

Strategically Using the Summer To Strengthen Colleges and Universities

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Introduction

Many of the traditional funding sources for higher education institutions have become less reliable. These funding sources include state funding and endowment spending. Recently tuition increases, often used to fill shortfalls, have been less effective at many schools because parents require more financial aid from schools to pay for those tuition increases. As a result, schools have been forced to come up with alternative ways to raise revenue.

Summer programming can provide institutions with a powerful way to increase needed revenue. During the summer, colleges and universities generally have underutilized resources and excess facilities capacity. By thoughtfully using resources and filling excess capacity with revenue-generating programs, such as camps, conferences, continuing education, and special events, institutions can raise needed revenue while furthering their mission.¹

Although the financial health of colleges and universities is important for their well-being, it is not the sole metric by which most institutions measure themselves. Colleges and universities, unlike businesses, are not measured by their ability to deliver a financial return. Even though success metrics for higher-learning institutions are difficult

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to define, let alone quantify, it is possible to establish a framework to measure program success. Quantifying the benefits of summer programming provides institutions with a powerful ability to make decisions as to which programs will produce the greatest benefit for them.

Armed with a framework to measure the benefits of potential programs, an institution can start to define a process to identify and prioritize its potential programs. Identification, assessment, and prioritization involve both looking at the performance of programs at other institutions and understanding how those programs would perform at one's own institution, based on its characteristics and the environment. Understanding how a program would work in the context of one's own environment enables an institution to select and develop programs that are likely to be successful on its campus. By understanding the operational structure of potential programs, institutions then can set their own expectations and manage programs to meet those expectations.

It is critical to ensure that the highest priority programs are implemented and run well. First, institutions must identify the summer programs that can be feasibly operated and offer the greatest overall benefit. By carefully planning the implementation of new programs, institutions can realize their potential benefits. Successful implementation of summer programming requires benchmarking and performance management to ensure continued high performance.

Summer programming offers higher education institutions an opportunity to take advantage of their strengths and resources to generate revenue and further their missions. The factors for successful summer programming are a thoughtful plan and relentless attention to detail while executing that plan. Though planning and developing summer programs may seem daunting, institutions will be greatly rewarded for strategically expanding.

Problem

Many colleges and universities experience budget shortfalls as traditional funding sources become less reliable. Traditional ways to fill budget gaps include endowment spending and state funding. As the reliability of those sources of funds falter, colleges and universities often resort to increasing tuition. Tuition increases, however, are not always an effective means of raising revenue the limited effectiveness of tuition increases leads colleges and universities to look elsewhere to raise revenue.

The stock market crash of 2000 precipitated a drop in endowments, which frequently resulted in a related drop in endowment spending.² The average endowment lost 6 percent in fiscal 2002 and 3.6 percent in fiscal

2001 (Wilson, 2003). This drop was especially severe considering the high returns many institutions became accustomed to in the 1990s. The lackluster performance of many endowments continues to the present even as the US economy makes its way out of a recession.³ The bland outlook for the stock market leads to continued concern about endowment performance.

Unfortunately other traditional revenue sources, like state funding, recently are also unreliable. Higher education institutions face increased competition for state dollars from social welfare and other education programs (Fleming, 2004). Public universities across the country face dramatic cuts in state aid. Even when money is allocated for colleges and universities, states sometimes reclaim the funds (Economist, 2003). The increasing scarcity of public funds for colleges and universities leaves many institutions with few alternatives but to increase revenue.

The increasing lack of reliable of funds from the states and endowments causes many institutions to attempt to fill budget gaps by raising tuition. A sluggish economy makes it ever more difficult for families of students to bear these increases. Once considered a failsafe method for higher education institutions looking to increase revenue, tuition increases do not yield as much as in the past. As institutions increase tuition, families in turn require more financial aid, making tuition increases less effective as a means to generate revenue (Young, 2002). Moreover, as state spending on financial aid continues to increase dramatically, some states put caps on tuition increases (Arnone and Fleming). Raising tuition is often not a viable option for raising revenue.

A tepid stock market, increased competition for state funds, and a sluggish economy are a few of the factors that create a challenging financial environment for many higher education institutions. Unable to raise revenue in response to financial difficulties, many institutions have responded by cutting budgets or taking on debt. As the effectiveness of the mechanisms institutions traditionally use to alleviate financial pressures are blunted, institutions are forced to seek creative ways to increase revenue.

Summer Revenue Opportunities

One way higher education institutions can address their financial challenges is to strategically use the summer to generate revenue. Most colleges and universities have an abundance of available summer resources, including staff and physical plant. Institutions can take advantage of their own school-specific resources to run new, revenue-generating summer programs.

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A key step in understanding the breadth and depth of an institution’s own resources is to quantify facilities availability during the summer. Assessing the availability of summer campus capacity is necessary to understand what programs a campus can accommodate and when those programs can be accommodated.⁴ If an institution chooses to forego a capacity survey, it risks underutilizing or misusing its facilities, and it loses much of the opportunity to optimize its summer potential.

A formal analysis of summer capacity utilization often yields surprising results, showing far more available capacity than expected. The example below illustrates the results from one institution. Prior to the capacity analysis, the institution’s leaders suspected that there was a large amount of unused capacity available, and suggested estimates of around 50%. The actual percentage of unused capacity, however, exceeded 96%. This university learned that it could use the summer not just to raise revenue, but to holistically strengthen the institution through new program development.

Name of Facility	wk-1	wk-2	wk-3	wk-4	wk-5	wk-6	wk-7	wk-8	wk-9	wk-10	wk-11	wk-12	wk-13	wk-14	wk-15	Overall Summer Usage
Residence Halls Total	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	8%	32%	13%	28%	28%	21%	5%	16%	5%	0%	11%
Classrooms Total	14%	22%	21%	27%	26%	38%	38%	30%	36%	32%	28%	26%	30%	13%	13%	26%
Athletic Facilities Total	14%	13%	11%	3%	11%	33%	16%	8%	22%	24%	13%	13%	13%	8%	0%	13%
Music Facilities Total	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	14%	0%	1%
Large Venue Facilities Total	34%	35%	49%	42%	23%	34%	49%	16%	48%	42%	26%	24%	48%	42%	46%	37%
Small Venue Facilities Total	17%	44%	39%	48%	54%	45%	72%	41%	69%	48%	33%	34%	70%	40%	35%	46%
Theater Facilities Total	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7%	50%	79%	57%	57%	57%	57%	36%	27%
Art Facilities Total	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	0%	0%	1%
LC Facilities Total	2%	4%	4%	4%	4%	6%	6%	4%	6%	5%	4%	4%	6%	3%	3%	4%
Usage Thresholds:	>															
Heavy Usage	67.0%															
Medium Usage	33.0%															
Light Usage	0.0%															
Unused	0.0%															

Figure 1

Facilities open during the summer provide institutions with the opportunity to add valuable programs to their summer offerings. Many administrators intuitively recognize this potential and develop summer programs that they believe would be beneficial for their institutions, even without a detailed analysis of summer capacity utilization. Some of these programs become large revenue generators. Many, however, become cost centers for the institutions. Unfortunately these costly failed programs are usually characterized as the expected outcome of innovation and experimentation. This expectation of failure is largely unnecessary.

Although it is impossible to design a process eliminating program failure, it is possible to design one reducing the likelihood of failure. A process mapping out research, planning, and execution phases for creating summer programs increases the likelihood of program success. With such

a process, administrators can implement and run not just beneficial programs, but the *most* beneficial programs for their particular institution, given their available capacity. The diagram below shows how these elements combine to produce high-performance summer programming.

High-Performance Summer Programming

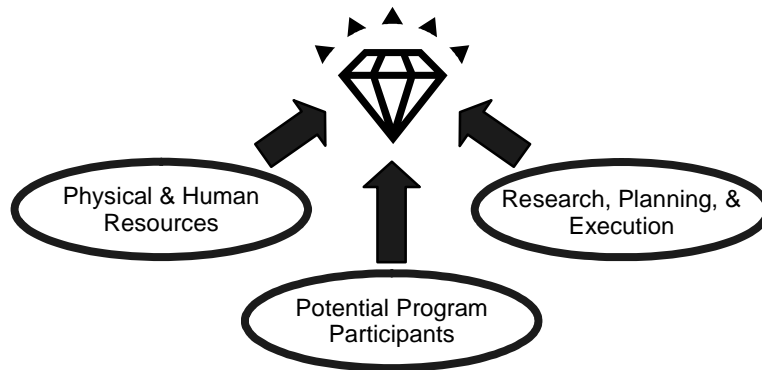


Figure 2

Most administrators already have a highly developed intuition as to whether there is excess summer capacity and which summer programs would be make good use of that capacity. A methodical approach to summer program development can supplement an administrator’s intuition. This approach involves developing all the summer programming options appropriate for the institution, and selecting those summer programs that provide colleges and universities with the greatest potential benefit. By establishing the metrics an institution will use to measure the benefit of these programs, a college or university can increase the likelihood of summer programming success.

Success Metrics

Few would object to the principle of selecting programs that deliver the greatest benefit to an institution. The concept of “benefit” in the context of higher education, however, is not as straightforward as in other contexts. For example, investors routinely use shareholder return as a measure of performance to evaluate publicly listed corporations. Lines of business within corporations evaluate potential projects based on their projected financial return on investment. The institutional missions in higher education, however, are distinctly different from those

of corporations. Even within higher education, there is a wide range of institutional missions (e.g., community colleges versus military academies). The differences in schools' missions make it difficult to identify a universal set of metrics determining benefit.

Despite the challenges involved, a framework can be constructed to define and quantify benefit in the context of higher education. As a starting point, we will assume that any beneficial program should help an institution further its mission. Satisfying this condition involves the following four concepts: revenue, reputation, recognition, and recruitment. Using these four dimensions, we can quantify the potential benefit new opportunities deliver to institutions. We will refer to these determinants of benefit as the "4-R" framework.

Revenue (Contribution)

Revenue (or more precisely, contribution⁵) is, arguably, the most important metric for evaluating potential programs. Of the four key components that we will discuss, the revenue-related metric can be measured in the most straightforward manner. Contribution is not the sole metric to consider in a holistic analysis of benefits a summer program brings to the institution. It is relevant, however, to gauge a program's ability to fill budget shortfalls and contribute to the financial health of the institution.

A program's contribution can be measured by examining incremental revenue generated and variable costs incurred during the program. For example, a residential alumni enrichment program (such as an archaeology program) generates revenue primarily through attendees paying tuition and room and board fees. Secondary revenue sources include the attendees' purchases of books and souvenirs through the campus bookstore. The drivers of variable costs include: additional teaching staff, program materials, transportation for off-campus activities, and the additional staff associated with maintaining the facilities. The sum of incremental revenues net of variable costs equals the program's contribution.

Reputation

In the 4-R framework, reputation is a measure of the perceived excellence of the institution's offerings. It may also be thought of as the perceived quality of the institution's brand. Since the offerings of higher education institutions vary so widely, a reputation is highly specific to each institution. For example, one institution may boast a solid reputation in cultivating future musicians and artists, while another may have

a strong reputation in producing competent finance and accounting professionals. The diversity of missions among higher education institutions ensures an equal diversity in types of reputation. In most cases, institutions guard their reputation and seek to enhance it. Enhancing reputation not only furthers the mission of the institution, but also benefits the institution in other ways such as:

- ◆ Immediate credibility to offer revenue-generating programs that are directly based on its high reputation, e.g., top art schools that offer summer courses for youth and top business schools that offer management development programs;
- ◆ An enhanced ability to attract and retain faculty in areas with high reputation.

Because of the institution-specific nature of reputation, a potential program may generate the same dollar amount of contribution at two institutions, but have dramatically different impacts to reputation. For example, a well-run math boot camp held at a state polytechnic institution may enhance its reputation as a strong training ground for engineers. The same program, however, may lower the reputation of an art institute because of the perceived dilution of its creative focus. In both cases, we have to understand the nature and extent of the institution's reputation to assess how a potential program would affect that reputation.

Recognition

While reputation may be thought of as the perceived quality of an institution's brand, recognition is the public awareness of that brand. Although the two concepts are related, and are often correlated, they need not be. A scandal at an institution may enhance its recognition, but tarnish its reputation. Another institution may have a sterling reputation for teaching students through the great books of the western tradition but may not be known to those outside of academic settings. Because recognition and reputation are distinct qualities of an institution that may occur independently of each other, we consider them separately in the 4-R framework.

An institution with high recognition has significant advantages over a similar one with less recognition, such as:

- ◆ An increased ability to attract applicants to the institution;
- ◆ An increased ability to bring potential employers to the campus to hire students.

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Though there are few programs whose primary benefit is increased recognition, some notable examples show that recognition can indeed be a benefit, *per se* in itself. For example, an institution that hosts a free summer outdoor concert series for the community will increase its recognition, though the recognition would not result in any direct financial contribution or significantly increased reputation.

Recruitment

An enhanced reputation helps an institution recruit faculty, and enhanced recognition helps an institution recruit students. When a program directly results in the recruitment of students, faculty, staff, administrators, board members, and donors, recruitment acts as a benefit separate from revenue, reputation, and recognition. For these purposes, recruitment can refer to both the recruitment of potential students or donors. In recruiting students, many institutions that host programs for gifted high school students receive a high number of applications from those students. To reach potential donors, an alumni program, like the alumni enrichment program discussed in the contribution section, could potentially increase its donor base if the program renews alumni ties to the school.

Summary of 4-Rs

The 4 types of benefits described in the 4-R framework work synergistically. Following are some important examples:

- ◆ Revenue, or contribution, can be used to develop programs strengthening reputation.
- ◆ An enhanced reputation raises an institution's recognition among the general public.
- ◆ A higher level of recognition improves an institution's ability to recruit top students, faculty, board members, and donors.
- ◆ The ability to recruit high-caliber students, board members, and donors has a direct effect on an institution's endowment, which can lead to a higher level of endowment spending and further increases in revenue.

The following diagram illustrates the relationship between the 4-Rs.

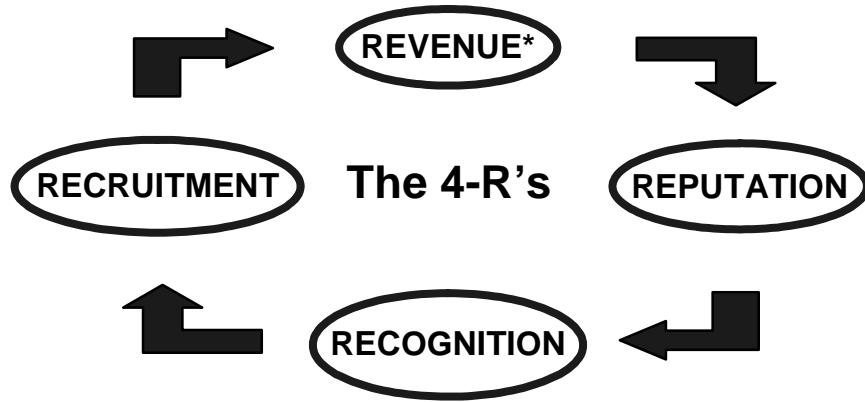


Figure 3

*Revenue is used as a proxy for contribution.

The 4-R framework allows higher education institutions to holistically quantify the benefits of potential summer programs. Colleges and universities can use this framework to prioritize the implementation of their new programs. To dramatically increase the likelihood of new program success, colleges and universities should look at the performance and operational structure of successful programs at other institutions and carefully evaluate how those programs would perform at its own institution.

New Program Selection

Programs that rely on an institution's strengths to capitalize on opportunities are the ones with the highest potential to produce large benefits. After surveying other institutions for potential programs, schools then select those programs suitable for them. The challenge institutions face is to develop, quickly and cost efficiently, an adequate list of potential programs and estimate the benefit that they can deliver. Institutions can overcome this challenge by taking a structured approach to new program selection that includes the following steps:

- (1) Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats ("SWOT") analysis of the institution and its environment ;
- (2) Identification of comparison institutions;
- (3) Survey and assessment of potential programs at comparison institutions;
- (4) Determination of the potential programs that would fit best at the institution given the results of the SWOT analysis.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis involves an evaluation of the institution's strengths and weaknesses, including a facilities usage analysis, and an evaluation of the environmental opportunities and threats that an institution faces. A SWOT analysis of an institution uncovers possible programs to investigate in comparison institutions and also helps determine which programs can fit on campus given an institution's capacity.

For example, an institution in a rural area may have strong nursing and occupational health programs, while its fine arts offerings may be weak. Much of the institution's classrooms, dormitories, and athletic facilities are unused during the summer. The institution may also be in an area where younger people frequently leave for cities, but older people remain in the local area. Possible programs to investigate in comparison institutions could include residential occupational health programs for the elderly and K-12 athletic camps. These types of programs would likely meet the needs of the community, and bring high returns along the 4-R dimensions.

Comparison Institution Identification

It would be comprehensive, but unfeasible, to survey all the potential programs at every higher education institution. A more practical method is to look at summer programming at selected institutions. Selecting several institutions from the following three categories should provide a sufficient number and variety of programs for use in the program selection process:

- (1) *Best-in-class*. Best-in-class institutions, or "aspiration" institutions, share many characteristics with the target institution, such as size and academic focus, but often have a better reputation and greater financial resources.
- (2) *Peer*. Peer institutions are similar to the target institution in size, focus, and level of academic success. These institutions often attract students from the same application pool as the target institution.
- (3) *Local*. Local institutions are located in the same geographic area as the target institution. Although these institutions may not attract the same students, they often attract many of the same potential participants for programs like day sports camps.

Survey and Assessment

By surveying the summer programming at selected institutions, we can identify not only the benchmarks and drivers of program performance, but also difficulties implementing programs. A structured interview format assigning values to qualitative data gives a more comprehensive view of the benefit and makes the information-gathering and analysis process efficient. Gauging qualitative impacts like customer satisfaction helps one translate those values to metrics like reputation impact.

In the example of the rural institution used above, we would survey residential occupational health programs for the elderly and K-12 athletic camps at the selected institutions to understand the potential benefit of those programs if they were run at the institution. In addition to understanding what the contribution of the programs would be, we would attempt to understand what the impact would be in terms of reputation, recognition, and recruitment. We would then adjust the projected contribution figures to be in line with the capacity available at the rural institution.

Best-Fit Analysis

Only a subset of the programs examined in the survey will be suitable for one's own school because of the particular institutional characteristics identified in the SWOT analysis. Many factors, like capacity constraints, lack of necessary facilities, and faculty resistance may make implementation of new programs difficult or impossible. Continuing with our rural example, a lack of an Olympic-sized pool may make a high-contribution swim camp an unfeasible proposition.

The new program selection process quantifies and illustrates the costs and benefits of potential summer programs, enabling the target institution to prioritize its implementation of new summer programs. The program selection process also uncovers keys to successfully implement and manage new summer programs. These keys include performance benchmarks, organizational success factors, and potential obstacles to overcome. After an institution has selected the programs most likely to deliver the greatest benefit, it is in a position to manage the programs effectively by focusing on the drivers of benefit while avoiding potential pitfalls.

Implementation Planning and Execution

A return on the time and effort invested in the program selection

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phases will be fully realized only if sufficient attention is given to implementation. The potential benefit of new summer programs may be compromised or delayed if implemented without a detailed project timeline, alignment of internal processes, and demonstrated institutional support. In this model, we describe two distinct implementation phases necessary to fully realize the benefit of new summer programming: (1) Implementation Planning; and (2) Establishment and Operation.

The planning phase of the implementation process involves creating a project map, developing a facilities usage scheme, establishing an organizational structure, and clarifying program details. A well-developed project map gives administrators a clear overview of implementation and guides them to maximize the effectiveness of new programs. An effective facilities usage scheme outlines the fee schedule and prioritizes access to facilities for different categories of campus users. A solid organizational structure provides a foundation for the success of all programs and program staff. Clearly articulated details for program administration ensure continued development of new programs and improvement of existing programs. Although the phases of planning are not strictly dependent on each other, there are some advantages to staggering the starting date for completing some of the phases since the learning from earlier phases make the latter phases easier to accomplish.

Mapping out the project involves identifying implementation tasks, estimating the duration of those tasks, and then identifying task dependencies and sequencing. Project mapping is necessary because it requires that program administrators understand the depth and scope of program implementation. Project mapping also encourages staff performance by specifying their responsibilities and giving them accountability for measurable goals. At the same time, project mapping prevents missed deadlines, “scope creep,”⁶ and general frustration. Mapping out the project provides momentum and increases enthusiasm. It gives all involved reason to celebrate as individual goals are met throughout the implementation process.

To develop a facilities usage scheme, an institution establishes both a graduated fee schedule and a strategic space allocation plan. Commonly in the world of higher education, the fee schedule is scaled by different categories of users: course-related usage is usually provided free of charge, private use by campus members is often offered at a relatively low rate, educational use by non-campus members is charged a competitive rate, and non-educational use by non-campus members is usually booked at a premium rate. A strategic space allocation plan specifies campus priorities for allowing different user groups access to all types of facilities throughout the year. Summer programs that offer an institution high

returns along the 4-R dimensions should be given priority for summer space allocation.

A graduated fee schedule and strategic space allocation plan are essential because they provide institutions with a clear, user-friendly, policy that supports summer program success while preventing conflicts of interest among departments, schedulers, and user groups. By prioritizing user groups and establishing a fee schedule, there is a decrease in logistical confusion and an increase in the benefit of summer programming.

Building the organizational structure to support summer programs could involve restructuring or creating relevant offices, making staffing adjustments, and developing a performance management system. Institutions can use their SWOT analysis and survey and assessment to identify problems with an existing administrative structure and then suggest relatively simple changes to create the appropriate structure. Likewise, the SWOT analysis and survey and assessment might identify staff positions that are ill-defined, irrelevant, or located in an inappropriate administrative office. Simple adjustments to staffing save an institution time and money by ensuring that staff members have an optimal working environment. A performance management system will further optimize the working environment by guiding and rewarding staff member success.⁷ A sound organizational structure continuously improves summer programs because it supports and rewards the success of staff members, increasing communication and preventing details from “slipping through the cracks.”

The last step of implementation planning is to articulate and define key program details. Guidelines should be made to select and implement additional summer programs, to manage existing programs, to evaluate and improve all summer programs, and to discontinue programs that do not provide an institution with appropriate benefits. This component of implementation planning leads to long-term success by establishing clear rules and procedures for ongoing program selection, evaluation, and improvement, and reducing conflicts of interest.

The following diagram gives an example of the sequence and duration of the components of implementation planning. Although approximate durations are given for each of the phases, the time for each phase can vary significantly. Additionally, the sequence of the components that is described is recommended, but not required. Often learning from one component can be used to accomplish a subsequent component more effectively.

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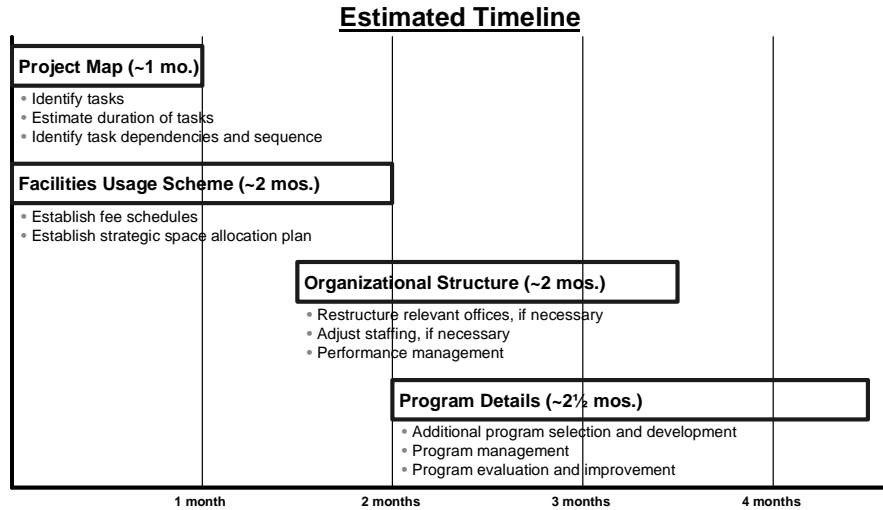


Figure 4

After an institution implements new summer programs, it should establish a process to maintain control, monitor performance, and make necessary changes depending on changes in the institution or its environment. Standardizing management processes gives administrators control of their workflow by enabling staff to accomplish work quickly, easily, and successfully. Since they are freed from some of the day-to-day work, administrators have more time for “big picture” planning. It also gives colleagues and external program directors a sense of consistency that leads to greater respect for administrators and their programs. Expectations are managed better for program participants, staff, and campus partners when they know what to expect and when to expect it. By requiring regular monitoring of programs and staff, performance management makes it easier for administrators to maintain focus on making their programs more successful. Administrators can ensure that their programs are aligned with institutional and environmental changes by periodically monitoring their institution’s strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats.

With good implementation planning and well-executed establishment and operation of summer programs, institutions can operate with a lean staff, measure performance on a regular basis, and promptly make “course corrections” when necessary. Well-planned and implemented summer programs can make good schools great. On the other hand, a highly beneficial program at one college or university cannot succeed at another institution if it is not adequately supported. Planning and

executing summer program implementation is essential to summer programming success.

Conclusion

Colleges and universities have an unparalleled opportunity to use the summer to raise revenue, enhance their missions, and strengthen their institutions. By thoughtfully selecting and developing new summer programs, higher education institutions effectively use their excess capacity. The key ingredient in summer programming success is effectively researching, planning, and executing new programs. To capitalize on their summer potential, colleges and universities must prioritize their summer program goals and then select new programs with the potential to meet those goals. Thoughtful and detail-oriented implementation planning, execution, and follow-through greatly benefits higher education institutions.

The cost of not acting, however, is enormous. When they do not act, institutions lose the opportunity to gain needed revenue. Furthermore, not acting prevents institutions from developing successful new programs and often keeps them from improving existing programs.

Although conducting this research and carefully developing new summer programs requires an investment of time and effort, it is an effective and cost-efficient way to realize the benefits of summer programming. Even if an extensive SWOT analysis and survey and assessment cannot be conducted, the basic framework is valuable to loosely guide short-term program development. In the long term, there is a relatively small cost for an institution to carry out or contract this work. A small, up-front investment of time and effort will be more than paid off by gains in future revenue.

Notes

¹ In this paper, “summer programs” and “summer programming” refer to camps, conferences, continuing education, and special events. Though not specifically designed for summer schools, these concepts and frameworks can be applied to develop traditional undergraduate summer academics.

² Some colleges and universities effectively guard against fluctuations in levels of endowment by developing and following formulas that combine “quantitative analysis and market judgment” (Yale 2004, 4).

³ The US seems to be coming out of a recession but the stock market is still performing unremarkably, with share prices roughly the same now as they were in the beginning of 2004. The budget deficit is growing, corporate profits are expected to shrink, and wage costs are expected to rise; all these factors concern investors (Economist 2004).

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⁴ A facilities usage analysis should be conducted during the SWOT analysis phase of new program selection, which we discuss later in this paper.

⁵ Contribution is calculated as follows: Revenue – Variable Costs = Contribution. We exclude fixed costs such as electricity and groundskeeping because they are paid for regardless of a program's existence.

⁶ Scope creep is the tendency for projects to grow more than originally intended. This often leads to expanding project costs and time frames, making the project more expensive and time consuming than anticipated.

⁷ This could be accomplished by sharing a part of a program's contribution with departments or people who have gone out of their way to make a program successful, or by simply including measurable goals related to program performance in staff members' annual performance reviews.

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