It is important to note that each frame gives a manager or leader part of an organization's story, but it takes multiple frames to see the entire picture.

Reframing Leadership

The use of Bolman and Deal's (2021) frames to examine leadership goes beyond the often-oversimplified image of leadership. Instead, Bolman and Deal (2021) presented three areas that should be examined when reframing leadership within an organization. First, leadership is *situational*, so it is imperative to look at the context of leadership, including the organization's structure, environment, and history. Next, leadership is *relational*, so the relationship between the leader and others in the organization should be defined. Finally, it is important to consider the *position* of the leader within the organization, as the power of leadership is not synonymous with position or authoritative power (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Each of the frames will be examined within the context of reframing leadership by way of general assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses.

Assumptions of the Structural Frame

The structural frame is rooted in the idea that formal roles and responsibilities created within organizations minimize distractions and maximize performance. The structural perspective requires people be placed in the correct roles within an organization. When a proper working structure is created within an organization, collective goals and individual differences can be accommodated (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Under the structural frame, the ideal structure of an organization is based on the organization's current circumstances and considers goals, technology, workforce, and environment. When issues arise in an organization, the structural frame dictates that management should use problem solving and restructuring to mitigate performance deficits.

According to Bolman and Deal (2021), the literature on structural leadership has been sparse. Successful structural leaders do their homework to ensure the structures they create for their organizations result in success. They consider the relationship between structure, strategy, and environment in problem solving. When examining an organization's environment, structural leaders examine both the *internal* and *external* environments. After solutions are developed, structural leaders then strategize to ensure their plans are implemented effectively. Lastly, structural leaders are not afraid to experiment with structure and strategies to create stronger, more impactful organizational structures (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Strengths of the Structural Frame. A strength of the structural frame is that it is logical. Creating a division of labor and focusing on specialization enables organizations to be more efficient. Hierarchical structures ensure that the work of an organization is being completed. Additionally, the hierarchical structure creates clear lines of communication and defined roles for each member of the organization. The structural frame also promotes objectivity within an organization. One of the assumptions within the structural frame is that by using rationality and not personal bias, the organization will be stronger. Such objectivity ensures that the goals and objectives of an organization are achieved. The structural frame creates modes of accountability within an organization through rules and regulations that provide uniformity and predictability within an organization and ensure optimal performance. Finally, the structural frame is action oriented. If troubles arise within an organization, the structural frame assumptions dictate the organization would correct issues through problem solving and structural changes.

Weaknesses of the Structural Frame. A hierarchical structure creates defined roles within the organization, but it also creates a system that is very impersonal. This structure promotes vertical communication, which inhibits knowledge sharing, and communication among those in the organization. Additionally, as information is communicated top-down, it can be altered by those communicating it, much like a game of "Telephone." Furthermore, the rigidity of a hierarchical structure can affect the morale of organization members because the structural frame promotes specialization within an organization, which could then foster boredom among employees within the organization, and stifle new or more creative ideas. Some of the assumptions of the structural frame are that it is overly simplified and inflexible. Dealing with organizations and individuals is very complex and this frame does not account for the many factors outside of structure that can impact an organization.

Assumptions of the Human Resource Frame

The human resource frame is rooted in the idea that organizational effectiveness is achieved when the needs of the organization and the workers are met (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Bolman and Deal's (2021) human resource frame evolved from the early work of Follett (1918) and Mayo (1933), who questioned the once deeply held managerial assumption that "workers had no rights beyond a paycheck" (Bolman & Deal p. 121). Instead, Follett (1918) and Mayo (1933) argued that workers can make or break an organization and are vital to its success. The human resource frame posits that organizations exist to serve human needs. The relationship between the employee and the organization is mutually beneficial since the organization needs the ideas, energy, and talent of its employees, and employees need careers, salaries, and work opportunities offered by the organization. When the fit between the individual and organization is poor, one or both suffer. However, when the fit between the organization and the individual is good, they both benefit—the organization has the talent and energy that is vital to its success, and the individual finds the work both meaningful and satisfying (Argyris & Schön, 1996).

Human resource leaders make sure they communicate a strong belief in the people within the organization, resulting in better productivity and action. Additionally, human resource leaders are available and accessible to the individuals they lead because connections are important to them. Finally, empowering others enables human resource leaders to be more effective. This can be done by including others in decision making processes so they feel like they have a stake in the organization’s success (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Strengths of the Human Resource Frame. Bolman and Deal’s (2021) human resource frame examines the relationship between individuals and the organization. The human resource frame aims to create a situation in which both the employee and the organization benefit from the relationship. If leaders can create work environments in which individuals find meaning and satisfaction with their work, then the organization could receive the energy and ideas needed to be successful (Argyris & Schön, 1996). The greatest strength of the human resource frame is that it considers both the needs of the organization and the individuals who are a part of the organization. The leader can connect with individuals and take *outside environments*—which often impact individuals and their performance at work—into account.

A second strength of the human resource frame is that it is adaptive to multiple organizational settings; the frame and assumptions are very general and can be implemented in any working environment. Additionally, because the frame is so general, it can consider the complexities of the organization and the individuals within the organization. Finally, this frame looks at how the organization can benefit the whole individual. As resources become scarce within organizations, leaders must find different ways to foster a sense of fulfillment in their employees. The human resource frame considers what will motivate employees outside of pay (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Weaknesses of the Human Resource Frame. One of the strengths of the human resource frame is that it is very general; however, this is also a weakness. The frame does not provide tangible guidelines to help leaders create work environments that benefit both the individual and the organization. Thus, it might be difficult for leaders to employ the human resource frame within an organization. Second, the frame needs to be tailored to individual workers. Tailoring the environment to individuals takes a lot of time and resources. If an organization does not have the resources to make changes for each individual, this frame would not be possible within an organization. Lastly, the environment outside of the work setting can change extremely fast. While the human resource frame does account for the outside environment, change within an organization cannot always change at the same pace. For the aforementioned reasons, the human resource frame can be difficult to implement.

Assumptions of the Political Frame

Within organizations, individuals with legitimate authority typically set the goals and structure, manage personnel, and create objectives for the organization. However, according to Bolman and Deal (2021), “organizations are coalitions comprised of individuals and groups with enduring differences who live in a world of scarce resources” (p. 206). This view creates a system where power is found by expertise, control of limited resources, and personal characteristics. The political frame operates on five assumptions: a) organizations are coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups; b) there are enduring differences among coalition members in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality; c) most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources—or, who gets what; d) scarce resources and enduring differences among organization members make conflict central to organizational dynamics and underlines power as the most important asset; and e) goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among competing stakeholders (Bolman & Deal, p. 191).

Those that lead from the political frame are realistic; they are able to articulate what they want and what is needed to make an organization successful. Leaders who use the political frame are focused and do not let what they want cloud their judgment. Additionally, such leaders can assess how power is distributed among key stakeholders; they are able to see who has what and how to create support within a situation or organization. After they have seen who has power, political frame leaders build connections with those stakeholders to gain power. Finally, political frame leaders know that power is important, but knowing when to use that power is just as important; they first try to persuade others, negotiate if needed, but only use power as a last resort in a situation (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Strengths of the Political Frame. Bolman and Deal's (2021) political frame examines how individuals and interest groups within organizations compete for power and scarce resources. Bolman and Deal (2021) noted that conflict is a normative part of organizations because individuals and groups have different needs, perspectives, and values. One of the strengths of the political frame is that it creates a realistic picture of the complex nature of organizations. Individuals always struggle to gain power and influence within an organization. The political frame also addresses the fact that organizations are filled with individuals that have different motives, conflicts, and power within the organization. Thus, the political frame makes it easier to understand that politics are present in all organizations. Finally, the political frame highlights that coalitions are central to gaining power, and that groups attain more power than individuals.

Weaknesses of the Political Frame. One of the weaknesses of the political frame is that it assumes that conflict and power struggles are present within all organizations. While this might be true some of the time, not all organizations have constant conflict and power struggles. Another weakness is that the political frame is impersonal; instead of dealing directly with individuals within the organization, the political frame advocates for using key individuals and organizational coalitions to make decisions that affect the individuals. This limits the opportunity for rational discourse within the organization to create common, shared goals. Furthermore, the political frame does not necessarily promote what is best for the organization; instead, it promotes personal power. Those who can attain followers tend to control decisions and are most often promoted. Additionally, those with power do not always use it wisely or justly to better or further the organization.

Assumptions of the Symbolic Frame

The symbolic frame serves as a conceptual umbrella for ideas drawn from several disciplines with a focus on symbols and their place within the culture and lives of individuals (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Bolman and Deal's (2021) symbolic frame seeks to interpret and illuminate basic issues of meaning and belief that make symbols so powerful within an organization or culture. Unlike the other frames that see organizations as *linear*, the symbolic frame views organizations as *complex*, constantly changing, and organic (Bolman & Deal, 2021). From all the diverse sources, the symbolic frame boils down to five core assumptions: a) what is most important is not what happens, but what it means; b) activity and meaning are loosely coupled, and events have multiple meanings because people interpret experiences differently; c) in the face of widespread uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, increase predictability, find direction, and anchor hope and faith; d) many events and processes are more important for what is expressed than what is produced, and they form a cultural tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories that help people find purpose and passion in their personal and work lives; and e) culture is the glue that holds an organization together and unites people around shared values and beliefs (Bolman & Deal, 2021). With these assumptions, the symbolic frame deviates from other organizational theories that stress rationality, certainty, and linearity (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Those that lead from the symbolic frame do so with words and actions as they examine situations. Symbolic leaders lead organizations by example and are not afraid to get involved. Additionally, such leaders use symbols or something visual to gain support within the organization. The symbol is used to signal a change that is going to happen or has occurred within a situation. Symbolic leaders use uncertainty or ambiguity and frame the situation to create meaning for individuals within organizations. After framing the situation, a good symbolic leader clearly communicates a vision for the organization as it moves forward. In creating the vision, symbolic leaders make sure to respect and use the history of the organization, which creates buy-in from others in the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Strengths of the Symbolic Frame. Bolman and Deal's (2021) symbolic frame provides a way for individuals to interpret the basic issues of meaning and belief that make symbols powerful. When used correctly, the symbolic frame allows leaders to create a focus or bond that unites individuals within a group to pursue a shared goal or purpose. This shared bond and focus is one of the greatest strengths of the symbolic frame, for when an organization has shared experience and vision, individuals within that organization become inspired and find meaning in their work, thereby creating increased motivation. A second strength of Bolman and Deal's (2021) symbolic frame is that it is personal. A leader that uses a symbolic lens when examining a situation must know the history and culture of the organization. Symbolic leaders seek to use the best of organizational history and culture to create a culture that is cohesive and has meaning for the work (Bolman & Deal, 2021). An additional strength of the symbolic frame is that it can be very inspiring. A symbolic leader, according to Bolman and Deal (2021), believes that the most important part of leadership is inspiring individuals. This inspiration can create strong connections and commitment from individuals within the organization.

Weaknesses of the Symbolic Frame. One of the strengths of the symbolic frame is that is personal; however, this is also a weakness of the frame. Bolman and Deal (2021) stated that a leader or manager using the symbolic frame must attend to the context of the people and the place. If a leader is new to an organization, for example, it will take time for the leader to learn the history and the culture of the organization. Additionally, symbolic leaders, according to Bolman and Deal (2021), can create change by serving as an example. Leading by example is effective, but it can often take a long time before people can follow the example of the leader. Thus, a weakness of the symbolic frame is that it might take more time to see change than if other frames are used. A second weakness of the symbolic frame is that it is a vague and abstract concept. Symbols and rituals are different within each organization, and what a leader believes might unite an organization, actually can divide an organization sometimes. The last weakness of the symbolic frame is that it can be very difficult to use because concepts can be subtle and elusive (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Symbols are sometimes merely *fluff* or *camouflaged* within organizations, but if leaders are effective, they bring symbols to the workplace that create change and unity (Bolman & Deal, 2021). To be able to create this change and unity, a leader must be extremely connected to the organization and know how individuals would react to symbols introduced to the workplace. While leaders may have the best of intentions, they cannot control the meaning making of others in the organization.

Theoretical Framework

Systems theory has a long history in both the social and physical sciences. Ludwig von Bertalanffy has been credited as being the father of general systems theory (Von Bertalanffy & Sutherland, 1974), as he developed systems theory in order to have a broader, more holistic theoretical framework for biology; but the theory quickly expanded to the social sciences (Von Bertalanffy & Sutherland, 1974). Within the literature, there was not a consistent definition of systems theory, but the central idea was the notion that as change occurs in any part of a system, it has implications for the rest of the system (Bess & Dee, 2007).

Early theorists thought that the system was closed, or isolated, from external impacts. Von Bertalanffy's most important contribution to systems theory in 1940 was the idea that organisms are open systems, meaning that external factors in the environment can have an impact on them (Von Bertalanffy & Sutherland, 1974). Today, systems theory is used to explain a wide variety of biological, sociological, and psychological phenomena. Since systems theory is so broad, it can only be used to explain why change occurred and not used to make predictions about organizational behavior (Bess & Dee, 2007).

General systems theory can be used to provide insight into changes that occur within higher education. Early systems analysis of education viewed the system as not being impacted by the external environment or as a closed system. Over time, this view changed and fewer organizational theorists believed organizations of learning are isolated from external environments (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The open-systems perspective developed from the unrealistic assumption that organizations could be isolated from environments and forces outside of the organization. In an open system, organizations can adapt and change based on external factors within the environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The *environment* is anything outside the system that can affect or change the internal components of the organization (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). An open system is based on the interaction of external elements, or inputs coming into the system, the transformation of those elements, and the resulting output. Within higher education, students and funding are the two main inputs, which are transformed to create outputs of knowledge and information (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Within the cycle of input, transformation, and output, it is important to create a means of feedback to ensure the system meets the demands of the environment. This feedback can come from within the system or outside the system. Without feedback, however, a system cannot correct itself to meet the changing demands of the environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Figure 2.1 illustrates how general systems theory model can be applied to the regional comprehensive institution setting to examine Chief Enrollment Management Officers' response to environmental change. Systems process involves: a) environment *inputs* that can impact the institutions such as state policies, changes in graduation rates, and university demands (strategic plans); b) individuals and institutions *process* and deliberate on the issues facing the organization; c) change in how the organization does work, *output,* to meet goals and expectations; d) formative and summative *feedback* provides information and results to the organization (Bjork, 2006).

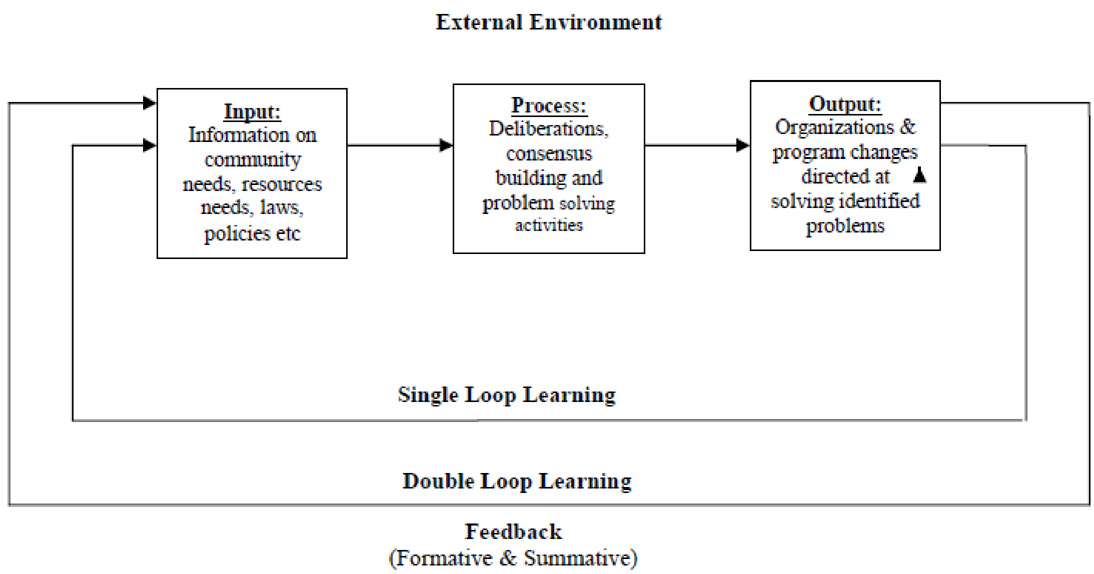

Figure 2.1

General Systems Theory Model

According to Hoy and Miskel (2008), an open-systems perspective is that organizations, such as institutions of higher learning, are not just impacted by the environment, but they are also dependent on it. Institutions of higher learning are dependent on external factors, such as students and the government, for the funding necessary to remain open. Such external funding sources are necessary for institutions to fulfill their missions of creating knowledgeable students and producing new research. Higher education has had to respond to external environmental changes that created expansion, such as the GI Bill and National Defense Education Act (Thelin & Gasman, 2011, Crockett, 2016). External factors have also created challenges for higher education, such as declining high school graduates, expansion of community colleges, for-profit institutions, and the recessions in the 1970s, 1980s, and 2000s (Crockett, 2016).

Institutions of higher education, like most organizations, try to reduce uncertainty and control the environmental factors that impact them (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Systems theory can be used to examine how higher education reacts to changes both internally and externally. Higher education administrators must examine external factors to better understand the relationship between society and universities (Björk & Keedy, 2001). Furthermore, administrators must find new ways to think about their work and find new ways to meet demands and pressures (Elmore, 2000).

Currently, higher education is facing the challenge of declining high school graduation rates, declining appropriations, and affordability, which will impact how institutions of higher education operate moving forward (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). First, it is important to examine all the environmental factors (i.e., the *input*) that will impact higher education in the coming years. Leaders within institutions will have to work to mitigate the impact of external factors on the organization and create change to remain successful, also known as the *transformation process*. Historically, higher education has tended to resist change, but if the external group is organized and strong, like the government, the system of higher education will typically comply with the demands of the environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Furthermore, as resources become increasingly scarce, organizations will develop ways to acquire new ones (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). With the contemporary challenges institutions of higher education face, they must find alternative funding sources and recruit students outside of high school graduates to continue to meet their mission, also called the *output.*

Another theory closely related to systems theory is social systems theory, which examines how people interact with their environment (Von Bertalanffy & Sutherland, 1974). Within social systems theory, the study of the individual is referred to as the *idiographic dimension*, while the study of a large group of individuals is labeled as the *nomothetic dimension* (Von Bertalanffy & Sutherland, 1974). When studying contemporary challenges facing higher education, it is important to examine how the idiographic dimension responds to environmental changes compared to the nomothetic dimension.

To gain a holistic view of how institutions of higher education change, adapt, and react to changes in the environment, systems theory and social systems theory should be utilized. Systems theory allows the researcher to see how non-human factors, such as change in policy, funding, or physical environment, impact the organization. Using social systems theory, the researcher can see how leadership, or idiographic dimensions, responded to changes in the environment and what their thoughts and reactions were moving forward. While leadership might set the direction and charge for the institution, the rest of the academic community may or may not agree with the leadership's direction. To understand the rest of the academic community's response, the researcher should examine the nomothetic dimension's response to change within the system. Utilizing a two-prong theory approach of systems theory and social systems theory will give better insight into how institutions of higher education, individuals, and groups react to changes within the system.

Summary

Institutions of higher education continue to face challenges around funding and enrollment. The emergence of enrollment management within higher education has helped institutions make strategic decisions on how to operate with external environmental challenges. This chapter examined the history and emergence of enrollment management within higher education.

Next, the literature review examines higher education funding, specifically, state funding trends of higher education in Kentucky. While national funding has gone back to pre-recession levels, Kentucky continues to fund higher education at levels lower than 2008. Enrollment management response to challenges in funding and declining enrollment is explored by reviewing institution strategic plans. Finally, an overview of systems theory is explored as a means of providing insights into how enrollment management within higher education reacts to environmental changes both internally and externally. The next chapter discusses specific details related to the methodology for the research study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This qualitative, evaluation case study examines the impact enrollment management strategies have on regional university budgets in the Commonwealth of Kentucky in an era of shrinking student markets and state appropriations. According to the *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, Kentucky has experienced a 25.6% decrease in state appropriations per student from 2008 to 2018 (Mitchell et al., 2019). In 2013, most states had begun reinvesting in higher education, but this did not occur in Kentucky until 2018. While Kentucky has started to increase funding per student, funding remains 22.6% lower than it was prior to the Great Recession (CPE, 2023). Kentucky's funding is a stark contrast to the rest of the nation that saw state funding of public colleges exceed per-student levels since before the Great Recession (Kunkle & Laderman, 2023). With the decline in state appropriations and the number of high school graduates, enrollment management divisions within institutions of higher education have been challenged to find new enrollment opportunities to assist with the overall budget. Enrollment management divisions found themselves with greater challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic impacted enrollment across the nation in the fall of 2020.

Based on the aforementioned challenges, four research questions guide this study:

1) How has the decline in traditional-age college students impacted budgets in regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?
2) How has the decline of state funding impacted the university budgets of regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?

3) How has decline in state funding and high school graduates impacted the recruitment of non-traditional students (e.g., international, adult, and transfer students) at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?
4) How have chief enrollment management officers at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky responded to the decline in traditional-age students (i.e., environmental change) and decline in state funding (i.e., system change)?

The remainder of this chapter will discuss the study participants, data collection, and data analysis. It will conclude with a discussion about the validity and reliability, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

Research Design

Qualitative research examines how individuals make meaning of their experiences and environments (Merriam, 2009), and how these expressed experiences come together to create a phenomenon. This form of research is located within interpretive or constructivism research, which, according to Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2009), means there are multiple realities, and the research does not find knowledge but instead must construct meaning. The researcher serves as the primary data collector by conducting interviews, examining documents, and observing behaviors (Creswell, 2009). Inductive data are analyzed, meaning the researcher does not have a null hypothesis, but instead must make meaning from the research (Hatch, 2002), and form comprehensive themes about the subject(s). Qualitative research is used to empower individuals' stories, understand context, explain linkages to theory, develop new theories, and used when quantitative measures simply do not fit the problem (Creswell, 2013 p. 48).

Case Study

Many theorists have presented different ideas and thoughts about case study research. Case study research is a means for researchers to explore in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2009). The cases happen within a real-life setting bound by time and place (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2014). According to Stake (2010), case study research is not a methodology, but the researcher choosing what to study. Other theorists have presented the case study as a methodology or a comprehensive research strategy (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2014). The current study uses an evaluation to examine those in senior leadership positions in enrollment management and their decision-making processes regarding enrollment and recruitment. According to Yin (2014), evaluation within case studies can be used to capture the complexity of a case by including temporal changes, as well as explore the contextual conditions within a case.

According to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) (2017), high school graduation projections showed that Kentucky hit a peak in high school graduates in the 2012-2013 academic year. Kentucky was also then projected to have a small decline in the number of high school graduates for the foreseeable future (WICHE, 2017). In addition to declining high school graduation numbers, Kentucky faces uncertain state funding appropriations and tuition increases, both of which impact enrollment in higher education (Mitchell et al., 2014). Using the evaluation case study methodology, this study examines how leadership has reacted to environmental changes that impact higher education. Additionally, institutional budgets and enrollments, will be examined in order to make formative and summative evaluations about the success of each senior-level enrollment manager.

Yin (2014) stated that an evaluative case study methodology can be used to examine “decisions” (p. 217). In an evaluation case study, the researcher is concerned with the decisions made at each case study site, but the *effectiveness* of the decisions made are examined.

Selection of Study Sites

This study explores how regional public universities in Kentucky classified as Master’s Colleges react to changes in the environment caused by a decline in traditional-aged students and changes in the state funding model. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with those who were responsible for enrollment management at case sites, which include the public institutions of higher education within Kentucky that have the Carnegie Classification of Master’s College (M1-M3). The Carnegie Classification defines a Master’s College as an institution that “awards at least 50 master’s degrees and less than 20 doctoral degrees during an academic year” (Carnegie, 2024). In the Commonwealth of Kentucky, there are six public Master’s Colleges. From the identified population, two institutions were excluded from the study. One institution was excluded because it is currently exempt from the Kentucky performance funding model. State funds are being provided to this institution until financial stability is achieved. A second institution declined to be part of the study, and therefore was not included. Finally, due to the researcher’s employment and direct connection to enrollment management, another institution was excluded from eligibility in order to reduce the potential for bias.

The remaining three institutions have varying structural differences within their divisions of enrollment management, including units within the division, job titles, and reporting structures. Creswell (2013) asserted that a case study should include an array of purposeful sampling. Additionally, having different structures demonstrates the concept of *equifinality*, part of systems theory, which organizations can reach the same end by many potential means (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). For this reason, enrollment management leadership at the remaining three institutions were interviewed to assess how they have reacted as the environmental factor of declining high school graduations and declining funding have impacted their respective institutions.

Study Sites: Three Kentucky Regional Comprehensive Institutions

The three sites selected for this study were state-supported and part of the state performance funding model. They are located in different regions of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The following sections include a brief profile of each of the research sites. In order to help maintain anonymity of the research sites, the name of each of the institutions has been replaced with a pseudonym.

Valley State University

"Valley State University" was founded in 1906 when the Kentucky General Assembly enacted legislation making Valley State a normal (teaching college) school for teacher training. Today, Valley State is a regional, comprehensive institution with six regional campuses, in addition to an online program that offers 100 undergraduate and graduate degree options. According to the university's *Fact Book* dashboard, the institution served 13,984 students during the 2021-2022 academic year.

In regard to enrollment management, Valley State has an executive director that reports to the associate vice president of student success, which was vacant at the time of the study. Enrollment management consists of several departments, including admissions, English as a second language, first-year programs, international advisement, student financial assistance, and student outreach and transition.

Mountain State University

"Mountain State University" was founded in 1922 when the Kentucky General Assembly approved two normal (teaching college) schools within the Commonwealth of Kentucky. In 1948, the institution changed from a normal school to a college with the expansion of program offerings to include graduate-level courses, and then to Mountain State in 1966. During the 2021-2022 academic year, the university served 9,427 students at its main campus and four regional campuses. The university has an 18-county service region, but enrolls students from Kentucky, as well as other states, and international students from 46 countries.

Mountain State University has a vice president for student affairs and enrollment management that reports directly to the president of the university. The division of enrollment management at MSU houses undergraduate admissions and transfer center, recruitment, and strategic enrollment management.

Lake State University

The origins of "Lake State University" date back to 1887 when it was founded as Lake Normal School, a private religious institution of higher education. In 1926, it became a state-supported institution and was renamed "Lake State Normal School and Teacher's College." With additional programming offerings and increased enrollment in 1966, the institution gained the designation of *university* and became Lake State University. Lake State is a regional comprehensive school serving a 22-county service region, with a main campus and three regional campuses, as well as online academic offerings. During the 2019 academic year, Lake State reported an enrollment of 9,660 students.

Lake State University has an assistant vice president (AVP) of enrollment services that reports directly to the president of the university. Undergraduate admissions, the Eagles Scholars program (a dual credit program), financial aid, transition services, military initiatives, and international student services all directly report to the AVP of enrollment services.

Table 3.1 provides an overview of each site during fiscal year 2022. The table shows total enrollment for each institution, total dollars received from student tuition, total state appropriation dollars, and total institutional budget. Finally, the table shows the title of the head of the enrollment management office for each institution based on each university's organizational chart.

Table 3.1

Site Description

Characteristic (FY22)	Valley State University	Lake State University	Mountain State University
Enrollment	13,984	8,984	9,427
Tuition Dollars	$142,731,554	$59,634,000	$67,215,982
State Appropriations	$74,444,100	$43,324,900	$47,024,700
Total Budget	$379,541,560	$145,500,000	$147,896,310
Head of Enrollment Management	Executive director of enrollment management	AVP of enrollment services	VP of student affairs and enrollment management

Data Sources

Data were collected using three techniques: a) a pre-survey sent electronically to all senior level enrollment management individuals at the four case-study sites (Appendix

A); b) individual interviews conducted at the case-study via *Zoom*, a videoconferencing tool; and c) a document review. All interviews were video and audio-recorded and transcribed through *Zoom*. The transcripts were edited to correct errors and ensure accuracy. The recording, transcript, and researcher's reflections and observations were saved to the researcher's personal password-protected computer. Each research site had a unique file to ensure organization and ease of reference.

Documents collection was conducted via information provided on the institutions' websites. Additionally, participants were invited to share any additional documents pertinent to the study, but not accessible online. The documents were categorized and saved on the researcher's password-protected computer. The collection and use of multiple different types of data helped ensure the validity and reliability of the evidence (Yin, 2014).

Pre-Survey

To gain insight and background information about each of the case study participants, pre-surveys were completed via email (Appendix A). The survey aimed to gain information about each research participant, their institution, and enrollment management practices. Participants were asked about education, prior work experience, and their work within enrollment management. Additionally, participants were asked to share the time in their current position and which functional areas within the institution currently report to them in their position as head of the enrollment management office. Finally, participants were asked if they were part of the development of their institution's current strategic plan. All participants completed the pre-survey. A copy of the email inviting participants to be a part of the study can be found in Appendix B.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews, according to Merriam (2009), involve open-ended questions with flexible wording. Typically, in a semi-structured interview, there is specific information that must be collected from all participants, which is the structured part of the interview. The research questions, informed by pre-survey information, serves as a guide to the rest of the interview questions. During the interview, the order of questions is not pre-determined, but instead allows for flexibility based on the interviewee (Merriam, 2009, allowing the interviewer to explore emerging topics and ideas that come from the interview. When semi-structured interviews are done correctly, the researcher can see how participants think about a situation and construct their reality, and receive answers to the researcher's questions (Yin, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews have many benefits, but the researcher must be aware of bias that could be present in the interviews. Due to his work in enrollment management, the researcher must be aware of the bias he might bring to the interviews and be cautious not to allow experience to influence participant responses. Yin (2014) stated that researchers should be aware of "reflexivity," or the researcher influencing the interviewee's responses, unintentionally influencing the line of inquiry within the interview (p. 112). Additionally, the researcher must make sure he is not using the study to substantiate a preconceived position (Yin, 2014). To prevent bias within the interviews, the researcher must be open to discovering contrary evidence within the study (Yin, 2014).

Semi-structured interview protocols were developed to guide participant interviews at each research site. The protocol was developed based on the researcher's experience in the field of enrollment management. Additionally, the researcher used his network of other higher education professionals to review and test the interview questions. Feedback from these individuals ensured clarity and relevance of the questions. The interview script and sample questions are included in Appendix C. All interviews in this study were digitally recorded, both audio and visually, and transcribed.

Document Review

A document review was conducted to gain further insight about the research questions and supplement the findings from the semi-structured interviews. Merriam (2009) claimed that document review is not much different from using interviews or observations. The most important part of document review is finding what is needed for the study. Document review can be useful simply by itself, but it can also confirm or provide additional information about findings within the interview. In this study, university strategic plans, fact books, census data, budget information, and yearly reports were examined.

While documents are extremely beneficial, they are subject to their own shortcomings and bias (Yin, 2014). When examining records for the case study, it is important to understand that the information is subject to human error and bias. Additionally, in the education system, reports on enrollment, retention, drop-out rates, etc., are subject to “systematic under- or over-counting” (Yin, 2014, p. 12).

In the current study, the documents that were reviewed about the case sites were publicly available. Sources included websites, strategic plans, state-reported data, and national data. The documents review provided context about the sites that were chosen for the study. In the study, the documents were not quoted in a way that would provide opportunities for the case sites to be disclosed. Instead, the documents were used to confirm or used as a means of assessing the decisions of each of the chief enrollment management officers within the study.

Data Analysis

Case-study methodology is not an iterative process, instead, the research starts to analyze data as soon as the first interview, observation, or document is read about the chosen site (Merriam, 1998). Maxwell (2013) suggested that qualitative researchers should not allow information to compile throughout the research process, because the information observed could refine the research process.

The researcher started by analyzing the results of the pre-survey. Information from the survey was used to refine and create the finalized interview protocol. Next, interviews were conducted with the research participants via Zoom. Following each case study interview with the Chief Enrollment Management Officer the Zoom transcript was uploaded into MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. The researcher rewatched the interviews and corrected any errors that were present in the Zoom transcribed interviews. After all errors were corrected the researcher reviewed the data using the MAXQDA software to code the data. Open coding was used in the data analysis since the researcher was open to any possibilities that could emerge from the data (Maxwell, 2013). Coding was based on themes that emerged from the interviews as well as from the research questions. Open coding was used to account for any additional themes that emerged from the data, which were not present in the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Coding involved aggregating the data into small categories and then assigning a label to each of the codes. Initial coding resulted in 26 codes that emerged from the interviews. Next, the researcher worked to refine the data by combining similar codes to form overarching themes. Four themes and nine subthemes emerged that were used to present the findings from the study.

Document review was completed on each case-study site. The document review was used as a secondary data source to provide context for the emerging themes as well as verify the findings. Document data according to Merriam (2009) can provide descriptive information, verify emerging themes, advance new themes, and offer historical understanding.

Finally, after thoroughly coding and reassembling data, the researcher moved into the interpreting phase, where a narrative was created around the case study sites (Yin, 2014). After viewing the narratives from each site, the researcher conducted a cross-case synthesis. The cross-case synthesis was used to find commonalities and differences amongst the case-study sites to form general explanations and conclusions to the research questions.

Role of Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). As the primary instrument, researchers must keep in mind their own experiences, identities, and backgrounds that they bring to the study (Creswell, 2013). Traditionally, what one brings to a study is viewed as *bias*, however Maxwell (2013) claimed these components are valuable to the study. Those who conduct qualitative research studies often explore topics they are familiar with, and they want to build a new theory (Flick, 2006). Being the research instrument has shortcomings and biases that can impact the study. Rather than try to eliminate bias from personal experience, it is important to identify and monitor bias as data are collected and interpreted (Merriam, 2009). However, while personal experiences and values can be viewed as an asset to research, it is important not to impose any assumptions (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Therefore, researchers must use what Reason (1988) calls *critical subjectivity*, where they do not suppress experiences, nor do they allow them to overwhelm, but instead use them as part of inquiry process.

The researcher of this study comes from a *postpositivist* interpretive framework, where the researcher identifies the problem and assesses the causes that influenced the outcomes (Creswell, 2009). In this study, the researcher began with systems theory, collected data, and used the data to determine if systems theory held true within the set of circumstances that were present. It is important for researcher's background to be shared and for the researcher to provide insight into how information was interpreted (Creswell, 2009). In the current study, the researcher is a member of the enrollment management team at a regional comprehensive institution. For this reason, he understand the challenges institutions the Commonwealth has faced around enrollment and budgets. Within the researcher's enrollment management role, he worked on the university strategic plan and enrollment planning with institutional leadership. He also has experienced first-hand the impact reductions in enrollment and funding can have on an institution. Such experiences provided an advantage in conducting this study, but it must be noted that the data analysis and reporting transpired through the lens of the researcher's personal experiences. Due to his experience in enrollment management, the researcher selected to interview individuals who have not served in the same role as him at different institutions. These selections allowed the researcher to understand the challenges each chief enrollment management officer has faced, without prior knowledge of how these leaders responded to environmental challenges.

Quality Assurances

Serving as the primary instrument of the research, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure the quality and validity of the study. By paying attention to how the study is conceptualized and the way the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, validity can be achieved (Merriam, 2009). Throughout the study is imperative that the researcher recognize potential bias that could influence the study. Throughout the study he remained aware of his own professional experience within enrollment management and how it could impact his personal interpretation of the data. To mitigate any personal bias, the researcher noted personal experience, reactions, and impressions in the margins of the transcript and kept them separate from the raw data (Hatch, 2002).

Validity within qualitative research does not carry the same connotations as it does in quantitative research (Creswell, 2009). In qualitative research, *validity* means that "the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings" (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). Additionally, Creswell (2009) suggests that qualitative research engages in two validation procedures within a study. To ensure validity in the current study the researcher utilized the strategies of *rich, thick description* and *member checking*.

Rich, thick description allows the reader to decide if the study is transferable to their setting because the writer describes in detail the research participants, sites, and findings (Creswell, 2009). Thick descriptions mean the researcher provided details about both the case studies and the themes that emerged during the study. The descriptions are rich according to Stake (2010), "if it provides abundant, interconnected details" (p.49).

Member checking was used to determine the accuracy of the findings, and participants were asked to review materials for accuracy (Creswell, 2009). For this study, member checking involved presenting the themes that emerged from the coding as well as the final data report to the participants. Participants were given the opportunity to comment on the themes and findings that emerged from the data with regard to their own institution.

When a research study occurs over a span of time, time limits the information that interviewees recall, which is known as *decay theory* (Thorndike, 1913). The interviewees would likely not remember everything over time, but instead would recall strategies that were particularly successful or unsuccessful. Thus, information could have been withheld from the interviewer. Furthermore, interviewees might not be comfortable with the researcher or the study, and they might only provide limited information about which strategies were used to ensure enrollment management helped fill gaps in the institution's budget.

Summary

To answer the research questions focused on how chief enrollment management officers have reacted to how the environmental factor of enrollment decline and funding impact institutions, a qualitative, evaluation multi-case study was conducted. In this study, pre-surveys were administered to help format interview questions. Videoconferences using *Zoom* were conducted to gain insight into the decision-making processes of three chief enrollment management officers at regional comprehensive institutions within the Commonwealth of Kentucky. To ensure the validity of the study, the researcher also examined other artifacts from the case study institutions, including newspaper articles, budget reports, and enrollment reports to create a rich, thick description narrative. Additionally, the researcher presented personal bias and member checked the findings. All the data gathered allowed the researcher to make formative and summative judgments about the effectiveness of the decisions made by leadership at the case study sites.

Chapter Four presents study findings across the themes that emerged from each of the research questions. Chapter Five discusses the researcher’s conclusions, implications for the field of enrollment management and leadership, and offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Overview

This case study sought to understand how the leadership in a chief enrollment management officer position at regional comprehensive institutions in Kentucky have reacted to environmental changes that impact enrollment and budgets. The study included participation from three chief enrollment management officers located at regional comprehensive institutions throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The study used pseudonyms for the participants and the institutions, including “Hampton” of “Mountain State University,” “Foster” of “Lake State University,” and “Parker” of “Valley State University.” The following four research questions guided this study:

1) How has the decline in traditional-age college students impacted budgets in regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?
2) How has the decline of state funding impacted the university budgets of regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?
3) How has the decline in state funding and high school graduates impacted the recruitment of non-traditional students (e.g., international, adult, and transfer students) at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?
4) How have chief enrollment management officers at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky responded to decline in traditional-age students (i.e., environmental change) and decline in state funding (i.e., system change)?

Study findings are presented in this chapter in chronological order based on the order the interviews were conducted. For each site, the researcher presented, organized, and reported data that are aligned with the themes that emerged from the interviews.

At the start of each section, a brief introduction of the interview participant is presented to facilitate a better understanding of context. Since the provided information is not listed on institutional websites, anonymity is still possible. The quotes within the findings come directly from the participants, however they have been edited to remove verbal tics and repetitive wording that is inherently present in verbal interviews.

Findings from the three interviews were initially cataloged based on the research and interview questions. Data analysis enabled the identification of four themes that were subsequently used to organize and report findings: a) organizational challenges and responses; b) strategic resource management; c) adaptive organizational strategies; and d) cultural adaptation.

The first theme, *organizational challenges and response*, examined how chief enrollment management officers responded to environmental factors that have impacted enrollment and budgets in the past five years. This theme examined environmental factors outside of the decline of traditional college-aged students. This theme had three subthemes that emerged during the data analysis process. The first subtheme was *pandemic impact*. Each of the chief enrollment management officers interviewed talked about how the COVID-19 pandemic presented the greatest challenge they have encountered in their career. This subtheme considered the impact of COVID-19 and how leadership responded. The second subtheme was *sociopolitical dynamics*, which encompassed social and political events that occurred within the last five years and impacted enrollment and budgets. The last subtheme was *geographic challenge*, which examined how the location and geographical characteristics of the institutions impacted recruitment and enrollment. Notably, this subtheme was not present in the Valley State case study.

Each of the participants discussed the theme of *strategic resource management*, which focused on how they responded to a decrease in human and financial resources. Within this theme, two subthemes emerged: *resource allocation* and *government investment*. Resource management focused on how resources were controlled, including shortages and distributions. Government investment looked at the role of the new state performance funding model and the impact it had on each the case study sites.

The theme of *adaptive organizational strategies* highlighted how the participants had to shift strategies in response to every changing and evolving circumstance. Within this theme, four subthemes emerged: *adaptive strategies, strategies priorities*, *operational planning*, and *innovative solutions*. Adaptive strategies explored what critical innovations are and those that needed to be modified to continue to meet the goals and mission at each institution. Strategic priorities looked at how leaders used the information they had available to determine what would reap the largest benefits moving forward. Operational planning considered the formal creation of recruitment plans for each case study. Finally, innovation solutions highlighted solutions to meeting enrollment management challenges in the future.

The final theme that was present was *cultural adaptation*. In each of the interviews, the participants discussed norms and practices at each institution.

Furthermore, they talked about how they hoped to adapt culture moving forward to be more enrollment focused in order to impact budget.

Interview A: Mountain State University

The first interview conducted was with Hampton, who stated that she stumbled into working in higher education and it was not her original plan. Hampton grew up in the south outside of Kentucky. Hampton's parents both worked in higher education; her father worked in a library and was an adjunct professor and her mother was a nurse on campus, but it was never her intention to get into higher education. The college journey was not linear for Hampton; she started at one institution and transferred before dropping out. Hampton went on to work at a halfway house for a couple years before returning to finish her degree. Ultimately, Hampton earned an undergraduate degree in elementary education and immediately started to pursue a master's degree, but never finished that degree. At that point, Hampton began using the bachelor's degree and taught elementary school for three years. Hampton left her small town for other opportunities and began working at a nonprofit, working with first-generation students in grades 7-12. The goal of the nonprofit was to get students *college ready*. In this position, Hampton made connections with the local university and was recruited to an admissions position as an assistant director of recruitment. This position was the start of a 20-year career working in higher education in multiple positions within the functional area of enrollment management. Last year, Hampton began a position at Mountain State University as head of enrollment management and she currently oversees all student services.

Organizational Challenges and Response

Pandemic Impact. Enrollment management leaders, like all good leaders, are expected to plan for the future. However, the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for leaders in higher education. Regional higher education institutions in Kentucky had seen years of declining enrollment prior to the pandemic. Hampton said, “In 2018 and 2019, we were seeing a downward trend in our freshman class and transfer numbers. We never reached our goals. Then, in 2020, it totally plummeted.” With the uncertainty of the pandemic, students were reluctant to enroll in higher education, especially residential campuses like Mountain State University. Hampton noted that the following three years were unpredictable for enrollment. “In 2021, enrollment kind of came back up, which was interesting. In 2022, it plummeted, but in 2023 they were up [again].”

Not only did COVID-19 create enrollment challenges for Mountain State University, but it also created challenges around student support. Hampton talked about how the students enrolling at Mountain State are less prepared for the challenges of college. “Community skills aren’t there; writing skills aren’t there; organizational skills aren’t there; motivation, you know, it’s not there.” Therefore, funding within the institution had to shift to more student services. said, “so your money needs to be going into mental health, retention, and academic advising.” She stated that these services were vital to students being able to matriculate and persist within the institution during these trying times. As an enrollment management officer, Hampton noted that new enrollments are important, but without student retention, Mountain State University would not be successful at meeting its goals.

Sociopolitical Dynamics. During the interview, Hampton shared that there were many factors that impacted enrollment and the budget at Mountain State University over the past five years. She mentioned social political events having an impact on her experience as a chief enrollment management officer throughout the interview. First, Hampton mentioned the attack on the value and cost of higher education. Hampton talked about the hard conversations she must have with students and families to get them to enroll: “People don't like to hear that it is their responsibility to pay for their child's education.” Instead, individuals hear a national narrative that they should not go into debt for a degree. However, this is not the case for most students. Part of recruitment is now educating students on the cost and value of education. Hampton said:

> So educating about financial literacy and making people realize a degree isn’t free are top priorities. Yes, your tax dollars are coming in, but you don't qualify for financial aid. I'm amazed at the conversations that I have with people about value. It's particularly about finances and about paying for college. People think, “well, you're supposed to help me.” I am helping you by having this conversation with you. But we've got to teach people the value of education much earlier in the process. It’s too late to have these conversations as a student is set to enroll in the fall semester.

When educating students about the cost and financing of higher education, the national narrative of not paying for higher education is hard to overcome. Hampton stressed, “I want to delete the words *full ride* from the English vocabulary.”

Other recent social political events have had an impact on enrollment at Mountain State University. During the interview, Hampton stated, “George Floyd, you know, and Brianna Taylor—all of those things that have happened are political, and politically they matter, no matter which way you learn.” These events, along with others, have negatively impacted recruitment and enrollment at Mountain State University. Political events have cast a negative shadow on higher education, in general, however. “It’s like the demonization of education is happening right now," Hampton stated, and higher education will need to continue to sell the value of a degree to be successful moving forward.

Geographic Challenges. When asked about other challenges that impacted enrollment at Mountain State University, Hampton spoke about the location of the institution:

> I have always maintained that the best and worst thing about [Mountain State] is its location. It's a beautiful, small town. If we were located along an interstate, we'd probably have twice the number of students enrolled. Location is always an interesting thing; you attract a student that likes this.

Hampton continued, saying that the school was surrounded by some suburban areas, but mostly rural. This posed a challenge when recruiting because students often look for schools located in cities with amenities.

In addition to the challenge the location poses to recruiting students, Hampton also talked about how geographic location posed a challenge for student retention. Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, students experienced increased mental health challenges. The location of Mountain State University created challenges for supporting students who experience mental health issues, according to Hampton.

> I don't know if the increase in mental health issues is environmental or because of COVID. We now have more instances of students who are experiencing mental health crises than ever before. [Because of] our location and because of dollars, I think it is hard to attract the talent needed to support mental health. So that hurts the university's retention. Our students have to be on a waiting list just to see a professional. Our psychological center is overwhelmed because we are in a smaller town.

The location of Mountain State, according to Hampton, has impacted both recruitment and retention of students in the last five years, which has then had an impact on overall net tuition revenue for the institution, thereby impacting the overall budget.

Strategic Resource Management

Resource Allocation. When asked about how the budget has impacted operations within enrollment management, Hampton stated, “we’re looking at creative ways to do things without spending more money.” Both Hampton and Mountain State employees have had to work additional hours to make up for the reduction in workforce and resources. “We’re putting in more work and more time, which is ok for salary employees.” However, most of the employees within enrollment management do not meet the threshold for salary pay, which has created challenges for the university. She said, “Our admissions counselors are not salary-based, you know, that comes with a whole lot of overtime. And then there’s the ramifications coming next year with the change in labor laws. This will result in additional overtime with no increases in budget.” Hampton continued to talk about compensation for her employees. “I’m paying admissions staff $30,000 a year. They probably make the least money of anyone in state.” To encourage individuals to be an admissions counselor the university has spoken with individuals about experiences within the position, telling applicants they get to travel and earn a master’s degree for free, in hopes of finding qualified applicants.

While the reduction in budget has impacted staff compensation, it has also caused Hampton and Mountain State’s enrollment team to operate differently. “So we’ve gotten real creative. And I’ve learned to say *no* a lot. I’ve learned to tell my people, just because you’ve always done it this way, you can’t do it this way now.” Hampton went on to say that they have reduced the number of recruitment events, as well. Additionally, they have offered less food and other giveaways to reduce the cost of recruitment. “Don't expect me to do the same, because I may not get the same results, because I'm doing less because I have less money." The second largest change that Hampton discussed were changes to the markets from which the university recruits students. In the past, enrollment management had the money to recruit across the United States, but Mountain State has had to be much more strategic. The university has begun to offer just over in-state tuition prices to 15 other states to recruit additional students, and this has posed a challenge for recruitment. "We don't have the money to market to [out of state students]. I don't have the money to send recruiters to these states," said Hampton. While the reduced tuition is a recruitment benefit, Hampton claimed they are struggling to get the students needed to offset the reduction in net tuition revenue.

During the interview, Hampton enforced the idea that additional resources were needed. However, she stressed that such resources needed to be reoccurring in order to be successful moving forward. Hampton stated that the university's president offered additional one-time funds a week prior to our interview. "Extra (one-time) money is not going to help me. I mean, it'll help me if you could give my people some money toward their salaries, but you can't sustain that."

Another area that lacked resources was funding for scholarships. Higher education has had to overcome a national narrative that it has become too expensive. Therefore, students expect institutions to reduce the cost for them. Hampton said, "how can we make it more affordable? We need to educate our population about why education is so expensive. If we reduce the cost for everyone we will not have the budget to operate."

Government Investment. Mountain State University has also experienced budget challenges when the Commonwealth of Kentucky transitioned from incremental budgeting to performance funding. While the university has done better than other institutions in the state, its portion of performance funding has decreased. Hampton noted, "We are fortunate here compared to others in Kentucky. They have had big budget shortfalls. We only had to find well, $6 million within academic affairs and $1 million within student affairs." Hampton discussed the challenges of the new funding model. "[Mountain State] can never win, even though we do fantastic. We can never [increase funding], because we do not have the numbers. Instead, we are going to have fight for changes to the model." Hampton shared that the performance-based funding model rewards institutions that have the greatest number of students. In Kentucky, the two research one institutions have been awarded much of the performance funding pool.

Hampton did not seem to think that the challenges with performance funding would improve anytime soon. "This is political. Their agenda and our agenda are two different things, you know." To move forward, Hampton said a lot change would need to occur.

> Until we get on the same page, we've got to do a whole lot, not just within higher education, but because this is an indication of how we are morally in our country. We have got to figure out something different, and I think it's going to get much worse before it gets better.

For things to improve, Hampton believed political changes would need to happen at the local, state, and national levels. Regional institution leadership would have to push for change.

Adaptive Organizational Strategies

Adaptive Strategies. Mountain State University, like many regional comprehensive institutions, has served a primarily traditional first-time freshman student population. When discussing the upcoming demographic cliff , decrease in high school graduates in 2025, that would reduce the number of first-time freshmen students, Hampton stated that the university would have to focus on different student populations. “I think we need to focus less on the traditional first-time freshmen and more on our adult learners on our stop outs, particularly in the State of Kentucky.” According to National Clearinghouse, Kentucky currently has 611,000 residents that have some college, but no credential.

> We've got to look to adult learners. We've got to look to certificate programs. And we're so stuck on our traditional way of doing things that it's like, I'm like, okay. Y'all see these places closing every day. It could happen to us; we've been very fortunate here at Mountain State University.

Another student population that Hampton hopes to recruit is transfer students. Hampton noted that transfer students are an opportunity for Mountain State, however she believed that sources would need to shift to attract this student population. “Transfer students, you know, they don't get what freshman get. We need to roll out the red carpet. We need to give them all the support financially, too.” During COVID-19, the community colleges across the United States saw the largest declines in enrollment. Community colleges are now just beginning to recover from these declines. To ensure that Mountain State University would be successful in recruiting adult learners and transfer students, Hampton claimed they would have to shift financial resources to these populations. “We are going to have to concentrate and probably remove some of those dollars from traditional recruitment to transfer to adult learners and to our regional campuses. Because that's where our growth is going to be, moving forward.”

In addition to recruiting new student populations, Hampton discussed recruitment strategies that were no longer a focus for Mountain State. “Tennessee used to [be a feeder], but we can't compete with their lottery money. We can't compete with it. And so that used to be our largest feeder from out of state students." Tennessee was not the only out of state location where the university has seen a decline in enrollment, however. Hampton said,

> Then it turned to Illinois, [and] because their tuition rates are so high they would come here in droves. Now we're seeing a drop in those students because there, the government has put more money in their MAP [Monetary Award Program] program because their tuition rates were so high. And they're doing more to keep students in their state.

The decline in out-of-state students from contiguous states had resulted in Mountain State focusing recruitment efforts within Kentucky to meet their enrollment goals.

For Mountain State University to be successful and meet enrollment goals, they have had to look at the entire student population. In the past, enrollment management was concerned primarily with just recruiting students, but later they began shifting their focus to retaining students. Hampton said, "I would rather pour a whole lot more money into retention because once [students] get here, they will be successful because they're smart." Hampton wasn't alone. In fact, enrollment management officers have claimed for years that it is less expensive to retain a student than to recruit new students.

The final shifting priority at Mountain State pertained to academic programs. Faculty have continued to push to create new academic programs. Hampton stated, "everybody wants a new program. However, nobody wants to get rid of a program that doesn't even have five students in it. But that's the reality of the world. We can no longer afford to the fluff." The university would have to take a strategic approach to determine which academic programs were appropriate moving forward to recruit students.

Strategic Priorities. During the interview, Hampton stressed the importance of creating a strategic recruitment for Mountain State University. For many years, according to Hampton, the university tried to do "everything for everyone." With limited resources, it has become important for the university to determine what they would look like moving forward. Hampton stated, “I think we will keep the focus on our backyard, specifically Kentucky.” Hampton shared the current enrollment at Mountain State: “Here's the reality, these are our students: 68% of our students come from Kentucky. Probably almost 32% of our students come from out of state.” Looking at the numbers for high school students currently enrolled in Kentucky led Hampton to believe the impact of the demographic cliff might not be as bad as once predicted. “The sophomore and junior classes are larger than this class [graduation class of 2024]. So in 2026, if students don't move, I think there are certain pockets of populations where we will be okay when it comes to the freshman class.” However, Mountain State would have to change expectations for out-of-state recruitment. “There are only so many places you can go to get kids. Everybody else is going to those places, too,” said Hampton. She noted that it is hard to complete with the larger institutions that are also recruiting out of state.

In addition to recruiting new students, Hampton shared that Mountain State has had to recruit back those who started at the university but did not persist. “We have a lot of people who started a degree and did not complete it.” With the demographic cliff coming, the university would have to start focusing on the non-traditional student to be able to keep up their enrollment, according to Hampton.

Another important recruitment opportunity for Mountain State, according to Hampton, is international students.

> We have a robust international student recruitment program. The issue as a regional institution is that we get lots of applications, but the students get here and then they transfer. This is because we're in a small town and they want to go to Chicago. Or, you know, they want to go to the east coast or west coast.

Hampton stressed that Mountain State must work on retaining international students moving forward and make sure they persist to graduation.

In addition to retaining international students, Hampton said that Mountain State University must continue to work on retaining and supporting current students. While new enrollment would always be a priority at the university, Hampton stated money should start to shift more to retaining current students.

> I would rather pour a whole lot more money into retention because once they get here, we know these students, these adults, they're smart. But their communication skills, written skills, organizational skill, and motivation—it's not there. So where your money needs to be going is in a mental health, retention, and academic advising.

Hampton believed that being strategic with recruitment and retention of students would enable Mountain State to stabilize or even increase the budget by having the students remain at the institution and persist to graduation.

Operational Planning. According to Hampton, the future of higher education is changing and only some institutions will be ready.

> Higher education is changing, and we're not keeping up. And I can say that, generally speaking, for all types of institutions. We're a regional institution public institution, but I could say for private schools, all types, we're not ready. I don't think we're marketing ourselves in a way that appeals to [students].

To be ready for the future, institutions would need to plan. One document that is used to plan for the future is a university strategic plan. “We do have one. But it's kind of dated. We need to develop a new way,” Hampton said in regards to Mountain State’s current strategic plan. When asked if university used or referenced the strategic plan, Hampton replied, “I don't think we do. We don't go back to it enough. And you have to remind people.” Hampton thought a strategic plan was needed for the university, but only if it was utilized. “I think it’s important. Don’t let it just be something that sits on the shelf, and you only bring it out for reaccreditation.”

In addition to a university strategic plan, Hampton talked about the importance of an enrollment management plan. This document has been under development and would highlight recruitment priorities set out by Hampton. “We've actually got a strategic [enrollment] plan that we're working on. It has a focus on our extended campuses because that's where a lot of our adult learners are and our stop out programs.” Hampton reiterated that Mountain State University needs to plan for the future to be able to adapt as enrollment and funding changes.

Innovative Solutions. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way universities interact with students. Institutions had to change their practices if they were going to continue to recruit and enroll new students. These new innovative practices have continued and have become the expectation of students. Hampton stated,

> Students today don’t want to take an extra step; everything's a direct line for them. And so you have to make sure you have removed barriers. We tried to figure out ways to remove barriers that we didn't even think were barriers. We’ve got to stop thinking like 50-year-old people that we are, and we've got to get the input of these young people if we are going to attract them. This can only be done by asking young people.

In addition to removing barriers, Hampton noted that institutions must make the admissions process more convenient. “We go to the schools and meet with the students. Now we help them through the admissions process to make it more convenient. By doing this, we are breaking down barriers for students.”

After a student commits to attending Mountain State, they must attend new student orientation. Previously the institution would charge the student a separate fee in a separate system to attend. However, Hampton has worked to simplify the process: “We decided to go with the model of placing the orientation fee on their fall bill instead of charging up front. It scared the Jesus out of me, but it’s what we did. We have to change our way of thinking." Hampton said that they were to leverage construction at the institution to create change, since people want to continue to do activities the way they always have. "One of the things that actually helped us is construction on our campus. We had to think outside of the box. Our student center wasn't open, so we couldn't do orientation the way we usually do it." Hampton said the changes were an improvement, and hoped this case could be a catalyst for additional innovative change at Mountain State.

In addition to changing processes at the university, Hampton said the institution was looking into new innovative ways to recruit students. For example, Hampton said that the university had been looking into new programs specifically designed for individuals that dropped out of college or those that worked within industries in the region.

> We need student programs for those students who [started college and did not finish] and for the industries that we have within our region. We need to create some certificate programs. Moving forward, we need to connect with the companies within our areas that help them with their training issues.

For this to become a reality at Mountain State, Hampton said that they will have to move resources to this program.

> We cannot keep doing what we have always done, but instead we are going to have to divert dollars. We are going to have to say we do not need 10 admissions counselors for freshman recruitment. Instead, we need to shift money where it should go; it should shift to more corporate recruitment.

Furthermore, Hampton believed that programs at Mountain State needed to start better preparing students to the job marketplace after graduation. "What we're hearing from professionals is we need to train students in more soft skills," stated Hampton. Historically, higher education prepares individuals for critical thinking, but Hampton believed the university would need to start shifting toward preparing students for the workforce to be successful. “We're producing graduates, and yes, they have the knowledge in their area, but they don't know how to work with others.” Hampton said this could be a symptom of COVID-19 and technology, but believed we must prepare students for what is to come after higher education.

The final area of innovation that Hamton mentioned during the interview was examining the discount rate at Mountain State University. To be able to stay competitive with other institutions, the university had been looking at tuition rates for out of state students and the scholarship model. Hampton said, “We must change our tuition and scholarship model. We've extending our discount to 15 other states where they get a regional tuition rate, which is $550 more than in-state.” Hampton asserted that changes to the tuition and scholarship model would bring additional students and revenue to the university.

Cultural Adaptation

Throughout the interview, Hampton alluded to the idea that the current culture at Mountain State University would need to change moving forward. The first reference for the need to change culture came during the impending enrollment cliff.

> Already we have been reading about the decline. You know, the students aren't there 2024, 2025, 2026. No, they're not there. We've been reading about this, but we still insist on doing things the same way and think that we're going to get the same results.

Hampton continued to push this idea that culture and mindsets of individuals at Mountain State needed to change when considering planning for the future with limited resources. “And I've learned to tell my people, just because you've always done it this way. You can't do it this way. We've got to get uncomfortable.” These statements were made in regard to trying to change the culture around enrollment management. But Hampton continued to talk about changing culture around other parts of the university, specifically faculty.

> This is one of the things that I talk about every chance I get. I talked to faculty saying, you can't keep teaching the same way you've been teaching for the last 20 years. You can't keep pulling out that same old syllabus. You're going to have to get them where they are and raise them up where you need them to be. They say it is not my job, and I say it is now if you want to keep them and retain them. [Enrollment management] can go out there and get them for you, but [the faculty has] got to retain them.

Hampton further talked about the need for faculty to adapt the curriculum to meet student demands. “Do I need this certification? Do I need this master's, you know? Do they need to get their master’s program moved online?” The faculty at Mountain State have traditionally preferred the in-person model and have not wanted to move programs online. “And I know faculty are tired of [teaching online], but it still works. It is still convenient for students.”

Interview B: Lake State University

The second interview was conducted with Foster. Her career in higher education and enrollment management was very traditional. When Foster started her undergraduate work in sociology, she joined a sorority and became very involved in the organization. After completing an undergraduate degree, she started to pursue a master’s degree in sociology. Her graduate assistantship was in campus Greek life, and this is when Foster “fell in love with higher education.” After graduate school, Foster started a full-time position as a Greek life coordinator, working with campuses across the country. She transitioned from Greek Life into student recruitment for a large private research institution. Later, Foster moved into recruitment and career services for a community college. While earning a doctorate degree, Foster served as a recruiter for a large research institution, a position she stayed in for almost 10 years. For the past 14 months, Foster served as a senior leader of enrollment management at Lake State University.

Organization Challenges and Response

Pandemic Impact. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at Lake State University was significant, according to Foster. The enrollment makeup and the type of students attending Lake State changed. She said, “Absolutely, we were hit hard. Looking at the numbers, we saw a big decrease in our first-time freshmen. Now we did see an uptick of our dual credit and our overall enrollment.” The result of the increase in dual credit resulted in this group making up a third of the undergraduate population. These students tend to bring in significantly less revenue than a traditional full-time student, which impacted the budget at Lake State. Foster noted that other factors resulting from COVID-19 hurt the budget, including “not having an undergraduate population living on campus.” She said, “that very much hurt our budget. Without students in campus housing consuming meals, we lose revenue impacting the total budget for the university,”

In addition to enrollment decline of first-time students, Lake State saw a decline in current students persisting. “Our retention was hurt by COVID and we're starting to see that rebound. But it's not as strong as we were hoping it would be,” said Foster. She also noted she thought some students left higher education because they did not like the online modality, but for others, she thought it was the stress of the pandemic.

In the years after the introduction of COVID-19, Lake State University was seeing incoming classes with higher grade point averages (GPAs). However, these GPAs did not translate into students being prepared for the academic rigor of college. “That is just statistically, not what we're seeing. We're seeing an inflated GPA, but ACT scores are lower and then students are coming in academically unprepared," said Foster. This has created additional challenges supporting students who were not prepared for college with limited resources. Foster also asserted that Lake State has had additional challenges trying to recruit students since COVID-19: "Now we face an even greater barrier of our service region: recruiting first-time freshman students. You know, they were always debating whether college was for them, but they spent two years [studying] virtually and they're academically unprepared for college." The decline in enrollment, retention, and students being underprepared for college has greatly impacted the budget at Lake State.

Sociopolitical Dynamics. A challenge for higher education, and for Lake State University in particular, has been a strong economy, causing individuals to question if higher education is worth the price and loss of income. Foster discussed how this impacted recruitment at Lake State:

> Now, because the economy is doing so well, [students] can go out to the Taco Bells or to the Wal Marts make $15.00 or $16.00 an hour. And that's more than they've ever seen in their entire life. So why take on the debt of $20,000 or $30,000 when you can go out and start making 16 bucks an hour?

Enrollment management at the university has had to talk with students about the benefits of higher education and potential for long-term higher earnings. However, it is a challenge to have students think long-term when they can earn a living wage now. "And that's the reality. I think people don't realize COVID had a big impact of that. You know, it kind of took that thought process and made it even larger for our students."

Geographic Challenges. The concept of geographic challenges was present in the interview with Foster. Lake State University has sought to increase their international student population in recent years. Foster noted that she has seen an increase in the number of international students at Lake State, but they are struggling to retain them after enrollment. Foster said, “any international student, I think, is going to find there's a transitional piece that is difficult.” However, the university’s location makes the transitions even more difficult for international students. “This a rural community. There's kind of another learning curve to adapting. We've had lots of conversations on both how we can we help assimilate the students into the United States and then into [the university].” To try to retain international students, Lake State needed to think outside the box. To start, the university began to take their international students to international student festivals that are hosted in the region. Second, Foster stated that the university is now busing their international students to one of the larger cities in the region to offer them additional opportunities.

> In partnership with our international student services, which I think is such a bonus for living in a small town, we have started taking students to larger cities in the region. The city offers much more in terms of entertainment, grocery stores, and essentials. We've put together a bus where every month we take them. For the day, they are to go and experience other things that they wouldn't get to if they just stayed at [Lake State].

With the addition of taking students to festivals and day trips to other cities, Foster hoped that the university would begin to see an increase in the number of international students that start and are retained until graduation.

Strategic Resource Management

Resource Allocation. Coming into the enrollment management division as a senior leader at Lake State University, Foster knew she would be faced with budget challenges. The institution had declining enrollment for several years. Foster believed that she would be able to come into Lake State and make improvements. However, a lack of resources made it challenging to make progress quickly.

> The effect that all of the other variables have on an institution on the institutional budget, and how that affects the staff [moral]. So as there's that decrease in

> students, obviously not making the goals, and [enrollment] being in charge of 70% of the budget for the university, that means budget cuts have to happen.

The challenge for Foster had been that a large portion of the university budget went to personnel. This posed challenges for Foster as a leader, “You cannot let go of a tenured faculty member when they have tenure. So who is affected by the budget cuts? That comes down to staff.”

Foster had to be inventive to ensure she stayed within budget while still trying to meet enrollment goal at Lake State. “Over the past five years, [we] have seen dramatic cuts in staffing, both by letting individuals go and hiring only at entry level.” This process has come at a cost for the university, according to Foster. “Our communication and marketing staff is a third of what it was five years ago. We spoke to Elon University last week, they said they have 40 people in their admissions office. We're lucky if we can keep three recruiters on the ground.” The changes in staffing and compensation have also resulted in staff turnover at Lake State. Foster said,

> You know, our enrollment counselors, they get six months, eight months, nine months of sales experience, and they can go out making three times what they make here, and they do it. So the loss of staffing with the loss of budget cause our budgets to continue to get cut, as well, and that creates very poor morale on campus.

As a leader, Foster has had to work with limited resources while trying to improve the morale of staff to be able to meet her goals.

Government Investment. The interview with Foster underscored the challenges that regional comprehensive universities face regarding performance funding in Kentucky. Foster noted:

> I will just tell you in full candor my opinion about the CPE performance-based funding model. It was set up so that the *haves*, the flagship institutions, [also called research one institutions], receive the majority of the performance-based funding funds. And the *have nots*, the more regional campuses, they're the ones who suffer on the back of that. When you look at what [Lake State] has received

> from performance-based funding models, you will see we don't receive any funds, and when you compare it to what others are receiving, it's one of those things where we're losing, and we're trying to play the catch up game. It’s impossible to catch up.

When asked how Foster, as leader, has reacted to the challenges of performance funding, she said, “it is a game that we cannot win.” Currently Lake State University offers a limited number of science and health majors, which is a part of the performance funding model.

> We may not ever offer a lot of those majors, or the institution itself is not set up to serve those types of students. At the end of the day, we are a regional educational institution. We are not set up to have an engineering school; therefore, we can't pump 500 or 600 students into an engineering program and win the STEM plus H model when it comes to CPE performance-based funding.

Instead of trying to change Lake State to gain funding, Foster believed that the institution needed to advocate for changes to the funding model. “Our president has done a really good job of going out and expressing concerns around the fact that we are set up to not win that game [of performance funding], and to try to change the model.” Lake State University has shared its story with legislators, hoping to see a complete change to the model. In the meantime, Foster stated that the university needed to look at the metrics of performance funding, but not make it a focal point of their strategies. Instead, they have needed to find ways to achieve their goals without the expectation of gaining performance funding dollars.

Adaptive Organizational Strategies

Adaptive Strategies. When discussing the upcoming demographic cliff, which will result in a reduction in traditional-age college students, Foster stated that she believed it will negatively impact Lake State University. “It is my prediction because of the fact we rely so heavily on our first-time freshman, I do think we'll get hit with that 10-15% decrease of first-time freshmen fairly soon.” Foster said that she has tried to get the university to look at other student populations for enrollment in the future. “We have been working to be very proactive with our conversations of adult learners, which is a high population in our region. Specifically, those with some, but no college degrees.” These are student populations that had not been a focus for the university in the past.

> The previous chief enrollment management officer didn't place a focus on it. He and the president very much stayed with first-time freshmen being a focal point. We have only since this past year started having a voice at the table of the importance of adult learners and non-traditional students.

Foster also noted that these student populations were a focus for a state level.

In addition to adult learners and non-traditional students, Foster talked about the importance of international recruitment to Lake State. “We’re seeing an increase in international students. As I listen to others in the region meetings, it seems like other institutions are kind of placing a focus on international students.” To assist with international recruitment, Lake State University hired a new director of international recruitment. Prior to the new director, the university did not place a large emphasis on this student population. The director has since revamped the way the university has engaged with international students and renegotiated contacts with international recruiters. Foster hoped their efforts with international students pay off in the near future.

As a leader, Foster believed that an emphasis on adult learners and international students would pay off. Such populations have the numbers, so Foster believed that they could be successful meeting enrollment numbers and budget by increasing adult learners and international students.

Strategic Priorities. Like most institutions, Lake State University has tried to increase student enrollment. During the interview, Foster stated that she had seen an increase in dual credit students, but this student type does not help the university’s budget. “We've been seeing an uptick of dual credit students. Now, when it comes to funding, we don't make as much money off those students as we do with our traditional students,” stated Foster. Moving forward, Foster believed that the university needed to increase traditional students to ensure financial stability. In 2024, Lake State has seen an increase in first-time freshman. With this change, the institution has had discussions about the appropriate number of students on which to base the university budget.

> We did see the bump that everyone else saw. We started with an 8% bump after census data in November. I think we ended roughly with a 4.7% bump, which was good for us. [Enrollment management] is responsible for 70% of our budget. What I find myself doing is meeting much more often than I ever thought I would with the president and the chief financial officer to talk about what is that realistic budget look likes and how we can realistically hit numbers.

A concern for Foster was seeing a decline in the number of Kentucky-based students applying to Lake State. “Right now, we're down in Kentucky. That's the reality of where our funnel is. We're up overall, but we're down in Kentucky. That's a big flag for me, because that's our bread and butter.” To be successful, Foster believed that Lake State would have to continue to make gains in the Kentucky market. Over the last couple of years, however, the university has tried to recruit out of state students from Tennessee, but did not see a return.

> Tennessee is a place that over the last five years [Lake State] has, at the advice of a consultant, spent a lot of money purchasing names, gone out and done traveling, and we have just not seen the yield that we had hoped for. So that is a place where we're moving away from.

Moving forward, the university had planned to be more strategic in their recruitment practices and retaining students. Foster stated, “I would say, in that capacity you were really looking at a two-pronged [approach]. How do you recruit these students, but then also make sure that the university is prepared to support them and retain them?” It is her belief that this two-pronged approach would help ensure stability with enrollment and budgets moving forward.

Operational Planning. One statement that stood out during the interview related to the strategic plan and planning in general at Lake State University. According to Foster, “Our university does not currently have an active, live strategic plan that we utilize.” The leadership of the university did not discuss a strategic plan but instead would talk about how the institution should move forward without a formal plan. “I will tell you in full confidence and candor, that I go to meetings and people don’t say when I'm around the leadership table, *let's talk about our strategic plan*.” When discussing the enrollment management division, Foster stated that her division has created their own strategic planning documents. “We have a strategic plan that we use in-house that's set up through 2025.” The enrollment management team visited and discussed this plan monthly. After 2025, the enrollment management team plans to reassess their plan based on everchanging environmental factors and decide how they plan to move forward to meet internal goals.

Thinking about planning for the future, Foster stated, “What I have found to be really a focal point for enrollment management here is how we maximize the affordability aspect of education.” This will continue to be a pillar of Lake State University’s planning moving forward. One area of concern for Foster for the future was that the university has not talked much about the demographic cliff or decline in traditional-age students over the next several years.

> In this role, there has been a lot of conversations and a lot of pushing of the institution to a talk about the 2025 cliff. Because that's not happened and then also the importance of funding marketing to get the word out about the institution. This is needed so that we can start recruiting in areas that we historically have.

From the interview, it was evident that Foster was concerned about the lack of planning and preparation for the future.

Innovative Solutions. Throughout the interview, Foster talked about how higher education cannot continue to operate the way it always had to move forward. Instead, leaders of institutions would have to develop new practices that meet the expectations of today's students. One area of change that Foster saw is that the university has put a lot more emphasis on *university experience.* "We know that when football and basketball teams do well, applications go up. In turn, investments should be made in the experience," said Foster. The entire student experience should be conveyed to students. Thus, Foster talked about the importance of marketing, even with limited resources. Other regions have been effective with their marketing, according to Foster, and "what they have done is the strategic aspect of marking and it is paying off." She added, "I have received their ads; they are doing it right and it is paying off." Additionally, Foster discussed the importance of marketing because of the way students consume information. Foster predicted that, in the future, fewer admissions counselors would be on the road talking with students. "I think what we will find is the model of the enrollment counselor getting in the car, going to the high school, asking the counselors, really going away." Instead, marketing will be more important to recruit and attract students to institutions.

A second area of innovation for Lake State University focused on changing the way they recruit and enroll international students. Foster said that Lake State's international office required that international students provide all documentation physically.

> What I have found is that we were so behind the times on international students in the sense that, for simple things of accepting documents electronically, we weren't

> doing that. We were making everything be mailed in that we were so behind any growth we have is statistically significant for the university.

While a simple innovation for the university, Foster hoped that by moving to electronic documents, they will see an increase in international student enrollment.

Foster shared her number-one priority for innovation in the recruitment realm. It was Foster’s hope that Lake State University could begin to work with businesses and companies.

> This is our number-one priority. We have to be able to offer these things. We have just started signing partnerships with businesses and companies to offer educational partnerships, which is a must-have. We are very much behind the game. But we are starting to see movement in that area. So, I'm hopeful for that. Our president is starting to see the value in these partnerships and that has been a big thing over the past year. We have spent so much time just trying to convince him we're not giving up on first-time freshmen. We never will, but we have got to have pipelines available.

Foster was very cognizant of the fact that the pipeline for first-time freshman would decline in the coming years. Therefore, enrollment management has tried to find innovative ways to recruit alternative student populations to Lake State.

Finances are usually a large barrier for students. During the interview, Foster discussed how other regional comprehensives, from their perspective, have found ways to make higher education attainable. “When you look at the scholarship offerings and their cost of attendance, they have figured out those metrics very well.” Lake State University has looked into how they can best utilize their scholarship dollars to attract students, while still maximizing their net tuition revenue. Additionally, Foster stated that financial resources also needed to be moved toward populations outside the traditional first-time student. “I think you will see budgets move more towards adult learners and these business partnerships, these educational partnerships. I think you will see institutions that are doing it right. You'll see innovation.”

Cultural Adaptation

Foster attended Lake State University as an undergraduate student. During the interview she stated that many of the same faculty members that were there when she attended were still there today. She felt that due to the longevity of the faculty, the campus has not seen innovation.

> We have a very veteran set of faculty here on campus. I graduated almost 20 years ago, and most of my faculty still works here. There's lots of value in that, but the movement to innovate programs is something that is stalled, in my opinion, because of the age of our faculty.

Foster stated that she had spent a lot of time since starting her role of chief enrollment officer trying to change the culture at Lake State. One of the best examples of lack of cultural change and innovation came after the university returned in person after the COVID-19 pandemic eased. Lake State University, like all institutions of higher education, had to move to remote learning in the spring of 2020. However, as soon as the faculty were able to return, they wanted to go back to their old ways. Culture did not change during this time period at the university. Foster stated, “They pushed through. And, as soon as they were able to no longer offer online, they move right back into face to face.” Foster has worked with the university provost to change culture and begin offering online education for their students. While Foster understood that faculty preferred to be in person, she knew that Lake State must offer more flexibility for today’s students.

> Now, we’re really talking to our faculty. Our provost has essentially told our deans and faculty members that we *will* offer online programs. Lake State University currently does not offer a true, completely online, undergraduate degree. That is not sustainable. He has tasked the faculty with this as it is a must. This is our number-one priority. We have to be able to offer these things.

Once they had an online presence, Foster noted that she believed additional cultural changes would need to take place. Moving forward, Foster saw, “the online arm of the institution becoming that support of the traditional undergraduate program." Students need flexibility because of other life demands and Foster saw online learning helping students meet those demands if the university could get faculty to adapt.

A second area that Foster had to change culture-wise was around enrollment expectations at Lake State. The veteran administration, faculty, and staff had enrollment expectations from the past when larger number of students arrived on campus each fall. "For me, historically we found in the 90s and the early 2000s is that the president or the CFO could just say, 'well, we need an extra 100 kids.' And they were just available. And that's just not the case any longer." Foster has spent a great deal of time informing campus constituents about enrollment management at Lake State University. In the past, the campus community did not know or care about recruitment. Foster noted,

> Really, I feel my role is to let individuals know across campus what's going on, and the numbers, and then have honest conversations, so that our chief financial officer can prep accordingly, and as well as our president and our deans, about what what's coming down the pipeline.

Part of keeping the campus community informed about enrollment is discussing the future, according to Foster. For this reason, Foster began having conversations related to the demographic cliff that faces enrollment and the budget for Lake State in the coming years. "How do we survive the 2025 cliff? How do we get our extremely, our veteran faculty, who have no real reason to change, become more adult learner-friendly. How do we move them to become adult learner-friendly, because that's really where our budgets going to lie in a couple of years." Foster used the term *adult learner* to encompass all non-traditional student populations that Lake State must try to recruit moving forward.

While Foster talked a lot about how she hoped to change culture moving forward, she also discussed the results of current culture at the university. Foster said, "I spend a lot of time thinking about morale, and how we can boost or salvage the morale we have." With declining enrollment and increased work demands, the faculty and staff morale at Lake State has been low. Compounding the problem was having a president that liked to keep the status quo, according to Foster.

> The other piece of it is, we have a president who does not believe in remote or hybrid working. So, lots of institutions have adopted this hybrid work model; ours has not, which is very, very similar to our faculty. You can come back and be on campus five days a week. And people have realized that getting to work from home one day, two days a week, 'that's really good for my mental wellbeing. And having that option may be worth me taking less of a salary.' However, we have not been granted, at a university level, the ability to do that.

The lack of change in culture at Lake State University has resulted in low morale among employees. This has therefore resulted in employees doing the bare minimum and not wanting to change.

Interview C: Valley State University

The final interview was with Parker. For most of his professional career, Parker has worked in higher education. Parker was extremely involved in student organizations and working on campus during his undergraduate experience. As a student worker, he started in the registrar's office processing documents. After completing an undergraduate degree, there were openings in the registrar's office, and Parker said, "I was in the right place at the right time," starting a 10-year career within higher education. In addition to working in the registrar's office, Parker has worked in admissions and recruitment doing data analytics, and was promoted to a leadership position within admissions. Parker has worked at Valley State University for five years in various roles and started as a senior leader in enrollment management a little over a year ago.

Organizational Challenges and Response

Pandemic Impact. When asked what Parker's experience had been within enrollment management over the last five years, it was summed up in one word: *challenging*. "*Challenging* would be the summary word that I would use. You know, in the past five years. I don't think any of us saw the challenges that the pandemic would bring." However, the challenges did not impact enrollment performance at Valley State University. "We are very fortunate at [Valley State]; we actually saw the most growth that we've had in the past 15 years in the past five years. But that has actually brought its own unique set of challenges." Parker stated that the challenges were positive, but the rest of the institution was not prepared.

> Our most significant challenges has frankly been the infrastructure of supporting the growth that we've had in the quick amount of time that it happened. In one year, we grew about 15%. It was something I had never experienced before since being in enrollment management. But what we are seeing is that although we've had an increase in enrollment, and we've had an increase in retention during that timeframe, the amount of services and support that it takes to support those students and get them not just onboarded, but also persisting, is something that I've never seen in my professional career thus far. And it just continues to grow every single year.

Parker continued to discuss the need for additional support for incoming students after the COVID-19 pandemic.

> They are not prepared to be college students, in terms of emotional stability in terms of mental health, in terms of social awareness. You name it. They just need a lot of help and a lot of nudging to be able to persist. But [that must happen] before they even get here. I have also seen a significant decrease in support getting the students through the enrollment pipeline.

Such challenges have continued once the students are on-campus. Parker stated that additional services have been needed to ensure that students are successful and persist at Valley State. As a leader, Parker noted that he was not prepared for the challenges of COVID-19, even when the challenges have been positive for the university. "If I had to wrap up the past five years, it has been thankfully year-over-year growth for [Valley State]. But also, [it has been] years of a lot of building the house we're actually living in, because we are dealing with a student body that that we just haven't before."

Sociopolitical Dynamics. Nationally, institutions are seeing an increase in the number of credit hours that students bring into an institution from dual credit. Kentucky has the same challenges, as the state continues to push students to take as many dual credit hours as possible to reduce the cost of higher education. Parker talked about this social political challenge that Valley State has faced. "What we are seeing externally is, students are coming in with significantly more dual credit and things like that than they ever have before." This increase has created challenges for enrollment management at Valley State University. These students are expecting to graduate in less time. Parker stated that another challenge is that the students are not necessarily prepared for college. They have credit hours, but mentally, they are not prepared for the challenges of higher education.

National politics have also had an impact on enrollment management at Valley State. Parker explained,

> Everything social and political has had impact on enrollment management. It absolutely has and will continue to impact enrollment management. You know, the Supreme Court decision on affirmative action significantly affected enrollment management and will continue to impact enrollment management. There's a significant impact at the federal level as well with legislation and support from the federal government. I would say, the biggest impact has been sociopolitical because that also touches on what I was referring to earlier with mental health of students.

The sociopolitical events that have happened at a state and national level has had a negative impact on today's students. This has created a challenge for enrollment management when they do not have the infrastructure for a larger number of students that need additional support.

Strategic Resource Management

Resource Allocation. Throughout the interview, Parker discussed the changes that he has seen in resources to support students transition into higher education. The change in resources has been seen at the K-12 level and into postsecondary education:

> I have also seen a significant decrease in support for getting the students through the enrollment pipeline. And now that pressure has shifted from the high schools, guidance counselors, career coaches to the postsecondary institutions. This is a significant challenge, because obviously we have very limited budgets with decreased state funding that is not that pressure is not lessening.

According to Parker, when state funding was at higher levels, there was additional support to help students prepare and transition into postsecondary education. Currently, Kentucky is seeing only 50% of students matriculate from high school to higher education.

In addition to losing support at the K-12 level, postsecondary institutions have needed to change structures and/or disband support programs due to declining budgets. Parker said,

> I would say the same things about adult learners and other non-traditional populations. I have seen a lot of universities absorbing those offices into other units. I know another regional institution within the state, for example; they've combined academic testing with the transfer office. And at one point had it completely eliminated the transfer office altogether. And now it's combined testing transfer and adult learners.

Due to the lack of resources, Valley State University has needed to make strategic decisions about how they recruit and support prospective students. This becomes a challenge, according to Parker, since the university needs students to be able to have the resources to recruit and support students.

Government Investments. The change to performance funding in the Kentucky has significantly impacted Valley State University as a whole, and the division of enrollment management, according to Parker. During the interview, Parker expressed his disappointment in the structure of the model, stating it disproportionately benefits the research one (R1) institutions and harms the regionals. “You know, it's not a secret that [Valley State] does not get a huge share of the pie and performance funding as a regional comprehensive. That's just part of the model, and it is not meant to provide significant support to the comprehensive regionals.” Instead of focusing on the state performance funding model, the university is focused on how to maximize net tuition from each student enrolled. According to Parker, the university has relied more on tuition for its budget than state funding dollars.

> So that's what I was getting at when I was referring to a heavy focus on our net tuition model. We are focusing on the understanding that even with reform and performance based funding, we're anticipating the eventual state allocation to be zero or very near zero at [Valley State].

Without changes occurring in the performance funding model in Kentucky, the university has ultimately believed that it will receive no performance funding, and its leadership would still have to focus on the model. Parker said he believed that the metrics will help them with net tuition revenue, even if they cannot compete for larger portions of performance dollars.

> We have to be focused on the model. We don't want to appear to be a university who is not paying attention to those metrics because our persistence and graduation rates and all of that are super important. And so, we have seen a significant increase in our retention and our enrollment and things like that. But at the same time, we also are trying to be realistic in the idea that if there is no major reform in performance funding, then we need to be prepared for the consequences of what that could mean for the budget at [Valley State].

Parker, as a senior leader in enrollment management, has been cognizant of the challenges that the performance funding model has for Valley State. However, he stressed that the university is tuition dependent, and therefore net tuition revenue drives decision making instead of performance funding metrics.

Adaptive Organizational Strategies

Adaptive Strategies. The budget constraints at Valley State University have caused leadership to make tough decisions on priorities for the university moving forward. In the not distant past, Valley State spent a great deal of resources on trying to recruit international students. However, due to political and economic challenges, international students were not a priority. Parker talked about this student population and how recruiting them has become less of a priority.

> International recruitment, it's a stretch to even say that's a thing anymore. Because a lot of universities aren't even able to have an international recruitment position because we can't afford to have somebody recruiting abroad. We've had to focus on making sure we have the funding to work with recruiting agencies. And then obviously, if you are super aware of legislation and things like that, there has been a lot of confusion in this area in the past five years. We've been working with recruiting agencies, and then all of a sudden, we had to abruptly stop.

As a leader, Parker had to discuss with the campus community why Valley State was seeing a decrease in international students. Individuals across the institution were still under the assumption that it was easy to recruit international students. “I've had those tough conversations with faculty members. A lot stated we have seen a significant decrease in international,” said Parker. Throughout these conversations, Parker had to explain the funding challenges of recruiting international students.

> We can't pay $10,000 to send somebody over to these countries for a month, and 10 years ago we were doing that. We had an international recruiter who was recruiting and traveling internationally. It's just not realistic with the level of funding that we receive to continue this practice.

Knowing that international students were not as large of a priority for the university, enrollment management needed to find other student pipelines.

Valley State University shifted their priority from international students to transfer students and adult learners. These student populations presented large opportunities for the university, with a lower recruitment cost.

> We are heavily looking at increasing our support in transfer students in adult learners. Additionally, students have stopped out from [Valley State] and could return, and only have a semester or two to complete their degree. We've actually formed an office specifically for that work. We made that decision about a year ago, and it's been very fruitful. We are hopeful that we don't see a significant decrease in traditional student populations. But we're also not letting hope be our strategy. And we are focusing on trying to increase our support for those non-traditional populations.

While the larger focus has been placed on non-traditional learners, Parker said that the university will continue to monitor data to make sure they are recruiting the ideal student populations.

Strategic Priorities. With limited resources, Parker talked about the importance of making sure that the university had a strategic recruitment plan. Throughout the interview, Parker talked about the importance of first-time freshman at Valley State, but noted that other populations help round out the enrollment. While many institutions continue to see declining enrollment, Valley State has experienced continual growth in the last several years. Parker attributed the growth to being strategic and making sure they focus on recruitment in Kentucky.

> Interestingly enough, we have actually grown our in-state population significantly in the past five years. And so, if anything, I actually see that either stabilizing or continuing to grow, even though in-state enrollment is declining. And that's just because that's where our students are from. We as an institution go after Kentucky and our out-of-state strategy is not as extensive. We're a Kentucky institution, so we try to have market saturation in Kentucky. We know the markets have saturation. And we're actually using projected graduation data in determining our territory management strategies and tactics. And in the areas that are declining in projected graduates, we are not pulling back the gas pedal, but we're instead infusing resources in the area that is going to continue to see graduate growth. And as I anticipated, it is actually helping us.

Strategic recruitment for Valley State University does not just entail looking at market data to determine where they should be recruiting. Instead, Parker talked about the importance of making sure the financial resources were strategically used to yield the most students possible.

> We are laser focused right now on developing a model that makes us extremely competitive internally with our net tuition model and evaluating all of the factors that go into that, and so how that directly impacts enrollment management means that we're probably going to be branching into markets that we've never had to branch into before, and you know, reallocating resources that we would have traditionally dedicated to in state, to out of state, to international, to the non-traditional populations that we just talked about. So you know, a high school student with a high merit award doesn't really impact the net tuition model. We've got to go after the students who are going to ultimately impact the bottom line, and that is an unfortunate circumstance.

Parker said that strategic recruitment will allow the university to still recruit a consistent class of students while optimizing net tuition revenue.

As many institutions prepare for declining enrollment because of the demographic cliff, Parker asserted that Valley State would not be impacted.

> It depends on the institution, because if you look at the enrollment cliff data nationally, there are absolutely states that are going to be absolutely destroyed by this cliff. Kentucky is disproportionately not as strongly impacted as other states. Even other states that that are directly bordering us. I think people are going to have to rethink their strategy and the institutions that are heavy out of state markets and that are heavy markets in these major metropolitan areas and don't focus at all on these rural communities to recruit and things like that. They're going to have to change their strategy because those areas may not see a huge decline in graduation rates. But it means that all of the regional institutions in those areas are going to be developing strategies to go into those pockets of students that they normally would not focus on recruiting.

Parker said that Valley State would continue to focus on the traditional first-time, first-year student. As other institutions look to expand to new markets, like adult-learners, international, or online students, Valley State planned to remain a residential campus for the traditional student. Parker stated that the university would not serve all populations, and instead it needed to remain focused on those populations they were best set up to serve.

> I think we will continue to see that because, although we all know that we need to increase our awareness of those non-traditional populations, the bread and butter of the first-year students every single year is going to be that traditional-age student. And so at least that's my stance. But I think it significantly impacts the bottom line of enrollment management and how we operate. And I think everyone would love to throw their support at those populations. But it's just not realistic.

Operational Planning. During Parker's tenure at Valley State, he believed in the importance of having a plan. Since joining the university as the chief enrollment officer, Parker has been part of creating the university's strategic plan, which created the foundation for the strategic enrollment plan that was now being developed.

> We developed the university strategic plan. We are now developing a strategic enrollment plan that aligns directly to the strategic university plan. Our pillars are knowledge, innovation, and transformation at the university level. And knowledge, innovation, and transformation will also be the pillars for our strategic enrollment plan, which has the gamut of enrollment management strategy: recruitment, financial aid, and retention. And in graduation, all play into the strategic enrollment plan. So, things that were at the university level will obviously fall down into the strategic enrollment plan. But even if it is not a direct connection, we are still using those three top pillars to inform our strategies.

Planning has helped Valley State continue to see growth in student enrollment but it has not had the impact they were hoping for with regard to the university budget.

During the interview, Parker discussed the challenges Valley State has experienced since increasing enrollment. Parker said the university was challenged with providing students with the support necessary for students to be successful. Additionally, the increase in students has not provided an increase in the budget. "So, even though we've seen an increase in enrollment, that doesn't necessarily mean we've seen an increase in net tuition." Therefore, Parker and the team at Valley State have had to examine the scholarship model and plan for the future by finding ways to increase revenue.

> What we are currently doing is a full analysis of our net tuition model. And looking at the decision we made with the test optional movement. Also, our entire scholarship model was going to be a test-optional scholarship model. And what that has meant is, more students have qualified for scholarships, so we have not yet seen a significant negative impact on the net tuition price. This is the first year that I'm nervous about that because we've not necessarily paid out more aid at this point compared to last year, but there are more students that are eligible to receive that aid in our pipeline, so I do anticipate a hit to the net tuition model, even though we have increased enrollment over the past five years.

Parker alluded to the fact that decisions were made during the COVID-19 pandemic quickly and the impact of those decisions were not discovered until much later. One example was moving from requiring standardized tests for admittance to being test-optional, meaning students could just be admitted by their high school GPA. This change resulted in additional spending for scholarships, which further resulted in the university and Parker then trying to create a plan for the future. “I think the analysis that we're doing will inform that [future scholarship model]. I hope to not completely eliminate test-optional because students need it.” While the planning that was done during pandemic positively impacted students, it negatively impacted the university’s budget. Therefore, a new plan had be created to ensure financial stability for Valley State. “I don't want to limit their [students] ability to receive merit. But I also understand that we have to. We have to operate in a net positive position,” stated Parker. When asked about the plan moving forward at Valley State, Parker said,

> We are laser focused right now on developing a model that makes us extremely competitive internally without a net tuition model. We are evaluating all of the factors that go into that and how that directly impacts enrollment management. It means that we’re probably going to be branching into markets that we’ve never had to branch into before. We are going to reallocate resources that would have traditionally been dedicated to in-state to out of state and from international to the non-traditional population. Additionally, we have to look at merit scholarships because a high school student with a high merit award doesn’t really impact the net tuition model. We’ve got to go after the students that are going to ultimately impact the bottom line and that is an unfortunate circumstance.

The plan laid out by Parker was a change from what Valley State had done in the past where they have been focused on just raising enrollment. Moving forward, the university will be creating a recruitment model that prioritizes net tuition revenue to ensure a stable budget.

Innovative Solutions. When Parker started his position as the chief enrollment management office at Valley State, he had no idea that four months in, COVID-19 would completely change his work. However, Parker was able to use this challenge to create positive change at the university.

> COVID forced us to change everything, to be honest. It gave me the opportunity as the as the chief guy coming in, I mean, I wasn't even in my position for four months when COVID happened, so and we honestly threw everything out the window from start to finish. Our whole communication plan was rewritten, our whole marketing, print, digital, social, everything, was completely redone because we had to rethink our strategy. Boots on the ground were completely redone. And, to be honest, it was the hard reset that our counseling staff needed.

Change and innovation within an established organization can be challenging. However, Parker said he believed that the team was able to use the challenges of COVID-19 to create positive changes at Valley State, resulting in increased enrollment.

Another area of innovation for the university was changing the recruiting position. In the past, all of the recruiters were based out of Valley State, and would travel around to recruit students. After COVID-19, Parker saw that remote positions could be beneficial for enrollment management at the university.

> I also think we will see a significant increase in regional, remote recruitment positions. That's because you may or may not be able to recruit in your backyard, and so I think universities will have to be very in tune with where they is organic interest. And if there is enough organic interest, it could justify increased support in those areas. If I had to guess in five years, that's probably the most significant increase in strategy and things like that that we will see, Chicago is a great example, in my opinion [institutions will employ remote recruiters in Chicago].

This would be a change to the staffing model that Valley State currently had in place.

Looking toward the future, Parker believed that innovation would continue within enrollment management. When asked what the future would bring, Parker began to talk about how artificial intelligence (AI) will be used. “I think AI will be used in recruitment.” Parker said AI will be used to determine recruitment territories, but also used for marketing institutions. Additionally, Parker predicted that AI will be used in enrollment processes: “I think we will see a lot of increase in the use of AI in making faster and quicker admission decisions, in drafting marketing strategies for institutions.” The impact of AI in higher education has yet to be seen, but Parker noted that it will change enrollment management work in the near future.

Cultural Adaptation

Changing culture within an organization can be a difficult task for a leader. During the interview, Parker talked about changes to culture that have taken place since he stepped into his position as the chief enrollment management officer. These culture changes have resulted in an increase in enrollment and morale among the enrollment management employees at Valley State. “We saw astronomical growth during the pandemic, and we saw increased morale during the pandemic. It was a very strange phenomenon, because I know several other universities did not have that happen.” The COVID-19 pandemic caused the university to see rapid change. While other institutions saw decreased morale and resistance, Valley State University saw the opposite. Operations were able to rapidly change and there was positive cultural change for the division of enrollment management. Parker stated that the rapid change was possible by having the entire team examine how they work with students.

> It forced us to rethink the strategy of how you engage a student in one-on-one conversations rather than just going to a college fair and thinking that that's going

> to really move the dial in your funnel. It was great for us. Day one of the university being remote, we were ready; we had a virtual tour up and running. We had live chats. We had virtual events. You name it, we were ready! It was a really good experience for us because it changed the way we recruited, and we were able to maintain that momentum, moving forward.

When in-person operations restarted for Valley State, the enrollment management continued to change the culture around the recruitment model. According to Parker, “we have shifted our recruitment model to what I have coined as *intrusive recruitment*. I think that is our biggest success, which has been relationships.” According to Parker, the university’s former recruitment strategy was to travel to anywhere they were invited. “When I first came into this division, [Valley State] was still doing the thing where we were traveling everywhere we were invited. We never turned anyone down, and it was like throwing spaghetti at the wall and seeing what stuck.” Parker has changed to the culture of using data to inform the recruitment strategy moving forward. Additionally, Parker has strived to change the role of the admissions counselor. In the past, the university counselors were less proactive talking to students; now they are expected to engage and assist students at events.

> Being present is our new strategy. And that may sound very elementary. But you know, that's what we do. That's my strategy; that's my approach. So even in the hard times and in the places where a lot of people won't go and won't say the things we are, and really just showing up and being present for those students that need the help in the moment and meeting them where they're at.

Furthermore, Valley State has changed the position by increasing the pay for admissions counselors in an attempt to move away from the position being entry level to more of a leadership position. It is now the expectation that everyone is admissions builds relationships with students, with high school staff, and the community. According to Parker, the shift in culture has resulted in large growth.

> So that shift has yielded dividends for [Valley State]. This year, we will probably hit around 25% mark of growth. It is kind of crazy to even be able to say out loud,

> considering everything that has happened in the past five years. But I 100% attribute it to where we spent a lot of time, energy, and tears on making sure that our people are appreciated, because you cannot do this work without infusing the time and resources that are needed into your people.

Parker has worked to ensure that the culture now present within admissions permeated to all the other areas of enrollment management at the university moving forward.

Findings

All of the case study sites have experienced many of the same environmental factors, or *inputs*, over the last five years that have impacted institutional enrollment and budget. While many of the challenges were the same the *process* or responses of the Chief Enrollment Management Officers differed at each case study site. For this reason, each institutions experience differing *outputs* related to enrollment and budgets.

Each Chief Enrollment Management Officer is aware of the upcoming decline in high-school graduates starting in 2025. While upcoming demographic change is a concern at each of the case-study sites, each Chief Enrollment Management Officer talked about other organizational challenges that have impacted their institutions over the last five years. The impact of the pandemic was the most challenging experience in their career. Each of the case-study sites had to quickly change from in-person experiences to completely virtual. Two institutions saw a decline, while Valley State University was able to increase enrollment. Valley State attributes the increase to being able to leverage technology and other changes they had put in place. Another challenge that impacted enrollment and budget was the sociopolitical events within the United States. Each of the Chief Enrollment Management Officers talked about how they felt that students and the general public were questioning the value of higher education. The final challenge that emerged during the study was geographic challenges, which was only seen at two of the case-study sites. The two institutions that experienced this environmental challenge stated their institution's location posed a challenge to recruiting out-of-state students as well as international students.

A second finding from the study focused on the theme of *strategic resource management*. Each of the institutions studied has experienced budget challenges that have resulted in the Chief Enrollment Management Officers having to decide how limited resources are allocated to make sure their institution is still meeting their desired enrollment goals. At each of the site locations, they have had to examine how, the level, and where funding is being used. This has posed challenges at each institution because the cost of recruiting students has increased and how much they are compensating employees is not keeping pace with the rest of the marketplace. An additional layer of challenge is the state moving to a Performance Funding Model for part of the state appropriation allocation. This has caused each of the sites to receive less funding, and they anticipate this trend to continue unless changes are made to the model.

To respond to the environmental changes each of the Chief Enrollment Management Officers use *adaptive organizational strategies*. Each of the case-study sites has shifted their priorities in response to the challenges they are currently facing. No longer are the institutions able to do everything they did in the past. Instead, the institutions have to focus on recruiting student populations that will bring in the most net tuition revenue. Each site stated that they are placing a large focus on recruiting students within the region. However, they will use other student populations, like adult learners, corporate partnerships, online, and international to assist with the budget. To achieve these goals the institutions will have to create strategic university and enrollment plans to guide their practice. Each of the case-study sites has a strategic plan but only one is currently utilizing this plan, Valley State University. It should be noted that Valley State University is also the only institution that has seen sustained increases in enrollment. Moving forward, all of the Chief Enrollment Management Officers stated that they will need to find new innovative solutions to address environmental inputs. The pandemic taught each of the institutions that they need to be able to adapt and change quickly if they are going to remain competitive with recruitment.

The findings from the study centered on the idea of *cultural adaptation*. Each of the Chief Enrollment Management Officers stated they have tried to impact the culture at their respective institution. Each had to deal with low morale at their institution following the pandemic. The low morale was a factor of low pay and high turnover within the divisions of enrollment management. Valley State University stated morale has improved with the increase in students attending. However, the other two sites are having to continue to deal with the idea of doing more with less, which has caused morale to decline. Finally, all three sites stated they are trying to change the culture of the institutions to think more about enrollment. Without sustained enrollment, each of the institutions will continue to face budget challenges.

Summary

During the interview process, common themes emerged among the interview participants and their respective institutions. While each leader has faced similar challenges over the last five years, each has taken a different approach to how to overcome these environmental challenges. These common themes included a) organizational challenges and response; b) strategic resource management; c) adaptive organizational strategies; and d) culture adaptation. The approaches of each of the chief enrollment management officers employed produced differing results at their respective institutions, which will be explored in Chapter Five. This will be done using the literature and theories explored in Chapter Two. Additionally, data about enrollment, performance funding, and budgets will be presented to determine how each leader handled the environmental challenges they faced in their roles. Chapter Five will also include a discussion of the implications for practitioners and an examination of future research recommendations on chief enrollment management officers within higher education.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to understand how the leadership of chief enrollment management officers in Kentucky have changed their recruiting practices to increase student enrollment while traditional-age students and government funding have decreased. This chapter will answer the four research questions that guided this study:

1) How has the decline in traditional-age college students impacted budgets in regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?
2) How has the decline of state funding impacted the university budgets of regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?
3) How has the decline in state funding and high school graduates impacted the recruitment of non-traditional students (e.g., international, adult, and transfer students) at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?
4) How have chief enrollment management officers at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky responded to decline in traditional-age students (i.e., environmental change) and decline in state funding (i.e., system change)?

The combined use of case study and systems theory provided a means for the researcher to examine the broader system that higher education operates within. The use of both approaches enables the researcher to examine the specifics of the case while also considering the influence of broader systems and external environments. This approach offers in-depth exploration as well as comparative analysis between cases in the context of the system. Within the context of higher education, systems theory can be used to explore change, influences, and innovation. Systems theory is an ideal model for Chief Enrollment Management Officers to assess and plan for the future. It accounts for environmental factors that will impact the profession in the coming years. Finally, the feedback loops allow practitioners to assess the effectiveness of the interventions in achieving desired outcomes.

Prior to answering the questions that guided this study, there will be an analysis of the themes that emerged during the study, as presented in Chapter Four. The themes were a) organizational challenges and response; b) strategic resource management; c) adaptive organizational strategies; and d) culture adaptation. For each theme and subtheme, relevant literature and theoretical concepts will be recapped and utilized to discuss the data. At the conclusion of the discussion of themes, the research questions that guided the study will be answered. Next, the chapter will discuss implications of the study for leadership, specifically for enrollment management officers. Finally, the chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research and limitations of the study.

Organizational Challenges and Response

The field of enrollment management has been talking about the demographic cliff that will arrive as soon as 2025 (Bauman, 2024). The decline in traditional-age college students will impact states at different rates. While each of the chief enrollment management officers who participated in the study stated they were aware of the cliff, all of them discussed other major organizational challenges that had been present in recent years that impacted enrollment and budgets at their respective institutions. Systems theory states that organizations are open systems, and external factors from the environment can have an impact (Von Bertalanffy & Sutherland, 1974). Data suggest that external events (i.e., a decline in student enrollment) influenced changes in the organizational structures and operations of these regional institutions. The theme of organizational challenges and response will examine and discuss some of the external factors that impeded the work of enrollment in recent years. Within the theme of organizational challenges and response, three subthemes emerged: a) pandemic impact; b) sociopolitical dynamics; and c) geographic challenges, which will be discussed further.

Pandemic Impact

In the last five years, the external factor that impacted higher education the most was the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. During spring 2020, institutions of higher education were forced to discontinue in-person classes and move to a remote format. The impact of the pandemic is likely to affect the higher education sector for years to come (Kelchen et al., 2021). All the sites that were examined in this case study stopped traditional in person classes in March, 2020.

From the interviews, all the participants said that the pandemic was the most challenging experience of their career. According to Hutton (2021), institutions of higher education across the country saw large declines in enrollment. Two of the institutions within the study saw declines in enrollment, while one saw increased enrollment during the pandemic. The increase in enrollment was likely due to the technology that had been put in place prior to the pandemic. Valley State University was able to quickly transition the student experience from in-person to virtual. The other two case study sites lacked the technology needed to change the student experience to online as quickly as Valley State. At these sites, the online course offerings were limited prior to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While enrollment numbers varied between each of the institutions, all the participants stated that the pandemic had a negative impact on the students themselves. Students were less prepared when entering college because they did not have a traditional high school experience. Additionally, there was an increase in mental health challenges, resulting in the need for additional student services to help students be successful.

Retention rates at the institutions were impacted negatively in the short term, as well. The participants cited numerous reasons for the decline in retention. For example, students were unfamiliar with the online experience and decided to stop out of higher education until a time when instruction returned to in-person. It was also stated that some students went into the workforce because the workforce saw an increase in pay during the pandemic.

Despite the mixed results on enrollment during the pandemic, each participant expressed that the pandemic had a negative impact on the budget. All the institutions had additional spending to move their courses and services remotely. Students needed additional support, which resulted in additional costs to help ensure that students were successful and retained. According to Kelchen et al. (2021), colleges and universities lost billions of dollars in revenue during the pandemic. This was a result of the loss of housing/meal dollars, tuition freezes, cleaning costs, and reduced class sizes when institutions were able to return in person. While all these factors were not mentioned by the participants, the external environmental impact of the pandemic was felt at each institution. While chief enrollment management officers try to account for external factors that could impact enrollment and retention, a global pandemic was an environmental impact that no one anticipated. Systems theory (Von Bertalanffy &

Sutherland, 1974) is useful, as it helps to explain the dynamic relationship between the external environment and the internal structure and operations of several regional universities.

Sociopolitical Dynamics

Sociopolitical dynamics emerged as a subtheme within the theme of organizational challenges and responses. The subtheme looks at the combination of social and political factors that impacted enrollment and funding within the organizations of regional comprehensive institutions in Kentucky. Systems theory asserts that most organizations try to reduce uncertainty and control the environmental factors that impact them (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Enrollment management in the university setting works to mitigate the impact of external effects on the organization. However, in each of the interviews, participants stated that sociopolitical factors had a large impact on higher education over the past five years. The COVID-19 pandemic was discussed early. Currently, however, the full impact of COVID-19 on enrollment and funding of higher education is not known. Additionally, the federal ruling on affirmative action and social justice movements over the last five years had students questioning whether they should pursue higher education, and Kentucky continues to see a decline in the college attendance rate according to the Counsel on Postsecondary Education. Each of these factors have impacted regional comprehensive institutions enrollment, which also has impacted budget. Enrollment management has been charged with meeting the challenge of raising costs to meet financial demands of institutions and assuring the public that higher education is actually worth the increased cost (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013).

The value of higher education was another national sociopolitical narrative that each of the institutions have tried to overcome the last five years. For example, Foster talked about how high school graduates were able to go into the job market and get jobs paying $16.00 an hour. For many students, especially first-generation, that is higher pay that most have ever experienced. Therefore, students are reluctant to participate in higher education and take on debt that could be hard to repay. This notion aligned with the literature that asserted that higher education has been heavily criticized by financial experts who claim that college student debt upon completion is rising to unmanageable levels (Hossler & Kalsbeek, 2013). Hampton also discussed student debt during her interview, specifically around students now having the belief that they should not have to pay for higher education. This has caused students to shop institutions of higher education to see who would give them the best scholarship and aid package. Parker also discussed how his university has changed its scholarship package to attract additional students, but that it has come at the expense of net tuition revenue. So, while enrollment increased at Valley State University, it did not improve the institution's financial standing. Finally, participants observed that students have seemed to be told that higher education is too expensive, and they would be better off attending a trade school. Tuition increases at universities continue to outpace inflation, driving student cost (Mitchell et al., 2014). According to College Board during the 2023-2024 academic year, in-state tuition at community colleges was almost 65% less than public four-year institutions nationally (Ma & Pender, 2023). With Kentucky being a manufacturing state, many students have decided to pursue trade options instead of attending college. The narrative that higher education is no longer worth the cost has negatively impacted regional comprehensive institutions. The flagship institutions in Kentucky continue to see stable or increasing enrollment, however. Additionally, the community colleges within the state are seeing a rebound since the enrollment declines from COVID-19 (CPE, 2024b). These increases have come at the expense of enrollment at regional comprehensive institutions within the Commonwealth. Moving forward, regional comprehensives institutions will have to find ways to demonstrate the value of their education to student if they are going to continue to meet enrollment and budget goals moving forward.

Geographic Challenges

The subtheme of geographic challenges only appeared in two case study sites, Mountain State University and Lake State University. Each of the participants from these institutions stated that geography played a part in the challenge to recruit and retain students at their respective universities. Over the last 30 years, college students have become less likely to enroll at institutions far from home. As of 2019, 42% of first-year students attended a college or university that was less than 50 miles from home, and the percentage continues to grow (Abrams, 2022).

Since students consider location when applying for colleges, both the participants from Mountain State and Lake State stated their location was a barrier to student recruitment. “The best and worst part about [Mountain State] is its location,” said Hampton. Mountain State’s rural location has limited the number of students that have considered the institution post high school. The participant from Lake State said that their location proved to be a challenge to recruit non-traditional students, specifically international students. During the interview, it was stated that Lake State can recruit international students, but this student population had low retention rates. Hampton noted that she believed Mountain State University’s location was part of the reason they have struggled with recruitment and retention over the last five years. These struggles at Mountain State have resulted in lower net tuition revenue, which has had a negative impact of the overall budget.

Geography plays a large role in college choice. Turley (2009) asserted, “stop treating the college choice process as though it were independent of location and start situating this process within the geographic context in which it occurs” (p. 126). Moving forward, both Lake State and Mountain State must find a way to convey to students that their locations are a benefit if they are going to be successful in recruiting and retaining students. Examining this challenge through the lens of Bolman and Deal’s (2021) symbolic frame, these two institutions face uncertainty around future enrollment. The participants from Lake State and Mountain State must find a way to frame their locations as a positive for students, faculty, and staff. This message must be the focus of the institution, so enrollment and retention goals are met in the near future.

Facing uncertainty and ambiguity, symbols emerge to help people resolve confusion, find direction, and anchor hope and faith (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Strategic Resource Management

The notion of strategic resource management was the second theme that was present in the study. *Strategic resource management* (SRM) within the study refers to the allocation, usage, and evaluation of both institutional and state resources for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives within enrollment management. Bolman and Deal’s (2021) political frame will be used to examine the two subthemes within SRM. The political frame operates based on five assumptions: a) organizations are coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups; b) there are enduring differences among coalition members in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality; c) most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources—who gets what; d) scarce resources and enduring differences among organization members make conflict central to organizational dynamics and underlines power as the most important asset; and e) goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among competing stakeholders (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 191).

Resource Allocation

Each of the participating chief enrollment management officers noted that resources over the last five years have become limited at their institutions. The subtheme of resource allocation is focused on how resources were managed, including shortages, and distributions to try to meet both institutional and enrollment management goals. Resources became limited due to decreases in net tuition revenue at each of the case study sites. Additionally, inflation resulted in increases in fixed operating costs.

During the interviews, two participants, Hampton and Parker, talked about how resources at the K-12 level have had an impact on enrollment management at their respective institutions. They noted that students have received less encouragement and support from high schools to pursue higher education and this has continued through the enrollment funnel. Additionally, they said that students have come out of high school less academically prepared since the emergence of COVID-19. Therefore, as leaders, Hampton and Parker have needed to shift resources to help students apply and get admitted to college, a function that was often handled by their K-12 partners. All three interviewer participants, however, stated that they have had to move resources to help with retention and assisting students coming to college underprepared academically.

All three participants discussed the need to review compensation among enrollment management staff. Pay within these departments has not kept pace with the rest of the labor market. Hampton mentioned that she had trained recruiters, who left the job after a year in order to make significantly more money in other fields. Low pay has resulted in low staff morale and frequent turnover at each of the institutions. Leaders within enrollment management must try to increase pay, but this comes at the expense of having additional staff. The challenge of compensation mirrored Bolman and Deal's (2021) assumption that scare resources and enduring differences among staff members cause conflict. Each of the participating universities has been challenged with high amounts of turnover and low staff morale.

Government Investment

The subtheme of government investment focuses on state funding and its impact on the sector of regional comprehensive institutions in Kentucky. From 2008 until 2018, per student funding from the state decreased by 36% (Mitchell et al., 2019). It was not until the fiscal year 2022-2023 that the Kentucky government announced a 12% increase in state funding for higher education. However, the funding was earmarked for capital campaigns and an increase in the state's performance funding pool (Beshear, 2022).

At each of the case study sites, the participants stated that performance funding within the Commonwealth of Kentucky has negatively impacted regional comprehensive institutions. Hampton, for instance, claimed that performance-based funding was created for the flagship university and that regionals would suffer as a result. Parker stated that his institution believes that unless changes to the structure of performance-based funding occur, the university's share of the money will ultimately go down to zero. Table 5.1 shows performance-based funding allocation for the last five years.

Table 5.1

Performance-based Funding Allocations

Institution	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
U of Kentucky	$14,492,500	$6,086,400	$6,086,400	$30,904,300	$33,338,500
U of Louisville	$3,343,300	$2,938,900	$2,972,500	$17,523,600	$17,594,600
Subtotal	$17,835,800	$9,560,500	$9,058,900	$48,427,900	$50,933,100
Mountain State U	$0	$0	$0	$3,296,800	$3,095,000
Lake State U	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Valley State U	$3,578,400	$394,200	$120,200	$4,927,900	$3,222,900
Subtotal	$3,578,400	$394,200	$120,200	$8,224,700	$6,317,900

Reviewing the performance-based funding allocations confirmed what the participating chief enrollment management officers noted during their interviews. Much of the funding has gone to research institutions in Kentucky, while very little is allocated to regional comprehensive institutions.

Adaptive Organizational Strategies

An adaptive leadership approach is key for organizations to be able to change and remain effective, especially in unpredictable environments. This ideal closely aligns with Bolman and Deal's (2021) structural frame, which noted that the ideal structure of an organization was based on the organization's current circumstances. Additionally, it considers goals, technology, workforce, and environment. When issues arise in an organization, the structural frame dictates that management should use problem solving and restructuring skills to mitigate performance deficits. The theme of adaptive organizational strategies explains how the participants and their institutions changed strategies, created plans, and examined innovation solutions to face environmental challenges.

Adaptive Strategies

The subtheme of adaptive strategies explores how the case study sites shifted priorities in response to changing circumstances. During the interviews, each of the chief enrollment management officers talked about the demographic cliff that is expected to hit higher education in 2025. In the southern region, high school graduations are projected to peak around 2026 with 1.5 million graduates, followed by declines over the course of the projections to 1.4 million in 2037 (Bransberger et al., 2020). Each of the chief enrollment management officers have differing projections about how the demographic cliff will impact their institutions. Foster, at Lake State University, said, “I do think we’ll see a 10-15% decrease of first-time freshman fairly soon.” Hampton also discussed the decline in high school graduation rates in the south and how it has impacted Mountain State University. Each participant discussed the need to move resources from traditional recruitment to other areas in an attempt to gain new enrollments. International, adult learners, transfer students, and corporate partnerships were all discussed as possible new enrollment funnels to possibly mitigate losses that would come from the decline in high school graduates in the south. A review of enrollment data at each of these institutions showed that the only student population that has increased is international students at Lake State University. Since these institutions were in the early stages of planning to recruit alternative student populations, it would likely be years before it can be determined if the shift in resources was successful.

Parker had a differing view of the impending demographic cliff. While Parker said he believed that other parts of the country will experience declining enrollment, he did not see that happening at Valley State University. Over the last five years, the university has experienced increasing undergraduate enrollment, while other institutions have experienced a decline. Valley State planned to use data to focus on first-time students. To ensure that the university continued to meet their enrollment goals, they planned to adapt their financial resources to increase the rate at which they yielded students. This meant looking at their scholarship offerings to make sure they could recruit students, but also maximize net tuition revenue to help the budget. Finally, Parker said his university was not going to ignore alternative student populations, but first-time students would remain their "bread and butter." Parker did not believe it was realistic to move resources from traditional recruitment to other student populations, however.

The chief enrollment management officers' leadership aligned with the literature (Crockett, 2016). The structural frame states that when issues, like the demographic cliff, arise in an organization, leaders should use problem solving and restructuring to mitigate performance deficits (Bolman & Deal, 2021). However, it will be years before it can be determined if each institution's adaptive strategies proved to be effective in addressing future enrollment and budget challenges.

Strategic Priorities

The core mission of enrollment management is to use a wide range of applied social science research methods, models, and analysis to create strategic enrollment goals (Hosler & Kalsbeek, 2013). Each of the participating chief enrollment management officers discussed the need to establish strategic priorities for their respective institutions.

Historically, each of the participants had a growth mindset, where they believed they could continue to add additional students to ensure the budget was stable. However, over the last decade, each of the regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky have experienced declining enrollment. According to Bolman and Deal (2021), structural leaders consider the relationship between strategy and the environment to solve problems impacting an organization. The subtheme of strategic priorities explores the important areas within the organization moving forward to try and create stability.

All of the interviewees stated their first strategic priority was to return to serving students within their service region. Hampton said that Mountain State University was "trying to be everything for everyone." Moving forward, the university planned to be more strategic and recruit in their backyard, meaning locally within Kentucky. Parker at Valley State University stated that he has analyzed the data to determine where they should recruit. Looking at high school graduation rates, Parker believed that Kentucky continues to be the best place to recruit. Unlike other areas of the country, Parker did not believe that Kentucky would see the declines other parts of the county will experience in the coming years. Lake State University has established a priority to increase first-time full-time enrollment of students from Kentucky. It is the belief of Lake State University that increases in first-time enrolment would create budget stability. Over the last five years, Lake State saw an increase in dual-credit students, but these students did little to help with the budget. Another strategic priority mentioned at Mountain State and Lake State was increasing international enrollment. Both of these institutions have seen low international numbers in the last five years, and they believe any effort made will result in increased enrollment numbers. Finally, all of the participating chief enrollment management officers talked about the importance of retaining the recruited students.

A good leader not only establishes strategic priorities but also phases out strategies that are no longer beneficial to the organization (Wilkinson et al., 2007). Both Foster and Hampton stressed that focusing on recruitment in Tennessee has not proved beneficial. The data showed, and external consultants noted, that out-of-state students are an area of growth. After spending time and resources, numbers did not increase within this recruitment strategy.

Operational Planning

The subtheme of operational planning focuses on the importance of turning institutions' strategic plans into an action plan. This subtheme examines how each of the institutions utilize their strategic plans as well as enrollment management plans. Strategic plans are one way to ensure an organization remains focused on the same goals and objectives. Within the structural frame, Bolman and Deal (2021) discussed the importance of structural leaders developing strategies and plans to ensure effectively implementation of strategic priorities. This dimension of the role was explained by Dooris et al. (2004): "the purpose of planning is not to make a plan but to make a change" (p. 8). Chief enrollment management officers must implement plans and create change at their institutions to overcome environmental challenges.

All the case study sites had a strategic plan; however, they were utilized to varying degrees. Hampton at Mountain State said the current strategic plan was outdated and rarely referenced by the administration. Higher education is changing rapidly, according to Hampton. To prepare for this change she believed the university needed an updated strategic plan and enrollment plan. After the documents are created, they would need to be utilized to ensure the organization is achieving its strategic priorities. Foster also stated that Lake State University currently did not have an active strategic plan. Since there was no university plan, Foster believed it was important to create an enrollment strategic plan. Additionally, Foster thought that the plan needed to address upcoming enrollment shifts since no one at Lake State has discussed their impacts.

Unlike Lake State and Mountain State, Parker said that Valley State University valued having a plan. To that end, Valley State had recently created a strategic plan and enrollment plan. Parker noted that the enrollment plan was built off the university's plan to ensure strategic priorities aligned. At Mountain State, the planning documents were not static; instead, the administration has continued to examine the documents and make sure they will serve the institution moving forward.

Notably, the two institutions that did not have an actively utilized strategic plan have experienced enrollment decline over the last five years, except for in 2023. Instead of planning for the future, much of what these institutions have been doing has been reactionary to environmental changes. Mountain State, on the other hand, has experienced years of enrollment growth, while utilizing its strategic plans. By not having to react to current environmental challenges, Parker and Mountain State has been able to create plans to meet impending environmental challenges.

According to Bontrager and Green (2012), strategic enrollment management is not a quick-fix process. Given that planning takes time and resources, many institutions fail to create enrollment plans. Instead, enrollment goals are met with urgency and institutions are reactive to changes and look for quick solutions to reach yearly goals.

With the rapidly changing environment over the last five years, it is not surprising that two of the case study sites were reactive rather than proactive in devoting resources to long-term planning.

Innovative Solutions

The final subtheme that emerged from adaptive organizational strategies was innovative solutions. Innovative solutions highlights new approaches utilized to address environmental challenges impacting institutions of higher education now and in the future. Historically, higher education has been slow to change, but after the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education had the opportunity to create reinvented solutions to respond to an evolving environment (Harvey-Smith, 2022). A common idea among the interviewees was that traditional college recruiters would have to change in the future. There are many reasons that they believed this position would have to change. For example, it is extremely cost prohibitive to have recruiters travel to schools and recruit students. With limited resources, it is important for university administrators to make sure funds are used most effectively to reach their goals. Today's students get their information about prospective colleges digitally rather than through face-to-face interactions with recruiters. For this reason, institutions will be putting more money toward marketing to recruit than into having traditional counselors, allowing institutions to expand their reach for recruitment without the cost of sending individuals to new markets such as abroad.

A second area of innovation that emerged focused on financing the college experience. Financial aid and net tuition revenue are critical components to enrollment management and must be explored as methods of generating revenue and enrollment

(Harvey-Smith, 2022). Foster stated that financial barriers are large for students in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Therefore, Lake State has looked at new ways to leverage scholarship dollars to attract students. Parker also said that they have looked at how to best optimize scholarships to attract students, while still maximizing net tuition revenue at Valley State. Foster also said that Lake State needed to put more emphasis on the university experience. As a traditional residential campus, it is important to inform students about the benefits of a life-on-campus experience. By marketing this experience, Lake State could better justify the increased cost of a residential experience compared to online institutions.

The last area of innovation centered on the idea of better utilizing technology to remove student barriers. According to a study by McKinsey, higher education experts have predicted technology usage will increase in the coming years, but it is currently lagging due to a lack of awareness, inadequate deployment, and cost (Brasca et al., 2022). Hampton talked about how today's students want a direct line to everything. This comes from students being technology-native and having access to information quickly. Therefore, institutions must use technology to meet student expectations, while removing barriers. Foster also discussed using new technology to remove barriers for international students. Until recently, Lake State University required international students to send paper transcripts rather than digital ones, thereby delaying the admissions process. The simple process of accepting electronic transcripts has sped up the admission decisions. Additionally, Parker discussed the emergence of AI, noting that this would change enrollment management moving forward. AI would be able to help determine recruitment territories and help with faster admissions decisions.

Innovation may be needed to meet the changes coming to higher education. Bolman and Deal (2021) asserted, “changes, whether driven from inside or outside, eventually require some form of structural adaptation” (p. 94). Each of the participating enrollment management officers believed that innovative change would be needed to adapt to the environmental changes of limited funding and a changing student demographics.

Cultural Adaptation

Cultural adaptation examines how cultural norms and practices changed in response to environmental pressures. In this study, knowledge and behavior changed over the last five years, which has enabled the organizations to adjust, survive, and in one instance thrive in their environment. According to Schein (1992), a formal definition of *culture*, a formal definition of *culture* is as follows:

> A pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 12)

All three chief enrollment management officers within the study said they have worked to change the culture at their institution since stepping into their role. The COVID-19 pandemic was certainly a catalyst to change culture at each of the case study sites since “normal” university operations had to change quickly. For Hampton and Foster, the cultural change was not permanent. Instead, when their respective institutions were able to return to in-person operations, the culture norms reverted. The universities did not embrace the changes that came from COVID-19, and instead went back to the way things had always been. However, each of the participating chief enrollment management officers realized that cultural norms would need to change at their institutions to be successful in the future.

Valley State University, unlike Mountain State and Lake State, created new cultural norms since COVID-19. Over the last five years, Valley State has seen record enrollment increases. This success was likely the catalyst for the culture change at the university. Individuals within the organization bought into the new cultural norms since the institution thrived during a challenging time. Parker stated that he hopes the positive culture changes in enrollment management permeates to other parts of the institution.

Answering Research Questions

Research Question 1

Research question one examined how the start of the student demographic cliff in Kentucky has impacted enrollment at regional comprehensive universities within the commonwealth. Additionally, has the decline resulted in less net tuition revenue resulting in a decreased budget. *How has the decline in traditional-age college students impacted budgets in regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?*

Each of the chief enrollment management officers in the study discussed how they were aware of the impending demographic cliff. However, the interviews revealed that other factors over the last five years have played a larger role in impacting enrollment and the budget. These ideas emerged as the theme of organization challenges and response. The prevailing challenge each interviewee discussed in length was about the impact of COVID-19 on their respective institutions. Enrollment at two institutions was negatively impacted by the effects of the pandemic. It was stated that students who did not like the online modality were uncertain about the future, so they did not persist to graduation, and it was assumed that others decided to join the workforce. One participant noted that his school saw an increase in enrollment during the pandemic. At this institution, the chief enrollment management officer believed that his change in strategies prior to the pandemic allowed him to see these increases. Data was used to determine where to recruit students that are most likely to enroll. Additionally, the university has begun using a new CRM (customer relationship management) platform that allowed them to transition from an in-person experience to remote quickly to connect with potential students. The institution was able to recruit students with online tours and other student experiences. Online instruction was already part of the university portfolio, which made for an easier transition to this modality. Overall, enrollment was able to increase during COVID-19.

While enrollment varied across the case study sites, all three participants said that their institutional budget had been negatively impacted. Most of the budget at each of the case study sites were funded by student tuition dollars. Therefore, the two sites that experienced declining enrollment had also seen a decline in the university budget. The third case study site, which experienced growth, saw a challenge with the budget because they did not see an increase in net tuition revenue. At all the sites, students needed additional support after COVID-19, which had put additional strain on the budget. Finally, each of the chief enrollment management officers stated that employee wages had to increase over the last couple of years. Increased wages have resulted in a reduction in staff. However, institutional goals have remained the same despite the reduction in human resources.

The above finding aligned with the literature that showed that since COVID-19, institutions across the United States have experienced a period of financial difficulty (Kamssu & Kouam, 2021). These difficulties are the result of uncertain enrollment and unexpected expenses related to student support post COVID-19 (Smalley, 2021).

Sociopolitical dynamics also played into the challenge of recruiting students to regional comprehensive institutions. The participants noted that a national narrative has emerged where individuals question the value of higher education. Regional comprehensive institutions must figure out how to express the value of higher education moving forward to overcome this narrative.

Finally, the idea of geography emerged as a challenge for the chief enrollment management officers. This challenge did not emerge during the literature review; however, research has been done on enrollment choice based on how close an institution is to a student's home. Limited research has been conducted on how geography impacts the student experience and whether this impacts enrollment.

These findings aligned with Hossler and Kalsbeek (2013), who stated that budgets at institutions across the country would face challenges with the demographic cliff, including decreases in state fund per student, and increased accountability from the public. Furthermore, Hossler and Kalsbeek (2013) noted that higher education would face public accountability for rising costs. With the increase in cost and family income remaining low, many students questions the value of a four-year degree.

Research Question 2

The second research question looked at the impact of Kentucky changing to a performance funding model on regional institutions budgets. *How has the decline of state* *funding impacted the university budgets of regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?*

Each of the chief enrollment management officers interviewed acknowledged the change to performance funding in Kentucky has negatively impacted budgets at their respective institutions. The theme of government funding encompassed the thoughts and ideas each of the participating chief enrollment management officers had regarding performance funding. When discussing performance funding, each interviewee said that their leadership and goals have not changed because of performance funding. Instead, they asserted that recruitment and retention were paramount to ensure a healthy budget at each of their institutions. The idea of finding alternative funding sources to offset reduced funding challenges was consistent with literature, as supported by Schlemmer (2019), Hossler and Kalsbeek (2013), Mitchell et al. (2014), and Philips et al. (1996). Any performance-based funding dollars received by an institution helped the budget, but their institutions were not going to rely on this funding for sustainability. The chief enrollment management officers believed that unless changes came to the performance funding model, each respective institution would at some point no longer receive any performance funding dollars. Each university's budget was primarily tuition funded. The shift from state funded to state supported has changed the way that regional comprehensive institutions operate.

The use of performance funding in the United States has increased as a means of accountability. However, research data have not indicated that improved outcomes or policies have resulted from performance funding. In fact, there is a growing body of literature that suggested performance funding may lead to unintended outcomes that increase inequities among institutions serving underserved student and under-resourced institution types (i.e., regional comprehensives) (Ortagus et al., 2020; Hagood, 2019; Umbricht et al., 2017).

Research Question 3

The third research question centered on the idea of alternative student recruitment to assist with net tuition revenue as traditional forms of funding decreased. *How has the decline in state funding and high school graduates impacted the recruitment of non-traditional students (e.g., international, adult, and transfer students) at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?*

Each participating chief enrollment management officer was keenly aware of the impending demographic cliff that will result in fewer students graduating high school, starting in 2025. Prior to the demographic cliff, many of the regional comprehensive institutions have already experienced a decline in traditional-age students over the last decade. As enrollment management officers prepared for the future, each strategically planned student populations. They planned to meet enrollment and budget goals for the future. Each participant discussed different populations that they planned to target. International students, adult-learners, corporate partnerships, online students, and students with some college but no degree were all mentioned as student populations that they hoped to grow in the coming years. At the time of the case studies, each of the institutions had created plans to recruit these new populations. Therefore, the impact of these new recruitment populations would not be known for a couple of years.

The response of the chief enrollment management officers at the case sites aligned with the literature that noted that institutions must identify potential sources of students

(Copley & Douthett, 2020). Examples of areas to recruit included working adults, students who historically forgo college (first-generation and low income), and international students (Copley & Douthett, 2020). Adult and non-traditional students are anticipated to increase in the coming years due to the need for a work force that has completed higher education (Bettes et al., 2009). Transfer students are another population that institutions can capitalize on, as nationally, only one in five community college students will transfer to a four-year institution (AACC, 2014). With increased awareness and partnerships with community colleges, regional comprehensives could improve transfer enrollment. International students pose a challenge since the United States has seen a decline in this student population since 2016 (Copley & Douthett, 2020). However, international students pay more in tuition than domestic students, which still makes them a viable funding source for institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007) to make up for the decline in state funding and high school graduates.

Research Questions 4

The fourth research question sought to explore how leadership within positions of power make decisions when faced with environmental challenges. *How have chief enrollment management officers at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky responded to decline in traditional-age students (i.e., environmental change) and decline in state funding (i.e., system change)?*

The chief enrollment management officers in the study noted that the last five years have been the most challenging of their career. Each had been faced with challenges that they were not prepared for, or could have been predicted. In response to declining enrollments and budget, each of the leaders stated that they were working on changing the culture at their respective institution. Morale was one area the leaders tried to see improved due to the challenges higher education has experienced in the last five years. Faculty and staff at these institutions have faced uncertainty from a pandemic, social political challenges, and declining financial resources. This has resulted in individuals being asked to “do more with less,” which then resulted in negative morale at institutions. The chief enrollment management officers stated they examined compensation, as well as where money needed to be invested moving forward. The actions of the chief enrollment management officers mirrored the ideals of Bolman and Deal’s (2021) political frame. This frame stated that, “organizations are coalitions comprised of individuals and group with enduring difference who live in a world of scarce resources” (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 206). Thus, the chief enrollment management offices have had to decide how limited funding should be spent to meet institutional goals. All the leaders said that they were strategically planning to meet enrollment and budget challenges that could be coming soon. Through the planning process, each of the leaders tried to define what enrollment management and the institution should look like moving forward. It was stated that no longer can regional institutions try to be all things to all people. With limited resources, the culture would need to change to meet the goals of the institution. Each of the leaders talked about the importance of net tuition revenue and the money students bring to the university. All actions of chief enrollment management officers aligned with the literature that asserted, “universities today are faced with the choice of cutting programs, services, and other expenditures, increasing revenues, or a mixed approach” (Alstete, 2014). Within the study, the chief enrollment management officers planned to use a mixed approach to ensure meet budget demands. Regional comprehensive universities were founded on the mission to provide access to higher education and support the regional economy. Will regional comprehensive institutions be able to remain true to their mission as they plan for a future with less traditional students and a higher dependency on tuition dollars to operate?

Practice and Policy Implications

Based on the case study sites are suggestions for practice for partitioners and for policy. One suggestion for practitioners focuses on reactionary versus planned response. Within the case study sites that were examined most of the themes that emerged were reactionary responses to changes in the environment. An example is Chief Enrollment Management Officers responding to COVID-19 by changing practices to an online environment. In practice, reactionary changes are needed to respond to unexpected changes in the environment. However, the Chief Enrollment Management Offices provided very few ideas or planned responses to known changes to the environment. Starting in 2025 there will be a decline in the number of students that graduate from high school, within the case study sites the Chief Enrollment Management Officers did not have concrete plans on how to deal with this challenge. A second example is the budget challenges that each institution is facing. Each Chief Enrollment Management Officer talked about how they have reacted to a reduction in budget, but no one had a plan for how to address the budget issue long term. Each of the case study sites might have a plan to address these issues but they might not have been willing to share this information during the interviews. A suggested practice for practitioners would be to take time to plan for known environmental challenges that will face institutions in the coming years. This can be a challenge for practitioners because immediate issues can take up the majority of their time.

Within the Commonwealth of Kentucky, one policy that needs to be reexamined is Performance Based Funding. The intent of the new funding model was to reward and encourage institutions to increase institutional achievement. However, there are two issues with the current funding model that prevent institutions from being rewarded for achievement. First, the model is based on the number of students that meet set metrics and not percentages. Therefore, since regional comprehensives have fewer students than the flagship institutions, receiving additional funds is extremely difficult. The second challenge with the Performance Based Funding model is there is a set funding pool. With this model even if an institution improves within the metric, if other institutions improve more, they would not receive any additional funding. Additionally, further examination should be done on Performance Funding within Kentucky to make sure the model is meeting the stated objectives.

Limitations

When a research study occurs over a span of time, time will limit the information that interviewees recall; this is known as *decay theory* (Thorndike, 1913). Since the interviewees were asked to recall information over the last five years, they likely did not remember everything, but instead recalled strategies that were particularly successful or unsuccessful. Thus, information could have been withheld in the interviews. Another limitation of the study is that the interviewees might not have fully disclosed strategies and budget implications since the researcher also worked in enrollment management in Kentucky.

The selection of the study's subject limited the generalizability of the study. The environmental challenges explored are unique to Kentucky over the last five years. The study findings can provide information to other institutions facing similar environmental challenges, but they will not ensure similar results at other institutions. This study only looked at one type of institution, public Master's Colleges, which limited how the findings could be used generalized to other institutions of higher education including research, community, and private institutions.

While there were many environmental factors and challenges examined during the study, it is not an exhaustive list. Those challenges that were presented were the external factors that the Chief Enrollment Management Officer knew had an impact on enrollment and budgets. However, within the context of systems theory, there are numerous environmental factors or inputs that have an impact on the institution simultaneously. Therefore, other environmental factors at the national, state, or local level could have had an impact on the organization without the study participants being aware.

The study limited the interviews to upper-level administration mainly within divisions of enrollment management. Faculty and other staff members could have provided insight into the challenges posed by reduced state funding and declining traditional-age college students. This limitation ensured that the study was feasible. Had others been interviewed, the study could have quickly grown to a size that would not be manageable and included information not pertinent to the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study added scholarship to the field of enrollment management, specifically around how chief enrollment management officers at regional comprehensive institutions in Kentucky have navigated environmental changes related to budget and enrollment. The field of enrollment management is still relatively young and there is a dearth of research on how leadership enacted enrollment management. A potential line of inquiry for future research would be to explore how enrollment management is enacted by leadership at different types of Carnegie Classifications of institutions of higher education. This study examined M1-M3 Master’s institutions of higher education. Leadership within enrollment management at other classifications might have responded to environmental challenges differently.

A second line of promising inquiry may help to expand the size and scope of the study. This case study was limited in scope with only three sites explored. The United States has roughly 430 regional comprehensive institutions. Each of these institutions are faced with different environmental challenges, which could expand the knowledge on how leadership reacts to internal and external inputs. Additionally, examination of regional comprehensive institutions could yield more generalizable data and expand the research on enrollment management leadership.

The shift to performance funding and its impact on regional comprehensive institutions in Kentucky is another area of future study. Regional comprehensive institutions have moved from being state funded to state supported over the last few decades. Now, with the move to performance funding, these institutions are seeing additional resources stripped away. Due to the lack of resources, enrollment management officers must look for new ways to ensure the budget for their institutions. The future impact of this is yet to be known and could expand the research on leadership.

Each of the participating chief enrollment management officers have been in their positions for less than three years. The effectiveness of the ideas and plans of each of them is yet to be known. Therefore, additional studies could be done of the impact of the strategies and plans that were presented at each of the case-study sites.

Finally, this study only examined how chief enrollment management officers have responded to changes in funding and enrollment. By expanding the scope of interviews to other leadership within the organization one could gain a better understanding of how positional administrators react to external inputs. Findings from an expanded study would contribute to the literature on how institutions may respond to significant shifts in the external environment.

Conclusions

This case study examined how leadership with enrollment management at regional comprehensive institutions in Kentucky have navigated the declining state financial support, as well as decline in high school graduates. While the specific strategies and plans at each of these institutions were different, commonalities were found between each of the case study sites. All the institutions have faced organizational challenges over the last five years that have impacted their respective institutions. Each institution was impacted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, to which the long-term impact is still unknown at this time. Additionally, sociopolitical factors created enrollment challenges that had to be overcome by each of the institutions. The impact of the challenges put a strain on the resources of each of the institutions.

Due to the lack of resources, each of the chief enrollment management officers had to be strategic with those that were available. Priorities had to be placed on strategies and services that would meet the goals and the mission of each institution. Often this meant that priorities of the past could no longer be supported moving forward.

Each of the participating leaders discussed the need for their organizations to be adaptive. The challenges of the last five years have proven that institutions of higher education must be able to react quickly to environmental challenges if they are going to be successful. To prepare for the future, it is vital that leadership has a plan for the university and the division of enrollment management. Without a plan, institutions found themselves being reactive rather than strategically proactive.

Finally, this study illuminated the impact that culture has on an organization. All of enrollment management officers said that culture needed to change for their institution to be successful moving forward. However, without successes, it can be extremely difficult to change culture within an institution of higher education.

This study captured the thoughts and ideas of a small number of chief enrollment management officers, it provides a level of insight into the strategies and planning of each of the leaders to address the external challenges of reduced state funding and declining high school graduation rates within Kentucky. Their experiences, challenges, and approach to enrollment management might be helpful to others faced with similar environmental challenges.

APPENDIX A

CHIEF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT OFFICER PRE-SURVEY

1. Please provide an overview of your education, prior work experience, and what led you to working within enrollment management in higher education.
2. How long have you worked at your current institution?
3. How long have you worked within the functional area of enrollment management?
4. How long have you served in your current role?
5. What are your responsibilities and focus within your current position?
6. What functional areas do you oversee within your current position?
7. Were you involved in the development of your institutions current strategic plan?

APPENDIX B

PRE-SURVEY COVER LETTER

Dear {insert name},

As a doctoral candidate at the University of Kentucky, I am inviting you to take part in a study regarding your experience as the Chief Enrollment Management Officer at {insert institution name}. The purpose of this study is to understand how enrollment management leadership at regional institutions within Kentucky have responded to environmental factors impacting enrollment.

The study consists of a short pre-survey about the participants' work experience, a one-hour interview, and review of written findings. Participants would spend less than two hours total to be part of the study. The one-hour interview will occur at a time convenient for you online via Zoom. There is no compensation for participating; however, your responses will be contributing to the field of leadership studies and the field of enrollment management.

For further details about the study, please see the attached consent form to participate.

If you have questions about the study, please contact me at the information provided below.

Thank you for your consideration and I hope you will choose to be part of this important project. Please reply to this email within one week (7 days) if you are willing to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Christopher R. Jensen

Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership Studies, University of Kentucky

270-991-4379

crje224@uky.edu

Dr. Lars Björk

Faculty Advisor, University of Kentucky

lars.bjork@uky.edu

If you have complaints, suggestions, or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the University of Kentucky Office of Research Integrity at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

1. Can you please share about what your experience has been with Enrollment Management over the past 5 years?
2. How has, or how do you anticipate, the decline in high school graduates in Kentucky impacted, or will impact, enrollment at your institution? Please explain.
    a. Has your institution looked to non-traditional student populations to compensate for the decline in the pool of traditional-age students? If so, what populations have you targeted and how did you recruit this population?
3. How has the decline in traditional-age college students within Kentucky impacted budgets at your institution and how have you, as the Chief Enrollment Management Officer, responded to this environmental change?
4. How has the state's change to performance funding impacted your university's budget, specifically?
    a. As it relates to Enrollment Management?
    b. What is Enrollment Management doing differently now that you are operating under a performance funding model?
    c. Do you foresee any changes being put in place by Enrollment Management at your institution to ensure success under this model? Please explain.
5. How has the decline in state funding and high school graduates impacted the recruitment of non-traditional students (international, adult, and transfer students) at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky?

a. What has been your biggest success with recruitment over the past 5 years?
b. Are there certain populations that you are no longer recruiting as heavily?
c. What is the future of student recruitment knowing that the number of high school graduates will decrease dramatically beginning in 2025?

6. Is your decision making and strategy planning impacted by your institution's strategic plan?
   a. What is Enrollment Management's role in your institution's strategic plan?
   b. Do you have a strategic plan specifically for Enrollment Management at your institution?
      i. Was your enrollment plan created by Enrollment Management or the institutional strategic plan?
7. What impact did COVID-19 have on Enrollment Management at your institution?
8. What other environmental factors have impacted enrollment management at your institution over the past 5 years?
   a. How did you and your team address these environmental factors to ensure that you met your goals?

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

IRB Approval
11/7/2023
IRB # 86759
NMED

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

KEY INFORMATION FOR- ENROLLMENT MANGEMENT LEADERSHIP RESPONSE TO SYSTEM CHANGES: CASE STUDY

We are asking you to choose whether or not to volunteer for a research study about how enrollment management leadership responds to changes in external environmental factors. We are asking you because are the chief enrollment management officer at your institution. This page is to give you key information to help you decide whether to participate. We have included detailed information after this page. Ask the research team questions. If you have questions later, the contact information for the research investigator in charge of the study is below.

WHAT IS THE STUDY ABOUT AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The purpose of this explanatory study is to understand how enrollment management leadership at regional institutions within Kentucky has responded to environmental factors. Specifically, this study seeks to understand 1) How has the decline in traditional age college students impacted budgets at regional comprehensive universities in Kentucky 2) How has the decline of per student state funding impacted the universities budgets 3) How has the decline in state funding and high school college going rates impacted recruitment of non-traditional students 4) How have chief enrollment management officers responded to declines in traditional age college student going rates and decline in per student funding.

By doing this study, we hope to learn more about how external environments impact decision making by chief enrollment management leadership and these decisions impact recruitment and tuition dollars and add to the body of knowledge on this topic. Your participation in this research will last 2 hours consisting of 15 minutes pre-survey, 1 hour interview via recorded Zoom, and 45 minute post data review.

WHAT ARE KEY REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?

By participating in this study you will be contributing to the field of leadership studies and the field of enrollment management. There are no direct incentives for participating in this study. For a complete description of benefits and/or rewards, refer to the Detailed Consent.

WHAT ARE KEY REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE NOT TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS STUDY?

Participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. You might choose not to volunteer for this study if you no longer oversee enrollment management at your institution.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study or you want to withdraw from the study contact, Christopher Jensen, principal investigator and doctoral candidate, University of Kentucky, Department of Educational Leadership at crje224@uky.edu or 270-991-4379. The faculty advisor for this study is Dr. Lars Bjork. You may reach Dr. Bjork at lars.bjork@uky.edu

If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact staff in the University of Kentucky (UK) Office of Research Integrity (ORI) between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Monday-Friday at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428.

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Page **1** of **3**

DETAILED CONSENT:

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU WOULD NOT QUALIFY FOR THIS STUDY?

If you are no longer the chief enrollment management office at your institution you would need to recuse yourself from this study.

WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND WHAT IS THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF TIME INVOLVED?

The research procedures will be conducted via Zoom. You will also receive a pre-survey via email. A time that is convenient for both the participant and researcher will be scheduled to conduct the Zoom interview. Interviews will be scheduled during the fall 2023 semester. The Zoom interview will take 1 hour and recorded. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 2-hours.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

The primary investigator will be seeking four (4) participants, one from each site. Participants will be expected to complete a brief pre-survey (no more than 15 minutes) about professional experience and background if they decide to be part of the study. Additionally, they will be part of a one-on-one recorded interview conducted via Zoom (lasting approximately 60 minutes) where the participants will be asked about their leadership decision making based on environmental changes. The primary investigator will contact the participate to establish a date and time for the Zoom interview. Participants will choose their location for the virtual interview. Only the primary investigator will be present during the Zoom session.

Prior to the interview participants will be asked to sign the informed consent and return to the researcher via email. At the beginning of the interview the researcher will ask to begin recording the interview, both audio and video; however, the participant may request that the session on audio-recording only. The recording will continue till the end of the interview session. Participants may withdraw from the interview or study at any time with no repercussions. If a participate decides to exit the study, their answers will not be included in the database or final study.

After the data is analyzed and results rewritten, participants will receive a copy via email to review. Participants will be asked to confirm accuracy within one week or receiving via email.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no known risks with this study. Participants are encouraged to stop the interview at anytime if they wish to no longer participate for any reason. In addition to risks described in this consent, you may experience a previously unknown risk.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this study.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, the only choice is to opt out of the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

When we write about or share the results from the study, we will write about the combined information. We will keep your name and other identifying information private

No personal identification will be distributed to other participants in the study, this includes name and University affiliation. After the study is complete you will receive a complete report of the aggregated data from the entire study via email.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the original data set, which includes electronic copy of the interview and any documentation provided by the participant. Data will be keep on a password protected computer that only the researcher will have access to. Pseudonyms will be used for participants and university affiliations in any publications or presentations of this research

We will make every effort to safeguard your data, but as with anything online, we cannot guarantee the security of data obtained via the Internet. Third-party applications used in this study may have Terms of Service and Privacy policies outside of the control of the University of Kentucky.

CAN YOU CHOOSE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY EARLY?

You can choose to leave the study at any time. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

If you choose to leave the study early, data collected until that point will remain in the study database and may not be removed.

The investigators conducting the study may need to remove you from the study. You may be removed from the study if:

- you are not able to follow the directions, or
- they find that your participation in the study is more risk than benefit to you

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WILL YOU BE GIVEN INDIVIDUAL RESULTS FROM THE RESEARCH TESTS/SURVEYS?

Generally, tests/surveys done for research purposes are not meant to provide results that apply to you alone.

WILL YOUR INFORMATION BE USED FOR FUTURE RESEARCH?

Your information collected for this study will NOT be used or shared for future research studies, even if we remove the identifiable information like your name or date of birth.

INFORMED CONSENT SIGNATURES

_________________________ **Signature of research subject** *or, if applicable, parent or guardian*	_____________ **Date**
_________________________ **Printed name of research subject** *or, if applicable, parent or guardian*	

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