



Cal State Long Beach Studies the “Impact” of Impaction



Perhaps more than most colleges, the history of **California State University, Long Beach (CSULB)** is intertwined with that of local demographic trends. The college was established in 1949 to accommodate post-World War II population growth in Orange County

and southeast Los Angeles County. Almost six decades later, CSULB is grappling with record high enrollments and applications attributed to a statewide demographic phenomenon, Tidal Wave II.

Tidal Wave II refers to the nearly 80 million children of the Baby Boom generation, called Echo Boomers; the largest generation since the 1960s. As a result of Tidal Wave II, the California Postsecondary Education Commission estimates that more than 700,000 additional students will seek higher education from state institutions by 2010.

The wave has already hit at CSULB. In 2002, the campus was officially designated as impacted, meaning it had received too many eligible applicants and exhausted its enrollment capacity. In order to reduce the size of its incoming freshman class, CSULB instituted higher admissions criteria. The institution, which has approximately 35,000 students, is the seventh of the 23 Cal State campuses to be designated as impacted.

“We just don’t have enough capacity to handle all the people who are traditionally CSU eligible,” said Dr. Van Novack, assistant vice president of Institutional Research and Assessment at CSULB, “Starting in fall 2002, this institution — for the first time in its history — did not take every freshman who met minimum systemwide requirements.” Prior to impaction, CSULB admitted nearly 75 percent of its freshmen applicants. After impaction, in fall 2002, incoming freshmen enrollment was reduced by one-third to 3,037.

Tracking Post-Impaction Students with StudentTracker®

Almost immediately, the school identified a class of student it had never encountered: students who were CSU eligible but not eligible at the Long Beach campus. “We had redirection agreements with some of the local campuses for those students,” noted Novack, “but we had no way of tracking whether they took advantage of them or not.” CSULB turned to the Clearinghouse’s StudentTracker service to find out if impaction had negatively affected these students. In addition, CSULB wanted to learn what became of the students it had admitted, but who did not enroll. Added Novack: “Where did these students go if they didn’t come here?”

StudentTracker enables schools to match their student records against the Clearinghouse’s nationwide coverage of enrollment and degree records.

CSULB sent record data to the Clearinghouse for the post-impaction freshmen cohorts it wanted to study: students who had applied for each fall semester beginning in 2002. According to Novack, StudentTracker provides “... almost 100 percent coverage. If they enrolled in almost any other educational institution, you can find them.”

Understanding Impaction’s Effect

The school found that the majority of students who were CSU eligible, but no longer CSULB eligible, had enrolled in other four-year institutions, mostly other CSUs. However, they did not attend the campuses to which CSULB had redirected them, said Novack, perhaps due to their location or a preference for an academic program elsewhere. He added that the results “... showed us that we hadn’t really harmed these students by not taking them. We were not denying them a four-year college degree. We were just denying them the opportunity to obtain it here.”

CSULB also learned that by raising its out-of-state admissions criteria so significantly, it now faced new and tougher competition for qualified non-local students: University of California campuses and highly-selective private universities. This lowered its yield rate. “Our highest yield comes from students for whom we are the best choice. Obviously the more qualified the students, the more choices they have,” explained Novack, “The Clearinghouse data allowed us to find out where students we admitted and who didn’t enter CSULB went. That was very eye opening.”

As a consequence, CSULB is considering a ceiling for admission requirements. “As students become more qualified, they are less likely to come here,” he continued, “having the information on where they end up helps us realize why that’s occurring.”

A Source of “Incontrovertible Data”

The information available to CSULB through StudentTracker, said Novack, has “... changed the way we’ve thought about several things. As somebody who does this for a living, it really bothers me when institutions

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Dr. Van Novack, Assistant Vice President of Institutional Research & Assessment, CSULB

develop policies without empirical data. This is a source of really good, incontrovertible data. It's just so absolute: they either did or didn't go somewhere else."

In the past, the institution has used surveys, which he finds "costly and time-consuming." Novack reports that he has received data from the Clearinghouse in as little as 24 hours. Usually, it takes just three to four days. He considers StudentTracker's cost nominal. "We've always been really pleased with the turnaround and the support. The more you use it, the more you find other ways to use it."

CSULB has also used StudentTracker to track former students who didn't graduate and to learn which of its graduates opted to obtain higher degrees, like a masters or doctorate, at other schools. "Once students stopped going to CSULB, they just fell completely off our radar, whether they succeeded somewhere else or not," said Novack, "I think we've only scratched the surface with what we can learn using Clearinghouse data."



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