

## 5.A - Core Component 5.A

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The institution's resource base supports its current educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

1. The institution has the fiscal and human resources and physical and technological infrastructure sufficient to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered.
2. The institution's resource allocation process ensures that its educational purposes are not adversely affected by elective resource allocations to other areas or disbursement of revenue to a superordinate entity.
3. The goals incorporated into mission statements or elaborations of mission statements are realistic in light of the institution's organization, resources, and opportunities.
4. The institution's staff in all areas are appropriately qualified and trained.
5. The institution has a well-developed process in place for budgeting and for monitoring expense.

### Argument

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Columbia's most pressing current operational challenge stems from a decade-long decline in enrollment and net student-based revenues that has placed a strain on operating budgets. The external precipitating factor, the Great Recession, exposed a vulnerability that was of the college's own making, namely that in the 2000s it had built its financial aid awarding strategies, and the enrollment growth that they sustained, on the back of what turned out to have been a credit bubble in the form of the [private student loan market](#), and that it had used those dollars to enroll a large cohort of low-income and/or academically unprepared students who were not prepared to persist to graduation. After 2008, this business model, which required a constant infusion of tuition dollars from new students to compensate for the hemorrhaging of tuition dollars due to high attrition among current students, broke down. This forced the college to adopt a series of policy, strategic, and operational responses whose consequences are still working themselves out.

### Enrollment, revenues, and expenses

Columbia has operated for the past decade in a constrained student recruitment environment. It has not been able to replace enrollment losses among its traditional student cohort - particularly following the end of open admissions and the implementation of (very modest) admissions selectivity beginning with the 2013-14 new student recruitment cycle - with enrollment gains among a student cohort that is better prepared to persist to graduation. The result has been a steady decline in [total enrollment](#), which has fallen from a peak of 12,464 in Fall 2008 to 7,312 in Fall 2017. This trend encompasses distinct sub-trends in first-time student recruitment, transfer student recruitment, and student persistence:

- [First-time full-time student enrollment](#) fell by around ten percent between fall 2008 and fall 2009 after the Great Recession hit, but then held steady until the end of open admission, which cut the [freshman acceptance rate](#) from around 95 percent early in the decade to around 88 percent in recent years. ([Transfer acceptance rates](#) have fluctuated less dramatically between 93 and 98 percent.). Between fall 2013 and fall 2017, first-time full-time enrollment fell by 33 percent.
- [Transfer enrollment](#), a separate but important student recruitment stream, peaked in fall 2007 and then declined precipitously after the college, straining to accommodate what was then a

growing student population, abandoned a series of existing transfer agreements with area community colleges - a decision that President Warwick Carter, shortly before his retirement, [acknowledged had been “misguided”](#). Since fall 2013, transfer enrollment has stabilized at a little less than 50 percent of its fall 2007 level, even as the college has sought to rebuild its relationships with potential community college partners since early 2016.

- Student persistence outcomes ([retention](#), [graduation](#)) have trended persistently upwards since fall 2008, but not by enough to offset the losses at the front end.

At the same time, operating revenues have been squeezed by the collapse of the private student loan market and the college's subsequent decision to fill the resulting gap in students' financial aid packages with institutional grant funds. Columbia's lack of an established reputation among higher income, higher ability families who could otherwise afford this education has deprived the college of the market leverage to make published tuition increases stick; instead, it has had to recycle the additional tuition revenue as increased financial aid to incoming students. Thus, even as [tuition increased by 33.0 percent from FY10 to FY17, the average tuition per FTE student, net of student aid, grew by only 11.0 percent](#) in that same period. From FY09 to FY17, [overall spending on institutional financial aid grants](#) increased from \$8.3 million to \$37.0 million, and the [overall tuition discount rate](#) rose from 3.9 percent to 19.8 percent. As a result, [net tuition and fee revenues](#) fell from \$202.2 million to \$155.5 million, and [total revenues](#) from \$246.7 million to \$201.2 million.

The college has had no alternative but to respond to these income declines by matching them with expenditure reductions, with [total expenditures](#) falling from a peak of \$228.1 million in FY10 to \$197.5 million in FY17. Inevitably, much of the burden of these cuts has fallen on staffing levels. Since the fall of 2013, there have been several reductions-in-force and two Voluntary Separation Incentive Programs (i.e. buyout offers), one in spring 2015 and the other in spring 2017. As a result, the number of [full-time-equivalent employees](#) at the college declined by 26 percent between fall 2013 and fall 2017, matching the decline in FTE enrollment.

The college has achieved or expects to achieve operating budget surpluses through FY18, but as available revenues have declined, meeting the competing resource needs of academic departments and other strategic institutional priorities while also funding compliance obligations has become more difficult. The initial rounds of budgetary reductions were often a matter of unwinding questionable decisions made in a time of financial bounty and did not severely impact the college's ability to deliver programs and services. More recent budget reductions have exacted a greater cost, particularly on academic departments with negative operating margins, which under the new budgeting process (see below) are being pushed to review and reduce their structural costs.

## **Financial resources**

As the college seeks to stabilize and strengthen its student recruitment efforts, its broader financial resource base is generally healthy. Its most recent (February 1, 2018) bond rating review by Standard and Poor's, which affirmed the college's BBB+ bond rating and 'stable' outlook, reflects this broad picture. S&P's analysis cited the college's "healthy full accrual surpluses, robust available resources ratios following the sale of significant real-estate assets, and a low debt burden" as sources of financial strength, and identified "declining enrollment, weak selectivity, and decreasing matriculation rates" as areas of concern.

On the positive side, successive administrations and the Board of Trustees exercised cautious financial management during the growth years, banking operating surpluses, building healthy cash reserves, and using excess reserves to grow the quasi-endowment. As a result, net assets have increased in each of the last eight fiscal years, from \$179.6 million in FY09 to \$360.0 million in

FY17.

Lacking a robust history of philanthropic support from its alumni (see below), the college has attempted to reproduce the benefits of such support by other means, building the quasi-endowment with transfers from cash balances in excess of requirements – including a \$10 million transfer in December 2016 and \$20 million transfers in February 2017 and February 2018 – and exercising discipline and careful stewardship in managing it as if it were a restricted fund. (The college did not even make annual draws of endowment income into the operating budget until FY14.) Over the past five years, the college’s long-term investments – almost all quasi-endowment – have grown from \$117.5 million at the beginning of 2013 to \$200.7 million as of March 31, 2018.

Columbia's cash and short-term investments position currently reflects the receipt of the proceeds from the sale of several campus buildings. The college will spend many of those proceeds on the construction of the new student center (see below); it projects that it will end FY19 with just under \$80 million in cash and short-term investments after incurring all of the project expenditures. Its ratio of cash and investments to operations, as measured by S&P, has been at or above the median for BBB-rated private institutions over the past four fiscal years, and was well above it at the end of FY17.

- Reserves over time

Over the years, the college has gone into the bond markets to fund building acquisitions and renovations. It had \$81.6 million in outstanding debt obligations as of the end of FY17 (August 31, 2017). This debt situation is manageable. Columbia's debt service-to-operations ratio has declined in four of the past five fiscal years, and stood at 2.0 percent at the end of FY17. Its Maximum Annual Debt Service burden, as measured by S&P, is well below the median for BBB-rated private institutions.

The one area of financial vulnerability for the college is its dependence on tuition, fees, and residence hall charges as revenue sources. Without a curriculum that can attract meaningful federal research funding, it can only look to fundraised dollars as a significant supplementary revenue stream. Columbia’s development operation has an inconsistent history; at times the college has been able to raise funds for discrete projects such as the construction of a new facility for its film and television programs in 2010, but it lacks reliable major gifts and annual fund pipelines, and the annual giving rate among its alumni is less than one percent. Leadership and staff turnover and weaknesses in technological support systems have contributed to this situation. However, the current chief development officer is highly qualified for his position, and for the first time in some years a fully-staffed team of experienced development professionals is in place.

- Five-year fundraising report

### **Exposure to financial risk**

Columbia is an independent 501(c)(3) institution so there is no “superordinate entity” to which it can disburse revenues. It does not operate non-educational units of a significant size, such as a hospital or an NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics program, that could potentially drain institutional resources from educational purposes. The narrative for Core Component 1.D discusses the college’s decision, taken earlier in the decade, to close or restructure several affiliated ‘centers’ whose operating deficits were placing some strain on institutional finances.

The college’s defined benefit pension plan, which was frozen back in June 2003, has been de-risked

through voluntary termination programs in 2015 and 2018 that allowed eligible participants to cash out of the plan by accepting a lump-sum payout. The Board's Finance Committee also approved two payouts into the fund from operating surpluses, one of \$19.3 million in [FY14](#) and the other of \$4.1 million in [FY16](#). These contributions have resulted in the fund being fully funded according to Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation criteria and nearly 100 percent funded according to Internal Revenue Service criteria.

### **Staff qualifications and development**

The 2015 strategic plan calls for Columbia to “expand our investment in [the] professional development” of faculty and staff. When the college was searching for an associate vice president of human resources in 2016, the position description set out the expectation that the successful candidate would “create leadership training, professional development processes, performance management systems, and tools that shape the competencies necessary for future leaders”. In February 2018, the college launched a Leadership Development Program in which managers were invited to participate in three interactive modular master classes, with material delivered in both classroom- and web-based instruction. Over 100 employees participated in the program. Funding is included in the preliminary FY19 operating budget.

The college has made substantive progress in establishing processes to ensure that all new hires are qualified for their positions. Beginning in 2017, it implemented a consistent criminal background check, educational attainment verification, and prior employment verification system for prospective employees. These checks are now required for all new hires prior to the start of their employment at the college.

Another key initiative, which is discussed in detail in the narrative for Core Component 5.D, was the comprehensive staff position classification review that was launched in November 2014. Among other things, this necessitated the development of updated job descriptions for all positions at the institution, which has been helpful in defining the qualifications for those positions if and as they become vacant.

The college has also centralized its hiring processes for faculty and staff; all job applications are now funneled through a centralized candidate tracking system, which has facilitated the rigorous and equitable evaluation of candidates' qualifications. This system is already in effect for staff and full-time faculty hiring and will be extended to part-time faculty hiring in the fall of 2018.

The narrative for Core Component 3.C discusses the provost's office efforts since 2014 to require documentation of the academic credentials and professional qualifications of current full- and part-time faculty.

### **Physical plant**

Columbia College Chicago does not have a discrete, externally-bounded campus as such. Rather, it owns or leases a collection of non-contiguous properties in Chicago's South Loop, from the 33 E. Congress building on the corner of S. Wabash Avenue to the Media Production Center (MPC) on the corner of S. 16th and W. State Streets. As July 20, 2018, it [owns 14 buildings](#) (including the president's house, which is in a different neighborhood) containing a total of 1,211,776 square feet of assignable space, allocated as follows:

- Academic Resources (classrooms, studios, labs): 430,932 sq. ft.
- Student Resources (residence centers, study spaces, library, event spaces, open

labs): 106,062 sq. ft.

- Staff Resources: (faculty and staff offices, conference rooms): 275,811 sq. ft.
- 3rd Party Resources: (Apple Store, Public Narrative offices, bookstore): 10,207 sq. ft.
- Building Resources/Circulation: (janitorial, mechanical, hallways): 388,764 sq. ft.

In addition, the college owns two parcels of land, one of which is the construction site on which the new student center is rising, and leases student residence hall facilities in four buildings, one of which also houses various student services offices (it also leases classroom, studio, and office space at Raleigh Studios in Los Angeles for the Cinema and Television Arts Department's Semester in LA program).

The college's current physical plant was developed largely through a series of opportunistic purchases of comparatively affordable properties in the South Loop between 1996 and 2011. In those years, Columbia acquired ten buildings and two parcels of land and received a third parcel of land as a donation. With the exception of the MPC, the college's buildings were originally built for other uses – for example, the 623 S. Wabash building was a showroom for the Studebaker Brothers Carriage Company, and the 624 S. Michigan Ave. building housed clothing boutiques and a dance school – and subsequently renovated as teaching, learning, and administrative spaces. The absence of purpose-built spaces, and the buildings' location in a dense urban neighborhood, present myriad challenges: sight lines in certain classrooms are broken up by weight-bearing columns, the elevated train runs adjacent to several properties, and some buildings, such as 1104 S. Wabash, are designated as landmarks on the National Register of Historic Places, which limits the scope of possible modifications to them. In addition, the age of the buildings (and their HVAC systems) necessitates constant attention to repair and maintenance issues.

Given that in almost all cases it was working with buildings that were not purpose-built, the college has done an excellent job of remodeling spaces and even entire floors to create functional and attractive teaching and learning spaces – for example, constructing a sound studio for the Audio Arts and Acoustics program inside a former bank vault in 33 E. Congress. Not all of the buildings have proved equally adaptable, however, and some could only be made truly fit for purpose with a comprehensive renovation that might not be cost-effective. That point was highlighted in a comprehensive [2014-15 evaluation](#) of the college's buildings by the architectural firm of Solomon Cordwell Buenz (SCB), which concluded, among other things, that “[c]onstruction of new space in combination with the adaptive reuse of these historic buildings could be, in the long term, more efficient” and “more cost effective” in “meeting [the college's] academic needs.”

More recently, the post-2008 enrollment downturn, the slackening of the pressure to add square footage (which drove many of the earlier real estate purchases), and the regeneration of the South Loop (which has boosted the value of Columbia's real estate portfolio) has opened up space for the college to implement a targeted rationalization of its property holdings. It is funding the construction of the new \$50 million student center (opening in 2019) and the \$12 million comprehensive renovation of the Getz Theatre (re-opened in 2018) from the sales of the University Center residence hall (which was technically owned by the Educational Advancement Fund, a non-profit entity of which Columbia was a member institution; the college now leases student beds from the new owner); the former home of the theatre department's set shop (which has relocated to the renovated Getz Theatre); a residence hall that also houses student life offices (which the college has leased back until the completion of the student center); and an empty twelve-story tower at 820 S. Michigan Avenue (an opportunistic purchase for which the college could never find a suitable use). Even with the sales, by the time the 110,000-square-foot student center comes online in May 2019, the [gross square footage](#) of the college's physical plant will only be 12 percent smaller than it was five years earlier, still ample for an FTE student body that is already 21 percent smaller than in the fall of 2014.

## Information technology

One area in which the college has made significant improvements over the past four years is its information technology infrastructure, which President Kim early in his tenure described as his greatest operational concern. Between FY16 and FY18, the Information Technology office implemented a [plan](#) to support key initiatives in the five-year strategic plan, in particular goals 1 (Student Success) and 6 (Aligning Resources with Goals):

- *Campus network*: Prior to 2016, the campus network was not seamless. Each building had its own wireless network, wireless access across the campus was spotty, and the network was highly unreliable and subject to failure on a regular basis. Between 2014 and 2016, and at a cost of around \$6 million, Columbia undertook a comprehensive program to upgrade and stabilize the IT network's hardware backbone, installing a physical 20GB fiber ring that connects all buildings, replacing all network switches, and doubling the number of wireless access points across the campus.
- *Infrastructure hardware*: As was the case with the campus network, prior to 2017 the college ran its central IT functions on file servers and data storage devices scattered across the campus. Beginning in 2017, IT consolidated and centralized all distributed computing in a single platform (vBlock), providing efficiencies and far greater computing capacity and speed as well as Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) capacity. The college's file server, data storage, and IT backup and recovery infrastructure were moved to an off-campus, vendor-managed data center, with data for the College's most critical functions (identity verification, student records, financial data, etc.) backed up at a second site in Suwanee, Georgia.
- *Software platforms*: The college is in the midst of migrating its Learning Management System (LMS) from Moodle to Canvas, a change that will be fully effective with fall 2018 classes. This is a significant initiative not only for instruction in the regular curriculum but also for the development of the new Columbia Online digital learning program. In 2017-18, the college shifted to a new Constituent Relationship Management system (Slate) for its enrollment management operation. It has been reinstalling the Student Information System (SIS), Jenzabar CX, shorn of customizations that compromised its reliability and functionality (although concerns persist about Jenzabar as a viable long-term SIS solution for the institution).
- *Cloud-based solutions*: In fall 2016, the college migrated its email, file sharing, and associated storage systems to the Cloud, utilizing Microsoft Office 365.
- *Financial management tools*: Since 2016, the college has adopted a Cloud-based planning and budgeting platform, developed an in-house Institutional Data Warehouse to support budget reporting and business transactions reviews, and acquired a multi-year financial forecasting and budget modeling tool that has been integrated with existing internal planning and forecasting models. Together, these new systems have made it possible for budget planners to identify, track, and reallocate individual line-item budget expenditures – the building blocks of any operating budget – at a deep level, and have allowed for the creation of a more sophisticated budget reporting, financial management, forecasting, and scenario planning function than had previously existed at Columbia.
- *Other initiatives*: The IT office has moved to centralize the purchase of faculty and staff workstations and put all technology renewals and upgrades on a regular schedule. In the summer and fall of 2017, it replaced student workstations in the library and the Learning

Center. In July 2018, the college's platform for tracking employment applications was completely integrated with its human resources management platform, thereby allowing for the full automation of the system for managing the faculty and staff hiring process (until that time, hiring managers had to prepare a four-page paper Position Requisition Form for every job search).

Some potentially valuable work is also underway at the intersection of information technology and facilities management, as the college seeks to employ technological solutions to facilitate more efficient scheduling and facilities use. It already has a system in place to track and analyze academic space usage. The facilities and operations office is developing new standards to guide space use planning and scheduling across campus, and is moving to implement a fully web-based room scheduling system. The longer-term objective is to align the standards and the online scheduling capability to flatten course scheduling patterns, which currently cluster a disproportionate number of course offerings around the middle of the day. This may allow for a consolidation of academic spaces and a reconsideration of the future of those spaces that no longer effectively serve student and faculty needs.

### **Budgeting and budget monitoring**

Until comparatively recently, budgeting at Columbia reflected the legacy of the 1990s and early 2000s, when the college's main (and happy) priority was managing steady enrollment and resource growth. Current-year line-item spending was used as the baseline for building the upcoming year's budget, and the college lacked a rigorous culture of 'managing to the budget'. Academic departments did not track cost-of-instruction figures for their degree programs; those costs were allocated uniformly by student credit-hour across programs, even if the instruction was unusually labor- or technology-intensive. An inadequate budgeting and planning technology infrastructure made certain routine budget analysis and cost management practices, such as tracking budgetary outcomes in real time, difficult or impossible. Thus, while the budget-building process was always a substantial collective endeavor, it was less sophisticated and well-informed than was desirable for an institution of the college's scale and complexity.

Once enrollment and net student-based revenues began their decline from their FY09 peaks, the administration undertook an early attempt at budgetary right-sizing in the 2011-12 academic year, utilizing the Prioritization template developed by the educational consultant Robert Dickeson. That process, however, was stymied by a combination of the above-mentioned IT systems weakness – the campus prioritization team that evaluated Columbia's academic programs was never provided with reliable program expenditure budgets, for example – and internal political contention. It was not until 2015 that the college was finally able to align and harness systems, personnel, and internal management structures to establish an effective budget-building process that could attack a structural operating deficit.

The current budgeting system, which was first used in the development of the FY16 operating budget, is overseen by the office for budget, planning, and analysis (OBPA), which was established in early 2015. Working with the institutional effectiveness office, the OBPA builds preliminary revenue and expenditure forecasts based on enrollment and other projections. If the forecasts show a deficit, the CFO, OBPA, and senior academic leadership develop firm expenditure reduction targets for administrative and academic units, and the vice presidents work with deans and directors to achieve them. Funding requests for strategic initiatives or other institutional priorities are incorporated into the expenditure projections so that the college can protect those investments even if the overall budget is reduced from the current year's. The budget-building timeline has been moved up relative to past practice, when the Board of Trustees did not see a budget until after the start of the new fiscal year on

September 1. The preliminary revenue and expenditure forecasts for the coming fiscal year are developed by early March, with budget targets distributed soon thereafter; the Board receives and acts on a preliminary budget proposal at its spring meeting in May. A final budget that reflects any subsequent modifications over the summer goes to the Board for approval at its first meeting of the new fiscal year.

During the current fiscal year, the college closes its books on a monthly basis and prepares monthly budget statements, including actuals, a revised balance sheet, a cash flow estimate, and updated year-end projections, for the president's Cabinet and for the Business and Finance and Audit Committees of the Board of Trustees.

Central to the implementation of the new budgeting process has been the strengthening of the college's broader capacity for effective budgeting, real-time budget management, budget reporting, and long-term planning made possible by the technology investments outlined above. The consequences of these upgrades for planning and budgeting have been especially significant for academic affairs, the largest component at the institution. Since 2014-15, under the provost's direction, the OBPA has developed and refined departmental profit-and-loss statements to aid in departmental budget allocations. These statements have provided a much greater level of clarity about which academic departments are net revenue producers and which are subvention departments subsidized by other departments. More recently, academic affairs has started to draw on a more complex array of program performance and cost management indicators, such as student retention and graduation rates, entering student cohort sizes, and average class sizes, to shape budget allocation decisions. To advance this work, Columbia has become a participant in the National Study of Instructional Costs and Productivity, a/k/a the Delaware Cost Study, which provides comparative national cost-of-instruction data for individual programs.

The availability of more powerful analytical tools has created a more transparent and consistent set of metrics that the provost's office, deans, and department chairs are using to improve programmatic efficiency, quality, and effectiveness. While eighty percent of departmental budgets are still allocated by student credit hours, the provost's office has used its control over the remaining twenty percent to push subvention departments to review and reduce their structural costs, develop strategies for increasing their appeal to prospective students, and improve their track record in facilitating student persistence to graduation. It has utilized Delaware Cost Study data as the basis for budgeting decisions designed to bring programs' costs more in line with national norms – an eye-opening experience for some departmental chairs and faculty, who hitherto had been uninformed about their programs' underlying cost structures. Departments with declining enrollments have had to accommodate budget reductions unless other strategic indicators indicate that they should be shielded from them. Department chairs are now also required to develop more systematic part-time faculty budgets based on measurable program need and actual teaching schedules.

The expanded ability to isolate, track, and shift individual budget lines has been essential to the centralization of resources and services previously based within academic departments. The decisions were driven primarily by budgetary considerations but have had the benefit of providing greater equity of access to those resources and services to students and faculty across the institution. The most significant example of this has been the consolidation of academic support functions such as academic advising and career services, which is discussed at length in the narrative for Core Components 3.D and 3.E. In 2016, faculty professional development opportunities, which had been widely perceived to be inequitably allocated between departments when it came to both eligibility criteria and resource availability, were centralized. [Under the new system](#), all assistant professors on the tenure track receive a \$1,500 professional development allowance from their departmental budget; a six-person committee of deans and senior academic administrators reviews other such requests from faculty.

Lastly, academic technology funds have been centralized, with purchasing concentrated in two order periods each academic year.

The new budgeting and expense monitoring system, then, represents a vast improvement on what came before, although it has not made budget allocation decisions any easier. That said, there remains some scope for greater refinement and more sophisticated application of the available data. For example, the FY19 budget-building process marked the first time that the college was able to isolate and extract the discrete costs of some graduate programs within departmental budgets. Given the very different cost structure and funding model of graduate as opposed to undergraduate education, the systemic extension of this practice remains an important near-term budgeting priority. The provost's office is also aware that the new budgeting practices require a level of financial literacy among deans and department chairs that goes well beyond what has been expected of them in the past, and that individuals who hold those positions will require external support to develop that mastery.

Columbia, of course, remains highly tuition-dependent, so developing accurate and timely projections of fall enrollment and tuition income is essential for the budget-building process. The Institutional Effectiveness office uses a sophisticated LOGIT regression model, controlling for dozens of other variables that affect matriculation, to predict the impact of aid awards along a two-dimensional financial need-academic ability matrix on the propensity of students in a particular need-ability cell to enroll and persist to graduation. A matriculation probability is assigned to each student and the aggregated probabilities are applied to the projected admitted student cohort to arrive at an estimated range of the size and net tuition revenue of the incoming class. The model is evaluated and refined annually, an important task given the fluidity of the college's prospective student pool following the end of open admissions. The preliminary FY16 and FY17 operating budgets had to be revised downward over the summer once median initial enrollment projections were revealed as overly optimistic. The FY18 budget, however, required no such adjustment, and it appears as if the FY19 budget will not require one either. This suggests that the enrollment forecasting models have caught up with the college's evolving admissions reality.

Looking down the road, academic affairs is a recent subscriber to the Academic Practice Solution, a tool created by the Educational Advisory Board that leverages data for deans and department chairs to strengthen their ability to manage program costs, such as the selective massaging of average course section sizes, while still advancing students to timely graduation. Meanwhile, under the executive sponsorship of the provost and the CFO, a more responsive resource allocation model is under development for use in the preparation of the FY20 budget. It will incorporate assumptions about how the budget will treat subvention programs and reward or penalize programs based on their performance outcomes.

### **Personnel budgeting**

Personnel costs are of course the most significant expenditure item at any higher education institution. To support improved financial management and long-term planning, a centralized and more rigorous personnel position approval and control process was implemented in 2015, and has been refined and adjusted at several points since then. Under the policy, all faculty and staff position requests, including a position description, compensation target, and identified funding mechanism, must receive formal approval by the appropriate vice president and a budget review by the OBPA before a search is approved and launched. In addition, before any request for a new or redefined position is approved, the human resources office undertakes a review to establish a compensation range based on position classification, comparative market benchmarks, and any equity considerations. In the event of a hiring freeze or (as was the case at the time of submission) a mandatory short-term hold on position postings, a four-person committee must approve all requests for exceptions made on the basis of

claims of special circumstance or core operational need.

In addition, on January 1, 2018, the college launched a five-year, phased-in program of modifications to the design and cost-sharing structure of the health insurance benefit offered to full-time non-union employees. This represents an effort to re-align those benefits, especially medical insurance, with market norms at other Chicago-area employers and higher education institutions. The college is also working with a benefits broker/consultant to track its benefits programs comparatively, with a view to managing costs but also to exploring opportunities for more generous offerings if warranted.

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## 5.B - Core Component 5.B

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The institution's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission.

1. The governing board is knowledgeable about the institution; it provides oversight of the institution's financial and academic policies and practices and meets its legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
2. The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies—including its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students—in the institution's governance.
3. Administration, faculty, staff, and students are involved in setting academic requirements, policy, and processes through effective structures for contribution and collaborative effort.

## Argument

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### Board of Trustees

As authorized under the college bylaws, the Board of Trustees holds an [annual meeting](#) and undertakes the [corporate functions](#) assigned to it, including approval of the annual operating and capital budgets, annual tuition and fee schedule, and major capital projects. All significant proposals that come to the Board for action are first reviewed by the appropriate Board [standing committee\(s\)](#). While it approves faculty personnel policies and any program closures that would require the termination of tenured faculty, historically it has refrained from voting on certain academic matters that some other governing boards do, such as faculty tenure appointments, the establishment of new academic programs, and major curricular revisions. (It is fully briefed on all of these.) The Board complies with the Illinois General Not-For-Profit Corporation Act and periodically reviews and, if necessary, amends the bylaws (most recently as of May 11, 2017) to ensure that this remains the case. The manager of Board Relations, a dedicated Board liaison based in the President's office, maintains the Board's corporate records in collaboration with the General Counsel's office and the college Archivist.

The Board's Audit Committee receives, reviews, and approves the annual audited financial statements, pension and retirement plan audits, and A-133 audit (or "single audit") of federal program expenditures, and authorizes the filing of the college's annual Form 990 return with the Internal Revenue Service. The Audit Committee receives annual, aggregated reports on the adjudication of cases involving the college's Student Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure, and promotes trustees' completion of the recommended (by the federal government) training on the policy and on their, and the college's, obligations under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. (as of the time of writing, not all trustees had completed this training.) The Committee also receives annual, aggregated reports on complaints submitted under the college's [Whistleblower Policy](#); the chair of the Committee receives a monthly compilation.

The manager of Board Relations advises the Board, its Governance Committee, and the president on best practices in corporate governance; keeps up on the latest recommendations and ideas emanating from the Association of Governing Boards and other entities; and otherwise ensures that the Board has the benefit of the best and most current counsel on governance issues. As part of a broader Board development program, the Board Relations Office has instituted an end-of-year survey of trustees

regarding their Board service. The vast majority of the trustees who responded to the [two most](#) recent surveys expressed a belief that they possessed a clear understanding of the College's Mission, current Strategic Plan, curriculum, co-curricular programs, student support services, and financial standing, as well as of their own obligations and responsibilities as trustees.

To support the necessary level of preparedness and engagement among trustees, the president's office issues a monthly written report to the Board, the Strategic Marketing and Communications Office shares campus announcements of note with the Board, the Board Relations Office works to connect trustees to different facets of campus life, and the trustees receive the weekly student newspaper. Prospective trustees are informed about the expectations of Board service when they are recruited, and new trustees are required to attend a board orientation at which their responsibilities are explained to them. The Board's Governance Committee is tasked with assessing the performance of individual trustees and has been willing to move trustees off the Board who have consistently underperformed in terms of meeting attendance, philanthropic commitments, and overall engagement.

To ensure that student and faculty voices are heard in the Board's deliberations, the Board's membership includes non-voting [faculty](#) and [student](#) representatives, who serve, respectively, on the Board's Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Committees and deliver end-of-year reports at the final Board meeting of the academic year.

## **Faculty Senate**

The Faculty Senate was created in 2011. In Spring 2011, the full-time faculty voted on and approved the Bylaws; the Board of Trustees approved the Bylaws in October of 2012. The most recent version of the [Bylaws](#) were approved in 2016.

The Faculty Senate replaced Columbia's College Council. The Council (per its [Bylaws](#)) was "the principal governance advisory organization representing the Columbia College community. It makes recommendations to the College President on a broad range of policy issues concerning College matters, with the expectation of a timely response. The Council operates on principles of shared governance, effective representation of all constituencies, openness and transparency of its structure and operations, mutual trust, and efficiency. The Council is responsible for disseminating information and provides opportunities for dialogue on significant issues in the college." A major difference between the College Council and the Faculty Senate was that the College Council included full-time staff as voting members.

Per the Preamble to its Bylaws, the Faculty Senate "embodies the principles of shared governance and is driven by the collective will, expertise, and creative energy of its full-time faculty. The Senate empowers the faculty to provide authoritative communication and collaboration with the president of the College, chief academic officers, and others regarding policies and practices pertaining to academic excellence, creative and scholarly endeavors, and professional responsibility and conditions of employment.

Membership for the Senate is drawn each of the academic departments and at-large membership from each of the three schools, for a total of 37. A senator's term is two years.

There are four standing committees. The Executive Committee consists of Senate leadership (President, Vice-President, Secretary, Parliamentarian, and two at-large members). The Executive Committee sets the Senate agenda, manages Senate business, communicates with constituencies, and oversees the adoption and implementation of Senate decisions. The [Annual Report of the Executive Committee for 2016-17](#) illustrates the work and purview of this body.

The Academic Affairs Committee consists of twelve voting members and considers "teaching and learning-related concerns" at the College. It sets academic policies and reviews new curriculum. The bylaws identify non-voting members of this Committee, including representatives from Academic Advising, Student Financial Services, the Registrar, Enrollment Management, and Student Government. The [Annual Report of the Academic Affairs Committee for 2016-17](#) illustrates the work and purview of this body.

The Faculty Affairs Committee "considers matters that impact the workplace conditions for the faculty," at the College, including compensation, workload, and benefits. The [Annual Report of the Faculty Affairs Committee for 2016-17](#) illustrates the work and purview of this body.

The Financial Affairs Committee "collaborates with the administration on fiscal matters that impact teaching/learning and faculty affairs," including budgeting processes. The [Annual Report of the Financial Affairs Committee for 2016-17](#) illustrates the work and purview of this body.

Sample agendas from Senate meetings ([October 2017](#), [November 2017](#), and [December 2017](#)) illustrate the work and operations of the Senate.

Recent notable achievements of the Senate include the creation and approval of the Curriculum Policy Manual, a revision of the College's Sabbatical Policy, and the deliberations surrounding the elimination of two academic programs and their tenured faculty (a landmark process at the College).

#### *Curriculum Policy Manual*

The [Curriculum Policy Manual \(CPM\)](#) articulates the entire scope of curriculum at the College: it describes the development and oversight and approval of new curriculum (courses, programs), changes to existing curriculum (courses, programs), and their attendant deadlines (all synched with the College Catalog). It also defines the roles of faculty, department chairs, deans, the registrar, and the provost; and it identifies the committees tasked with curricular review: Department Curriculum Committees, School Curriculum Committees, the Academic Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate, and the Graduate Council. It also provides definitions of the degree programs (BA, BFA, BS, BMus, Masters) and provides credit parameters for each of these degrees. It should be noted that all of these definitions, processes, and requirements existed prior to the development and approval of the CPM, this manual represents the comprehensive accumulation of this information in a single document.

#### *Sabbaticals*

The Faculty Senate also approved a fairly substantial revision for [faculty sabbaticals](#) – providing much needed clarity on the process and reaffirming the College's support for eligible faculty. While the actual process had been disseminated (and stored in the College's intranet as an individual document), it was not incorporated into the Faculty Manual. It is now. In addition, in the former process, the individual faculty member was required to individually keep track of eligibility and timetable. Now, the College keeps track in the Interfolio faculty database. In addition, the College notifies the faculty member when s/he is eligible. Under the former process, a faculty member was able to defer a sabbatical for up to two years and, if done, the time between sabbaticals was not changed; so it was conceivable that a faculty member could have two sabbaticals in a four-year period. The application process has also been substantially changed. In the former process, the faculty proposal went first to the chair, then to the dean, then to the Sabbatical Committee, and then to the Provost. Now, the proposal goes to chair, dean, and committee concurrently. Each of these evaluates the strength of the proposal based on explicit [criteria in a rubric](#). The provost can then make the final decision based on these evaluations. Finally, the College committed itself to financially supporting

sabbaticals. Every year, a fixed dollar amount has been identified to support up to 10% of eligible faculty (based on a count in the 2017-18 AY).

### **President's Cabinet**

The President's Cabinet, as currently constituted, consists of the President; seven vice presidents (academic affairs, business and finance, development and alumni relations, enrollment management, legal affairs, strategic marketing and communications, student affairs); the Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (currently vacant); the President's Chief of Staff; and the Special Assistant to the President for Strategic Initiatives. While it has no formal role in the college's governance system, the Cabinet provides coordinated senior administrative oversight of institutional and programmatic initiatives that are in development or under review. It meets on a biweekly basis.

### **Student Government Association**

The Student Government Association (SGA) consists of 29 members: sixteen undergraduate Academic Senators (one for each of Columbia's sixteen current academic departments), ten undergraduate Non-Academic Senators who represent different student constituencies (first-year, transfer, commuter, international, etc.), and three graduate Academic Senators. The five-member Executive Board is elected from within the SGA membership. As part of its work on behalf of students, it approves the annual student activity fee and student health fee. It receives a formal briefing from the CFO following the Board's approval of the following year's tuition and fee schedule, and the President, Vice President for Student Affairs, and other college officers occasionally use it as a sounding board on issues that affect students.

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## 5.C - Core Component 5.C

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The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning.

1. The institution allocates its resources in alignment with its mission and priorities.
2. The institution links its processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting.
3. The planning process encompasses the institution as a whole and considers the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups.
4. The institution plans on the basis of a sound understanding of its current capacity. Institutional plans anticipate the possible impact of fluctuations in the institution's sources of revenue, such as enrollment, the economy, and state support.
5. Institutional planning anticipates emerging factors, such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization.

## Argument

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### Strategic and institutional planning

Columbia has engaged in three rounds of institutional planning since its last reaccreditation review in 2009, all of them in the wake of the enrollment decline that began during the Great Recession. Confronted by this disorienting development at a school that had known nothing but growth for nearly two decades, the senior administration struggled to grasp its underlying causes and to formulate an appropriate response. Its first attempt at the latter took the form of a five-year strategic plan, [Focus 2016](#), that the Board of Trustees approved in December 2010. That effort was overseen by three corporate entities with some overlapping membership: a Trustee Planning Committee, a Cabinet Planning Group that included the president's cabinet officers and deans, and a 39-member President's Planning Council with representatives from all major institutional constituencies. The last of these was a hand-picked group, so its reach into the wider college community was not as extensive as it might have been.

Immediately following the Board's approval of *Focus 2016*, the college launched a budgetary right-sizing initiative that was intended to align resources with the plan's priorities. It adhered to the Prioritization template developed by Robert Dickeson and his colleagues at the firm of Academic Strategy Partners, whom the college retained as outside consultants. In contrast to the 2010 strategic plan, Prioritization involved the wider campus community: all academic and non-academic units completed program assessments that were reviewed by the appropriate dean(s) or director(s), who in turn submitted recommendations on future levels of program investment to two steering committees, one for academic affairs and the other for support and operations, which in turn synthesized those recommendations into reports that were submitted to President Warrick Carter.

The breadth of stakeholder consultation and review, however, could not overcome the contentious internal politics of the Prioritization project. Inward-looking and hampered by inadequate data provision and information-sharing, it was perceived within the wider college community as a harsh zero-sum exercise to reallocate limited resources. As a result, the process spawned campus protests and confrontations that inflicted considerable short-term damage on the college's reputation and public image in the Chicago metropolitan area. Although Dr. Carter submitted a final report on Prioritization – which he called [Focus 2016: Blueprint for Action](#) and framed as a set of strategies for

implementing the strategic plan – for Board approval, the Board [finessed a response](#) to the document that stopped short of a formal endorsement but allowed the college to move forward with some of its recommendations. In particular, many of the recommendations contained in the [Academic Review Team's report](#) – a commitment to the facilitation of student persistence to graduation as the organizing principle of the institution's common work, a tightening of admissions standards, the development of clearer curricular pathways to graduation, the creation of an Integrated First-Year Experience program for new students, and greater investments in academic support services – laid down a marker for the college's future strategic direction.

Following Dr. Carter's retirement in June 2013, the new administration of President Kwang-Wu Kim, sensing a need for a fresh start after the turmoil of Prioritization, quietly withdrew *Focus 2016: Blueprint for Action* in November 2013 and launched a new strategic planning process in the 2014-15 academic year. It incorporated two waves of feedback from the college community that was solicited at college-wide public forums, in meetings with standing bodies in the college's governance system, and on the Civic Commons, a social media platform. The first stage of feedback collection informed the preparation of reports by six subcommittees of the strategic planning steering committee that incorporated recommended objectives, action items, timetables, and deliverables for their respective strategic areas. The second stage followed the release of the first draft of the plan and shaped the revisions that made their way into the final document, [Achieving our Greatness: A Strategic Plan for Columbia College Chicago, 2015-2020](#), which the Board of Trustees approved in May 2015.

### **Aligning resources with goals**

The Provost's office tracks progress on the implementation of the 2015 strategic plan and prepares annual status reports that are shared with the faculty and the Board of Trustees. The Institutional Effectiveness office has also developed and uploaded a series of key performance indicators related to the plan's implementation.

The Board's approval of the 2015 strategic plan occurred in the middle of the FY16 budget-building cycle, which made it difficult for the college to designate funding for strategic initiatives in the FY16 operating budget. Beginning with the FY17 budget, however, it has reserved operating and capital funding for such initiatives, even as it has reduced other operating budgets to align expenditures with declining net student-based revenues:

- [FY17](#): \$6.6 million operating, \$2.5 million capital, \$9.1 million total
- [FY18](#): \$6.4 million operating, \$1.2 million capital, \$7.6 million total

These funds do not include expenditures on the new student center, the construction of which is identified in the plan as an [action item](#) that supports Goal 1: Student Success.

The narrative for Core Component 5.A discusses the ways in which the academic affairs component and the office for budget, planning, and analysis are using the new budget-building process to press academic departments with negative operating margins to review and reduce their structural costs, develop strategies for increasing their appeal to prospective students, and improve their track record in facilitating student persistence to graduation.

### **Enrollment management plan**

As the college confronts nine years of declining enrollment since fall 2008, its strategic student recruitment challenge has become clear. It has let go of a portion of its former student market - much of it poorly prepared academically and/or priced out of the private four-year college market - but has

yet to gain traction with a different student cohort that has an affinity for its academic programs and is better able to persist to graduation. Building an established reputation within the prospective student market that it seeks to attract and continuing to boost student persistence indicators are longer-term objectives that will take time to achieve. The college has also learned, through trial and experience, that financial aid is comparatively ineffective as a tactical tool for leveraging enrollment growth (as opposed to supporting student persistence) because of the low price sensitivity of its applicant pool - that is to say, Columbia cannot 'close the deal' with large segments of its admitted student pool without enormous and financially unsustainable institutional grant outlays.

In July 2017, the college took possession of a multi-year financial forecasting and budget modeling tool to facilitate sophisticated scenario planning and financial analysis. One of its first applications was in the development of a five-year enrollment management plan, approved by the Board of Trustees in June 2018, that is intended to address the above challenge. The plan is predicated on growing the applicant pool among the kind of creatively-inclined prospective students who have shown a propensity for enrolling at Columbia and a capacity for persisting to graduation, and developing new strategies to attract, support, and retain them. It calls for the expenditure of \$27 million from the reserves over five years – not counting increases in tuition discounting (net of offsets from new student enrollment growth and improved retention of those cohorts) – to:

- Enhance admissions marketing and communications efforts in an effort to grow the applicant pool, which has been flat for the past five years. Building the 'top of the funnel' – i.e., the number of completed applications – is the linchpin on which the success of the plan will depend. It will also support the college's efforts to take fewer admissions risks with academically marginal applicants; selectivity is projected to increase incrementally over the course of the plan.
- Strengthen ongoing efforts to build a student recruitment operation that can successfully execute its chosen strategies in a competitive marketplace. To oversee these efforts, the college has hired its first Cabinet-level vice president of enrollment management, as well as a new associate vice provost for transfer initiatives and academic partnerships to facilitate the rebuilding of transfer admissions through an expansion of articulation agreements, guaranteed admission initiatives, and dual-degree agreements.
- Target student financial aid to reduce unmet need among those segments of the prospective student population that would seem to offer a competitive recruitment opportunity for the college. Again, any changes in student-based revenues due to increased tuition discounting (net of offsets from new student enrollment growth and improved retention of those cohorts) are not accounted for in the \$27 million.
- Improve and expand programs and services (the career center, student wellness office, etc.) that support student persistence to graduation. In part, this is intended to strengthen the sense of community on campus, which some student surveys have described as an area of comparative weakness for the college.
- Make selected investments – in particular, department chair and faculty hires – in academic departments that can accommodate enrollment growth, already demonstrate strong student persistence outcomes, and/or might be positioned to adopt innovative curricular revisions with new leadership. Academic advising will receive increased support as well.

There are of course short-term costs and risks associated with the plan, although its impact on those variables that can be modeled with some degree of confidence has been carefully evaluated. It is

projected to rebuild enrollment and restore net revenue growth more quickly relative to a projected baseline budget that perpetuates the *status quo* of the past decade. In essence, the plan requires the college to incur front-end costs in order to strengthen its ability to successfully establish and defend a clearly-defined niche in the higher education marketplace, thereby completing its transition from an institution with an access mission to one that puts the facilitation of student success at the heart of its common work.

### **Capital resource planning**

The current process for building capital budgets is less fully developed than the one for operating budgets, although here too change is underway. The existing model has given considerable latitude to the associate vice president for facilities and operations, who proposes and costs out an annual project list for review by the CFO and approval by the Board as part of the annual budget presentation. The CFO's goal is to create a more structured process that draws on a wider range of institutional perspectives and supports the institution's mission and current priorities more explicitly. As a first step, a campus-wide space planning committee, with subcommittees for academic, administrative/common, commercial, and student spaces, was established in fall 2017 to assess, propose, and review possible campus improvements and upgrades. The idea is to connect its work to the five-year enrollment management plan (see above) by identifying commonalities between the committee's proposals and any program improvement recommendations developed in accordance with the plan. The CFO has charged the office of the Associate Vice President for Facilities and Construction with taking the lead on this initiative with a view to incorporating the first set of project recommendations in the FY20 capital budget.

One area where the college is working to extend its capacity to align planning within a unit with institutional priorities is the management of its physical plant. The narrative for Core Component 5.A outlines the situation in which the college now finds itself, with a collection of buildings acquired opportunistically over several decades, some of which it has shed recently in a targeted rationalization that has freed up funds for the construction of a new student center and the renovation of the Getz Theatre. During the 2014-15 academic year, the college retained the architectural firm of Solomon Cordwell Buenz to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of all of the college's buildings. The SCB report ([Part I](#), [Part II](#), [Part III](#), [Part IV](#)) examined each college-owned property in depth, including deferred maintenance needs and an infrastructural systems assessment. The office of the Associate Vice President for Facilities and Construction is developing a five- to ten-year plan to address the [\\$60 million backlog of deferred maintenance](#) across the campus; this will presumably provide additional clarity regarding which buildings would be cost-effective to refresh and upgrade and which would not. The next step after that will be the development of a campus master plan, which is scheduled to occur in FY19.

The narrative for Core Component 5.A discusses the Information Technology unit's development of a [three-year plan](#), covering FY16-FY18, with priorities that were aligned with the college's five-year strategic plan.

### **Columbia Online**

The 2015 strategic plan calls for the college to [create new mission-compatible online and hybrid/low-residency programs for master's-degree-seeking and non-degree-seeking students](#) as a way of growing and diversifying its enrollment. To oversee its move into online learning, the college in 2016 created a separate Columbia Online unit under the leadership of a Vice Provost for Digital Learning who currently reports to the President. At present, Columbia Online is focused on the development of non-degree continuing education programs. It is offering [fifteen courses](#) and [five certificate programs](#) in

the fall 2018 semester, and is also partnering with creative companies to design customized skill development and professional development programs for their employees.

The unit has developed [a multi-year SWOT analysis](#) and budget projection to guide its operations over the next few years. As one might expect of a start-up unit, it currently runs operating deficits but expects to break into the black.

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## 5.D - Core Component 5.D

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The institution works systematically to improve its performance.

1. The institution develops and documents evidence of performance in its operations.
2. The institution learns from its operational experience and applies that learning to improve its institutional effectiveness, capabilities, and sustainability, overall and in its component parts.

### Argument

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#### Office of Institutional Effectiveness

Columbia has a (very able) Institutional Effectiveness office consisting (at the time of submission) of a Director who reports to the Vice President for Business and Finance and oversees four full-time researchers and analysts. Like most such offices, it collects, analyzes, and shares institutional and external data to support informed decision-making across the institution, particularly as regards enrollment management, student persistence, budgeting and planning, and student learning. It prepares or coordinates the preparation of internal and external reporting (mandated federal and state compliance reports, institutional and nationally-normed surveys, etc.), and manages the institutional data warehouse that serves as the college's database of record. Many of its reports, such as the annual [Factbook](#), strategic plan [status updates](#), and précis of selected [internal](#) and [external](#) survey findings, are available on its website, as is an [interactive database](#) that allows users to drill down into historical enrollment and student persistence statistics. [Admissions and registration status reports](#) are available on the college's intranet site.

Like many colleges, Columbia can have difficulty seeing itself clearly, letting go of outdated ways of thinking about itself, and making decisions on the basis of substantive rather than impressionistic or anecdotal evidence. Nonetheless, many of its operating units have demonstrated a capacity for closing the research 'feedback loop' by acting on evidential findings in a way that supports institutional improvement.

#### Enrollment management

##### *Admissions operations*

It took a few years for the senior administration to recognize that Columbia's post-2008 enrollment decline stemmed less from sector-wide woes and more from the collapse of the private student loan market that had sustained the college's business model and floated much of its enrollment growth in the 2000s. This dawning awareness necessitated a comprehensive reconsideration of the college's admissions and financial aid strategies, policies, and operations, of which the abandonment of open admissions was only one component. Navigating this changing student recruitment landscape would have taxed any enrollment management operation, never mind one making a transition from a unit that served an open admission institution to one engaged in building a class from inquiry to matriculation, and inevitably there were missteps along the way. However, the institution has demonstrated a capacity to learn from and correct its errors, even if broader strategic success in student recruitment remains elusive.

From an enrollment standpoint, Columbia had ceased to be primarily a commuter school once it

began to recruit suburban Chicago and out-of-state students in the mid-2000s after building a new residence hall, the University Center, as part of a consortium of area higher education institutions. As the Great Recession put its traditional lower-income student cohort under severe financial stress, the college sought to expand its efforts to recruit a student cohort that was better prepared to persist to graduation. It took time, however, for the Enrollment Management office to fully re-engineer its working methods to support an aggressive push into new admissions markets. In the fall of 2015, it for the first time adopted a conventional admissions staffing structure, with full-time recruiters assigned to geographic territories, given performance targets, and trained to market the college and its programs to students who did not know it well. In the fall of 2017, the recruiters' training was expanded to encompass high-level communication about the college's financial aid policies and practices. Separately, as part of the upgrade of the college's IT infrastructure discussed in the narrative for Core Component 5.A, the college in fall 2017 replaced a CRM system that had long hobbled admissions operations, data collection, and data analysis with a new, more functional system.

As the 2018-19 new student recruitment cycle begins, the college has a new Enrollment Management leadership team in place and a new five-year enrollment plan to execute (see the narrative for Core Component 5.C). It understands the tactical and operational challenges involved in gaining traction in the prospective student market in which it seeks to compete. The numbers indicate the areas of difficulty and opportunity:

- The enrollment management office has not yet been able to devise and execute a successful strategy for growing the top of the admissions funnel beyond a certain level. As of fall 2017, [freshman applications](#) had been flat for five years, and [transfer applications](#) for three.
- The [yield rate](#) on freshman and transfer acceptances fell sharply from fall 2010 to fall 2017, and the [melt rate](#), i.e. the percentage of accepted students who pay a confirmation deposit but withdraw before matriculating, remains comparatively high. Both trends are markers of an applicant pool with a significant composition of lower-affinity prospective students, i.e. lower-income students concerned about cost, higher-ability students who regard Columbia as a back-up school, and students whose behavior during the recruitment process - for example, non-FAFSA filers - suggests that they lack a serious interest in the college.
- The academic preparation of incoming first-time, full-time students, as measured by standard indicators such as [mean ACT composite score](#) and [mean high school GPA](#), improved significantly from fall 2008 to fall 2017.
- The [geographic](#) and [socioeconomic](#) diversity of the student body has held up during the years of enrollment decline, although in terms of raw numbers Columbia has lost ground in undergraduate enrollment in every broad geographic category that it measures since the fall 2008 peak, with the exception of international students.

### ***Student financial assistance***

The collapse of the private student loan market in the Great Recession led the college to try to fill the resulting gap in students' financial aid packages with institutional grant funds. For an institution that had engaged in only minimal tuition discounting before 2008, it had considerable ground to make up when it came to developing an effective aid leveraging strategy, but after some false starts, the Institutional Effectiveness office has developed a sophisticated iterative model to allocate student financial aid. Like many colleges, Columbia awards most institutional aid on a two-dimensional financial need-academic ability matrix, determining award levels in particular need-ability cells based on a rigorous analysis and price sensitivity modeling of how effectively the expended aid enables the

college to enroll students who persist to graduation. To determine price response, the yield model isolates the impact of financial aid while controlling for dozens of other factors that impact the probability of a student matriculating or being retained at the college. The model and the price response award targets for each cell in the matrix are evaluated and refined annually, and adjusted if necessary to support specific recruitment objectives.

The Student Financial Assistance (SFS) office has also reallocated some aid resources to provide targeted grants to current students to support persistence and completion. The [Degree Completion Assistance Grant](#), first offered in the 2016-17 academic year, provides need-based supplementary tuition grants to juniors and seniors who are approaching graduation and who can demonstrate that assistance from the grant will help them to take the final steps to degree completion. The [Student Success Award](#), first awarded in fall 2017, targets current students with a financial hold that is preventing next-semester registration who could get their balance down to a set level and create a manageable payment plan to cover the remainder with the help of a one-time grant. [Spending on these programs](#) totaled \$236,734 in the 2016-17 AY and \$268,435 in the 2017-18 AY, and the initial persistence outcomes are positive. Of the 41 students who received the Degree Completion Assistance Grant in 2016-17, 31 (76%) have graduated and six remain enrolled and on track to do so. All of the Student Success Award recipients were retained in the spring semester after receiving the award.

From an operational standpoint, SFS has made efforts in recent years to strengthen policies and guidelines for staff who work with students to improve overall service and financial aid management:

- Standardized, automated payment plans were instituted in fall 2015. (Prior to that time, students made the installment payments that they said they could afford, an honor system that was rarely honored and poorly enforced.) SFS monitors payment plan compliance and can reach out to students who fall behind. In April 2018, the payment platform was integrated with the student information system, which allows for the automatic calculation of payment installments (students previously had to complete a worksheet by hand), enables students to choose a convenient recurring date for monthly payments, facilitates the monitoring of student accounts, and has reduced the time frame for lifting a financial hold on a student account from two days to 10-15 minutes.
- In early 2016, SFS replaced its paper aid award processing forms with online DocuSign forms, a more convenient solution for families and for the office.
- The SFS website has been redesigned with the assistance of the Strategic Marketing and Communication (SMC) office to reduce the level of unnecessary detail and reorganize the available information. It went live in February 2018. SMC has also provided a liaison to SFS to assist with highly technical financial aid writing.
- In March 2018, SFS replaced its call and chat management vendor of fourteen years' standing after a documented two-year decline in the quality of its services. The new vendor uses financial aid professionals to field student and family inquiries, thereby providing a much higher level of responsiveness.
- In the past, a student with an outstanding balance who left the college was passed to an outside billing service before being referred to a collector. SFS has now taken that first step in-house, which allows them to consult with students on their specific circumstances and the steps that might be taken to bring their balance down.

## **Marketing and communications**

Another area in which the college has had to find a new footing in the post-2008 landscape was in its institutional marketing and communications efforts. These became especially pressing in the wake of the contentious Prioritization initiative of 2011-12, which generated significant and negative media coverage in the Chicago metropolitan area; the abandonment of open admissions, which forced Columbia to redefine itself in the public mind; and the ongoing evolution of the college's core prospective student market, which necessitated the development of a strategy to build a new and positive image among those students and their families. As with many of its operating units, Columbia has struggled with a legacy of a decentralized institutional communications structure and the resulting lack of message coordination. Significant progress has been made on this front since 2015-16, when a new Strategic Marketing and Communications (SM&C) leadership team brought all institutional marketing efforts under one roof and developed a new [college branding program](#) that standardized the messaging and visual look of those efforts. More recently, SM&C has reoriented its work around aggressively pushing stories about the college and the successes of its alumni, faculty, and students into the media marketplace. The Enrollment Management office has retained a vendor to assist with the development of a targeted admissions marketing campaign in support of the new five-year enrollment plan (see the narrative for Core Component 5.C); these efforts will be closely coordinated with the college's overall communications program.

## **Information technology**

As noted in the narrative for Core Component 5.A, and in support of Goals [1](#) and [6](#) of the 2015 strategic plan, the college recently implemented most of the recommendations in a three-year [IT strategic plan](#) that was designed to strengthen its information technology infrastructure and address an area of persistent operational weakness. Between FY16 and FY18, it:

- Installed a physical 20GB fiber ring that connects all campus buildings, replaced all network switches, and doubled the number of wireless access points across campus;
- Relocated the college's file server, data storage, and IT backup and recovery infrastructure to an off-campus, vendor-managed data center, with additional remote-site backup for the most critical functions;
- Adopted or reinstalled several software platforms, including its Constituent Relationship Management system, Student Information System, and Learning Management System;
- Migrated its email, file sharing, and associated storage systems to the Cloud; and
- Adopted a Cloud-based planning and budgeting solution, developed an in-house institutional data warehouse to support budget reporting and business transactions reviews, and acquired a multi-year financial forecasting and budget modeling tool that has been integrated with existing internal planning and forecasting models.

## **Student services and support**

### ***Advising***

As discussed in greater detail in the narrative for Core Component 3.D, the college changed its student advising model beginning with the fall 2016 semester, hiring professional advisors to oversee day-to-day advising and shifting faculty, whose facility with such advising could be inconsistent, into

a mentoring role. The change allowed the college to reduce the average advisor's student caseload to 400, a figure closer to national best-practice guidelines. At the same time, the college adopted SSC-Campus, a software tool developed by the Student Success Collaborative that uses the college's historical data to identify markers of student performance and behavior – for example, low grades in a particular course, class absence patterns, or missed student housing or financial aid deadlines – that may indicate a student's academic difficulty or disengagement from campus life. The SSC system also allows advisors to assess a student's progress towards degree completion and issue targeted communications prompting students to meet deadlines or take other timely action steps.

### ***Career Center***

As discussed in greater detail in the narrative for Core Component 3.E, beginning in the fall 2016 semester the college consolidated its career advising, student 'body of work' development, industry professional mentoring, student internship, and student employment resources under one roof, pulling them out of the academic departments where they had long resided and improving the consistency and equity of the services provided to students.

### ***Degree evaluation function***

The narrative for Core Component 2.A addresses the 2016 merger of the existing Records and Degree Evaluation offices into a unitary registrar's office based in academic affairs. (The two specialist functions now exist under the one roof, with some cross-training between them.) The merger stemmed in large measure from concerns that Degree Evaluation's existing business practices were hampering student persistence to graduation. For example, a student had to apply to graduate before Degree Evaluation would conduct a degree audit, and if the audit indicated that the student had not or would not fulfill all degree requirements based on current course schedules, Degree Evaluation would send the student a letter stating 'You are not eligible to graduate' and close the student's file. This passive approach placed unnecessary obstacles in the path of students who might otherwise have been positioned to graduate.

The new registrar's office, in contrast, was launched with the idea that it would take a more active approach to managing the degree audit process. It now runs regular reports on students' standing to establish which ones are close to graduation based on total hours, identifies those among them who have and have not applied to graduate, and processes their degree audits to determine whether they are also primed to fulfill their program and distribution requirements. It then reaches out to individual students and their academic advisors with targeted messages that promote completion and graduation, encouraging potentially eligible students who have not applied for graduation to do so, and alerting students who need to adjust their schedules prior to the semester add/drop deadline to remain on track to graduate. Changes to these students' academic records – grade changes, course waivers, course substitutions, etc. – automatically trigger a new degree audit and re-calculation of eligibility for graduation.

Taken together, improvements in student advising and degree audit processes have contributed to a sharp increase in the number of fourth-year students who [get across the finish line to graduation in four, five, or six years](#). The degree evaluation function should be strengthened even further when the registrar's office implements new degree auditing and transfer credit evaluation systems in 2019 and a new academic planner system in 2020. This technology will automate and streamline all of these processes and provide, respectively, students approaching graduation, transfer students, and degree-seeking students with a clearer sense of where they stand with respect to completing a degree program at Columbia and what requirements they must still fulfill to get there. Degree audits will be run in batches rather than processed individually as they are at present, freeing up staff time for more

systematic student outreach and counseling. Prospective transfer students, meanwhile, will be able to view their transfer equivalencies inside of a degree audit, thereby enabling them to better understand which of their courses will transfer to Columbia, how those credits will apply toward their degrees, how long it will take them to graduate, and what the overall cost of their Columbia education will be. The new technology will also enable academic schedulers to more accurately predict student demand for courses and better anticipate how many course sections should be offered each semester.

## **Campus Security**

Columbia has committed significant resources to the [Office of Campus Safety and Security](#) in recent years, notably with the November 2016 opening of a new Command Center in the 33 E. Congress building. This 1,547 square-foot state-of-the-art security facility, which includes an Emergency Operations Center, is the nerve center of campus safety operations. It operates 24/7 and houses video surveillance systems, emergency telephone phone lines, Chicago Police Department local zone radio monitoring, panic alarms, and intrusion alarms.

Campus Safety is overseen by the Associate Vice President of Campus Safety and Security, who reports to the Vice President of Legal Affairs and leads a professional unit of approximately 60 full- and 12 part-time personnel, most of whom are employed by a third-party security contractor, Allied Universal. Contract security officers certified by the State of Illinois staff fixed security posts and perform patrol functions; every open-access campus building is staffed by a security officer, a claim that few colleges can make. The force is not sworn, but the current AVP is a retired sworn officer who has hired other such individuals to serve as watch commanders and provide specialized expertise to the unit.

The Campus Security Team is divided into four areas of responsibility:

1. The Field Operations Director oversees the security officers and watch commanders and coordinates special event security.
2. The Investigative Security Director is responsible for accreditation, compliance (including Clery Act reporting), threat assessment, and training.
3. The Emergency Management Director oversees emergency planning, VIP protection for campus visitors, and security systems, and in collaboration with the Office of Global Education monitors and provide supports as needed to Columbia students studying abroad.
4. The Environmental Health and Safety Coordinator oversees institutional compliance with safety codes and OSHA regulations, and investigates and responds to complaints and inquiries regarding Columbia's buildings.

To remain current with college security practice and innovation, the College maintains membership in the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA). Campus Safety works closely with the Chicago Police Department and is a voting member of the CPD's First District Advisory Council (DAC) and of SCOPE (Security Council of Professional Educators), which includes representatives from area campus security departments and city and federal law enforcement agencies. Campus Security is a member of the Chicago Building and Owners and Managers Association's Emergency Preparedness Committee and participates in their meeting and exercises. As required by law, it holds an annual emergency management tabletop planning exercise with the College's Emergency Policy Group, which consists of the senior administration and directors of key operational areas, and with other institutional units as needed.

Campus Safety has also established a Student Advisory Committee to collect feedback from students about campus safety issues. In response to that feedback, in the summer of 2018 it installed a system

of 'blue light' cameras and emergency intercoms across campus. The system establishes communications and video links from the installation sites to the Command Center. If a caller activates the system, the physical blue light at the site also pulses to attract the attention of passers-by.

## Human resources

Beginning in November 2014, the college, aided by a specialist consultant, undertook a systematic review of its staff position classification system and compensation structure, both of which were out of date. Over the next eighteen months, staff position descriptions were revised and updated, staff position types were reclassified to reflect commonalities of responsibilities and skills, and staff position compensation benchmarks were aligned with those of comparable higher education institutions and other Chicago-area employers. The objective was to ensure that Columbia employees were paid competitively in comparison to their peers at similar institutions. In some instances, the job reclassification resulted in compensation adjustments for current union and non-union staff (below the AVP level) whose pay was out of line relative to comparative norms. The human resources office now reviews position compensation when vacancies in current positions occur and when new positions are created, although in certain circumstances its recommendations can be overridden.

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