Using Degree Completions data to inform portfolio development and create enrollment benchmarks

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ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

The mission of Abilene Christian University is to educate students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world.

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Agenda

- Creating a Data-Informed Product Strategy
- What and Why?
- Methodology
- Implementation

The Opportunity

Portfolio Strategy

- Spans multiple campuses and modalities
- Increasingly competitive landscape
- Prioritizing relevance and student demand
- Differentiate real growth opportunities from “passion projects”

The Challenge

Deeply understanding **where we are** versus **the path to where we want to be**

- Evaluate our conferals against our peers and the market as a whole
- Set **goals** for where we want to shape our portfolio
- Translate conferral goals into the **real student enrollment** needed to achieve those goals over time

The Question

1. How to relate a total number of conferrals to a particular entering cohort?

1. If the goal is X number of conferrals by a certain year, what should the incoming cohorts and total enrollment look like in order to achieve that goal?

Note: All numbers in the following examples are for demonstration purposes only and do not reflect actual outcomes.

The Key Relationship

In a given year, the number of students who graduate in exactly 4 years must be equal to the number of students from the respective cohort who graduate in exactly 4 years

Connects cohort size with the number of conferrals in a year

Conferral Backwards Method (CBM)

Key Assumptions:

- Cohort's Year to Year Retention rates
- Cumulative Graduation Rates
- Graduation Window Rates (GWR)
  - % of cohort graduate in exactly 2 years
  - % of cohort graduate in exactly 3 years, etc
- Conferral Population Rates (CPR)
  - % of total conferrals in a given year came from 2yr graduates
  - % of total conferrals in a given year came from 3yr graduates, etc

Graduation Rates of a Cohort		
Grad Rate Period	**Cumulative Grad Rate**	**Grad Window Rate**
2yr	2%	2%
3yr	12%	10%
4yr	62%	50%
5yr	67%	5%
6yr	69%	2%

Conferral Population Rate		
Total Conferrals	**500**	**100%**
2yr	25	5%
3yr	50	10%
4yr	360	72%
5yr	40	8%
6yr	25	5%

The Logic

(Total Conferrals) * (Conferral Pop Rate) = (Respective Incoming Cohort) * (Graduatio
Window Rate)

	Conferral Pop Rate
2yr CPR	5%
3yr CPR	10%
4yr CPR	72%
5yr CPR	8%
6yr CPR	5%

	Graduation Window
2yr GWR	2%
3yr GWR	10%
4yr GWR	50%
5yr GWR	5%
6yr GWR	2%

Example: Say the goal is 500 total conferrals in a year (across all cohorts).
What initial cohort size is needed to reach this goal?

(Total Conferrals Goal) * (4yr CPR) = (Respective Incoming Cohort) * (4yr GWR)

(500) * (0.72) = (Resp Inc Cohort) * (0.50)

Resp Inc Cohort = [(500) * (0.72)] / (0.50)

Resp Inc Cohort = 720

Using the CBM

Cohort	AY 25/26	AY 26/27	AY 27/28	AY 28/29	AY 29/30	AY 30/31	AY 31/32	AY 32/33	AY 33/34	AY 34/35	AY 35/36
Cohort AY20/21											
Cohort AY21/22											
Cohort AY22/23											
Cohort AY23/24											
Cohort AY24/25											
Cohort AY25/26											
Cohort AY26/27											
Cohort AY27/28											
Cohort AY28/29				720							
Cohort AY29/30											
Cohort AY30/31											
Cohort AY31/32											
Cohort AY32/33											
Cohort AY33/34											
Cohort AY34/35											
Cohort AY35/36											
NSE				720							
TSE	0	0	0	720	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

All enrollment calculations are rounding DOWN to the nearest whole number

Total Conferrals								500			
2yr											
3yr											
4yr											
5yr											
6yr											

Use enrollment persistence data to estimate Total Student Enrollment (TSE)

Use graduation rate data to estimate total conferrals

Using the CBM

3 Years to reach NSE maturity

AY 32/33 Conferrals goal	500
AY 26/27 Cohort	600
AY 31/32 Cohort	720
Current Delta	120
Cohort Growth Each year	60
% Linear Growth (2 years)	9.5%
	2454
Mature TSE Range	2463

Cohort	AY 25/26	AY 26/27	AY 27/28	AY 28/29	AY 29/30	AY 30/31	AY 31/32	AY 32/33	AY 33/34	AY 34/35	AY 35/36
Cohort AY20/21	50	10									
Cohort AY21/22	110	55	11								
Cohort AY22/23	330	110	55	11							
Cohort AY23/24	402	345	115	57	11						
Cohort AY24/25	440	385	330	110	55	11					
Cohort AY25/26	575	460	402	345	115	57	11				
Cohort AY26/27		600	480	420	360	120	60	12			
Cohort AY27/28			660	528	462	396	132	66	13		
Cohort AY28/29				720	576	504	432	144	72	14	
Cohort AY29/30					720	576	504	432	144	72	14
Cohort AY30/31						720	576	504	432	144	72
Cohort AY31/32							720	576	504	432	144
Cohort AY32/33								720	576	504	432
Cohort AY33/34									720	576	504
Cohort AY34/35										720	576
Cohort AY35/36											720
NSE	575	600	660	720	720	720	720	720	720	720	720
TSE	1907	1965	2053	2191	2299	2384	2435	2454	2461	2462	2462

All enrollment calculations are rounding DOWN to the nearest whole number

Total Conferrals	382	387	400	391	408	427	465	499	504	506	506
2yr	12	11	12	12	14	15	15	15	15	15	15
3yr	55	58	55	58	60	66	72	72	72	72	72
4yr	275	275	288	275	288	300	330	360	360	360	360
5yr	25	28	28	29	28	29	30	34	37	37	37
6yr	15	15	17	17	18	17	18	18	20	22	22

Term Desc	NSE	TSE	Conferrals
AY 20/21	500		
AY 21/22	550		
AY 22/23	550		
AY 23/24	575		
AY 24/25	550		
AY 25/26	575	0	0
AY 26/27	600	1965	387
AY 27/28	660	2053	400
AY 28/29	720	2191	391
AY 29/30	720	2299	408
AY 30/31	720	2384	427
AY 31/32	720	2435	465
AY 32/33	720	2454	499
AY 33/34	720	2461	504
AY 34/35	720	2462	506
AY 35/36	720	2462	506

Retention	Retention	Grad Rate	Grad Rate
1st AY	100%		
2nd AY	80%	1yr Grad Rate	0%
3rd AY	70%	2yr Grad Rate	2%
4th AY	60%	3yr Grad Rate	12%
5th AY	20%	4yr Grad Rate	62%
6th AY	10%	5yr Grad Rate	67%
7th AY	2%	6yr Grad Rate	70%
4yr GWR	50%	4yr CPR	72%

CBM Testing

When predicting number of conferrals in the 4-year window:

- CBM averaged a difference of 5 conferrals in a 4-year window, 1.3% difference

When predicting total student enrollment using the 4-year window:

- CBM averaged a difference in TSE of 49 students, 5.0% difference

Most variance came in years that would be affected by COVID

Model Demonstration

CBM Review

- Model performs well with larger consistent value populations

- Variance increases as core population becomes less steady
- Specific programs can out or underperform the model
- Model is useful for direction setting and a gut check on performance goals

The Outcome

Implementation - What now?

- Develop and refine portfolio investment strategy
- Create more accurate pro formas to inform our financial models
- Set realistic benchmarks for enrollment and completions

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TAR 2026