

Hamilton College  
Strategic Planning: Preliminary Report. February 2008  
**Subcommittee on Student Recruitment and Retention**

Our work to date has been in identifying topics of concern or interest and beginning to amass and sift through the tremendous amount of data that has been gathered on these topics, including but not limited to the following:

- information gathered by Gordon Hewitt on student attrition and the changing demographics of high school seniors
- the assessment data gathered by Dan Chambliss and his group
- work the Faculty Committee on Admission and Financial has done and is doing in evaluating admission publications and in comparing anticipated majors before matriculation with majors actually selected
- the wisdom to be derived from the experience of Monica Inzer and her staff.

These are some of the questions for which we hope to find some answers—or at least to identify potential paths to those answers:

- Recruitment: recruiting an academically talented and diverse class
  - What are we doing now that works well? that doesn't work well?
  - Changing demographics: how should we anticipate/respond to the upcoming and ongoing shift in the cultural, ethnic, and geographic identification of college-bound high school seniors?
  - What image do we portray?
    - Do we accurately portray who we are? Or, better, does we accurately portray the many individual elements that are all a part of who we are?
    - Do we adequately sing our praises when such praise is appropriate? Or does an inclination to always strive to be better mean that we fail to hold up that which is good?
    - Are some media better handled, better used than others? [printed materials, electronic information, direct contact between prospective students and representatives of the college (admission staff, current students, faculty and other college employees, alumni, etc.)]
    - Can we assume that all media will reach all of our target audience? E.g., can we assume that all applicants/matriculants will have convenient web access?
    - How easy is it for prospective students to find the information they want to know about Hamilton?
  - Does the way in which we recruit contribute to radical imbalances in the number of majors across departments? If so, what might we do differently?
  - Financial aid: do we use our financial aid dollars most effectively?
    - Should we be need-blind? at what cost?
    - Should we be loan-free? Is there a value worth preserving in students assuming some responsibility for the cost of their education? If there is, but if this is only imposed *de facto* on students with financial need, is it still a good thing? And will competitive pressures require us to find a way to move in this direction regardless of other issues?
- Retention: Why do students leave Hamilton, in particular those who are academically successful (as measured by GPA? or some other criterion?)?
  - Do these students expect to find one thing and instead find something significantly different? To what extent, if at all, is this a result of the college seeking to portray itself in ways that are not honest and true?
  - To what degree does student dissatisfaction actually arrive with some students because Hamilton was not their first choice and thus they arrive on campus wishing they were elsewhere? Are

these particular steps we might take to help these Hamilton-was-not-my-first-choice students get past what might otherwise prove to be a debilitating bias?

- Are we admitting the “right” students, i.e., those for whom Hamilton is a good “fit”? On the other hand, assuming that we do not want to preserve the status quo, is not a certain number of “misfits” an essential part of our growth as an institution?
- What can we learn from data gathered from exit surveys and anecdotally about what steps the college might take to create an environment that is sufficiently fulfilling that fewer academically successful students will choose to leave before graduation, whatever their ethnic, cultural, geographical, or gender identifications?
- Can we do a better job of helping students of various minority groups connect with services/organizations in the wider community that might help meet their needs?

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