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April 24, 2009

### Support-Staff Jobs Double in 20 Years, Outpacing Enrollment

*By Jeffrey Brainard, Paul Fain, and Kathryn Masterson*

Colleges have added managers and support personnel at a steady, vigorous clip over the past 20 years, new research shows, far outpacing the growth in student enrollment and instructors.

Support staff — like budget analysts, computer specialists, and loan counselors — nearly doubled from 1987 to 2007. Meanwhile, jobs for instructors increased by only about 50 percent, according to a report to be released this week by the Center for College Affordability and Productivity.

Although the report draws no direct link between growth in back-office staff and rising tuition, it does conclude that the scale of the expansion reflects unproductive spending by academe.

Enrollments also grew over this period, but the rate of growth of managers and support staff, many of whose positions did not exist 20 years ago, increased much faster. The ratio of this group to students rose by 34 percent, compared with just a 10-percent rise in the ratio of instructors to students.

The shift means that the core academic operations, teaching and research, are now a smaller piece of the pie, says Richard K. Vedder, the center's director and an economics professor at Ohio University.

"There's hardly a university in the country where it hasn't shrunk," says Mr. Vedder, who was a member of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education during the George W. Bush administration. "It's time for higher education to go on a diet."

College officials say they have added managerial and support personnel to cope with growing regulations, increasing student expectations, and new technologies on campuses. They did so in flusher times.

However, cost experts say colleges could have done more to control the growth.

"This is simply not a good trend, however justifiable the individual decisions may be," says Patrick M. Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, which was not involved in the study. It is "simply not a trend that's supportable."

Similar findings about the growth of the nonteaching work force were highlighted in recent reports by the American Association of University Professors and the Delta Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity, and Accountability. But the center's findings, combined with added research by The Chronicle to identify individual colleges, raise questions about priorities and provide fresh ammunition for critics of supercharged spending. Even before the recession, colleges were under pressure as students and parents reeled from tuition hikes, and policy makers questioned where the money went.

#### Growth in Support Staff

The center's report is based on U.S. Department of Education data reported by 2,782 colleges from 1987 to 2007. That was before the recession, which has led many colleges to freeze hiring.

Not surprisingly, many of the institutions with the largest relative numbers of back-office staff and the most growth over the last decade are universities with major hospitals. For example,



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Vanderbilt University employs 64 administrators and support staff members for every 100 full-time-equivalent students. That alone represents a 97-percent increase since 1997.

Beth Fortune, Vanderbilt's vice chancellor for media relations, says the medical center accounts for 80 percent of all university employees. Vanderbilt opened a children's hospital during the past decade while also increasing its annual sponsored research to more than \$400-million, from \$121-million.

"More physicians create the need for more support staff," Ms. Fortune says, adding that Vanderbilt is serving the growing health-care demands of the surrounding region without "drawing from our educational mission."

At another wealthy private institution, Wake Forest University, much of the staff growth on the main campus directly or indirectly serves students, says Kevin P. Cox, assistant vice president for university advancement and director of media relations. Expectations of students and parents have grown over the years, he says.

Robert A. Sevier agrees. Mr. Sevier, senior vice president for strategy at the higher-education-marketing company Stamats, says that for many students "the educational experience is increasingly a lifestyle experience."

Mr. Cox points to Wake Forest's service-learning center and intramural programs as examples of what today's students are looking for. "I believe all that contributes to community."

Wake Forest's main campus has 1,323 full-time staff and 491 full-time faculty members for about 7,000 students. "The importance of staff to supporting students and faculty is sometimes overlooked," Mr. Cox says.

#### Diversity of Jobs

According to the Center for College Affordability and Productivity, most of the increase in the back-office work force came among support personnel classified by the Education Department as "other professional staff." They include a wide diversity of positions that support the college's academic, student, and institutional operations, like lawyers, librarians, clergy, coaches, and student counselors.

Colleges added nearly 300,000 such jobs over the 20-year period, as well as about 64,000 administrators and managers, according to the center's report, "Trends in the Higher Education Labor Force: Identifying Changes in Worker Composition and Productivity."

Academic institutions actually added more instructors, about 625,000, than in the managerial and support categories combined. But most of the new faculty positions were part time. The center's finding that jobs for instructors rose by 50 percent reflects both full-time positions and part-time jobs expressed as full-time equivalents.

The ratio of managerial and support employees to students increased across all types of colleges. Two-year and for-profit colleges had lower ratios than did their four-year, nonprofit counterparts because both the former usually had no residential students for whom they needed to provide services.

The report argues that colleges could justify hiring more instructors in order to bring down average class size. But some of the administrative positions were redundant, the report says, and colleges could have constrained the growth by exploiting productivity gains made possible by information technology.

And although college officials say they have been forced to hire more administrators and support staff, some of the hiring has been discretionary, to accomplish educational goals, says Daniel L. Bennett, a labor economist at the center and author of the report. He cites, for example, diversity and foreign-study coordinators.

The report presents no data about the extent to which the growth in managerial and support jobs has helped spur the steady rise in tuition.

But labor is the biggest expense for most colleges, and more jobs mean higher spending on salaries and benefits.

#### Unknown Details

Some people who have looked at the work-force data say it is impossible to use them to draw broad cost conclusions because they don't differentiate jobs. Researchers don't know if the increase in back-office jobs represents redundant layers of bureaucracy, more staff members who

interact daily with students, or positions that produce revenue for institutions, such as fund raisers or people who work on technology transfer.

Terry W. Hartle, senior vice president for government and public affairs at the American Council on Education, disagrees with using data reported by colleges to the federal government to draw a line between instructors and the staff on a campus. "That bright line doesn't exist in reality," Mr. Hartle says. "Numerous people they've consigned to 'back office' duties have enormous amounts of interaction with students."

They also contribute to the life of the university. "You can't run a first-class or even second-class university without librarians, academic support staff, and IT-support staff," he says. "Administrators aren't just people pushing papers and cutting the grass."

Lynn University, in Boca Raton, Fla., has seen growth in both staff and students since it became a four-year institution, in 1987. The student population has more than doubled in that time, to more than 2,500 in 2007, and that growth triggered increases in the faculty and in support services.

Lynn now has five colleges, a music conservatory, and an institute that provides individual tutoring for students with learning disabilities. Its information-technology department quadrupled to about 40 people, and its development office went from one employee to about a dozen. Jobs once done outside, such as marketing and maintenance, were brought in-house.

"Did it add to costs?" asks Laurie Levine, vice president for business and finance at Lynn. "Yes, but it also added to student outcomes and student experiences."

**Raising Questions**

Jane Wellman, director of the Delta project on postsecondary costs, says the pattern of staff growth and spending on administration is not the biggest driver of college costs. Others include declines in state appropriations, which have led public colleges to raise tuition. But administrative costs do contribute, she says, and raise questions about whether colleges are moving away from their core missions of educating students.

"It's not the smoking gun," she says, but it is "something to be looked at, absolutely."

It costs a great deal of money to become a major research institution. And experts say ambition outpaced reality at many institutions.

"Once you get into the federal-grants game, you have any number of nonteaching jobs that you have to hire," says William G. Tierney, director of the University of Southern California's Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis.

The decision to ramp up research may be difficult to reverse, he says, because "it's easier to increase than decrease."

**GROWTH IN MANAGERS AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL**

**BIGGEST INCREASES** Here are some of the four-year institutions that have expanded the number of administrative and support positions the most relative to enrollment over the past decade.

Selected private colleges			
Employees, 2007	Students, 2007	Employees per 100 students, 2007	Increase in ratio, 1997-2007
Yeshiva U.	1,332	5,912	23351%
Wake Forest U.	1,833	6,694	27325%
Lynn U.	243	2,248	11141%
Johns Hopkins U.	4,556	14,735	311111%
Williams College	291	2,053	14103%
Vanderbilt U.	7,339	11,395	6497%
Colorado College	245	2,062	1294%
Simmons College	345	3,318	1088%
Washington College	150	1,218	1265%
Berry College	181	1,770	1045%
All private colleges			30%
Selected public colleges			
Employees, 2007	Students, 2007	Employees per 100 students, 2007	Increase in ratio, 1997-2007
George Mason U.	1,621	21,608	121%
U. of Kansas	2,657	24,988	1114%
U. of New Hampshire at Durham	1,506	13,620	197%
U. of Southern Mississippi	914	12,724	84%
U. of Baltimore	274	3,805	58%
U. of Louisville	2,054	17,294	1245%
New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology	368	1,472	2543%
Virginia Military Institute	143	1,378	1043%
U. of Southern Maine	656	7,752	838%
Vermont Technical College	113	1,277	932%
All public colleges			38%

**MOST EMPLOYEES PER STUDENT** These colleges were the institutions with the largest ratios of managerial and support workers to students in 2007.

Private colleges			
Employees, 2007	Students, 2007	Increase in ratio, 1997-2007	
Employees per 100 students, 2007			
Vanderbilt U.	7,339	11,395	64 97%
California Institute of Technology	1,219	2,133	57 26%
Duke U.	7,372	13,351	55 3%
U. of Rochester	3,368	8,355	40 77%
Washington U. in St Louis	4,160	11,929	35 35%
Yale U.	3,919	11,345	35 37%
Columbia U.	7,134	20,719	34 82%
Gallaudet U.	440	1,308	34 93%
Emory U.	4,040	12,040	34 62%
Johns Hopkins U.	4,556	14,735	31 111%
All private colleges			9
Public colleges			
Employees, 2007	Students, 2007	Increase in ratio, 1997-2007	
Employees per 100 students, 2007			
U. of Illinois at Chicago	5,796	23,015	25 40%
New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology	368	1,472	25 43%
U. of Alabama at Birmingham	3,265	13,146	25 -31%
U. of Washington	8,577	36,120	24 45%
U. of Michigan at Ann Arbor	7,901	39,199	20 13%
U. of Pittsburgh main campus	4,692	24,194	19 60%
U. of California at San Diego	5,064	26,466	19 37%
U. of California at Los Angeles	7,013	36,733	19 51%
Georgia Institute of Technology	3,351	17,558	19 2%
U. of Wisconsin at Madison	6,422	38,652	17 14%
All public colleges			8

**NOTES:** Employees and students were full-time equivalents. Numbers of employees were derived from the combined totals of managers/executives and other support staff members reported to the U.S. Department of Education. Figures were drawn from 550 public and 729 private, four-year colleges with enrollments of at least 1,000. Ratios and percentages are rounded.

**SOURCES:** Center for College Affordability and Productivity; *Chronicle* reporting

<http://chronicle.com> Section: Money & Management Volume 55, Issue 33, Page A1

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