

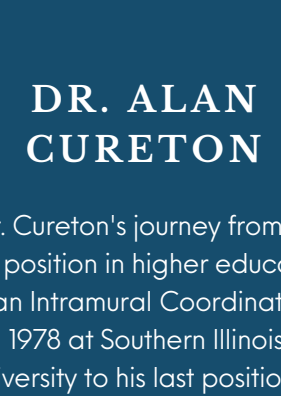


Vision, Trust, & Alignment

Leading Beyond The Enrollment Cliff
Featuring Dr. Alan Cureton & Expert Panel

Information

The information below is compiled from a 2023 webinar featuring an expert panel. Jim Allen interviewed Dr. Alan Cureton and Dr. Amy Carey on their vision for leading beyond the looming enrollment cliff, building trust, and ensuring alignment across campus.



DR. ALAN CURETON

Dr. Cureton's journey from his first position in higher education as an Intramural Coordinator in 1978 at Southern Illinois University to his last position as President of the University of Northwestern - St. Paul (2002-2022) has prepared him to be able to come alongside new and seasoned Presidents to assist them in their quest to advance their institutional mission.



DR. AMY CAREY

Dr. Carey, president of Friends University since 2015, was also the prior Vice President of Institutional Advancement for the University of Northwestern for 12 years. She is a passionate advocate for Christian higher education and is dedicated to this high calling of transforming lives through a missional and dynamic learning community.



JIM ALLEN

Jim's varied background and vision for building value (in both teams and organizations) wherever he went, uniquely positioned him to see and respond to unmet needs in Higher Education. He developed the Value(s) Based Enrollment Methodology (VBEM) for Enrollment Teams in Higher Ed, training over 35 Higher Ed institutions, of which over 30 are faith-based.

Vision

Leading Beyond The Enrollment Cliff: Is a new and/or renewed vision required? What would you tell a fellow president as they navigate the enrollment cliff they are facing?

#1

Dr. Cureton: Right now, it's incredibly important they have a clear vision for what they want the institution to pursue. But in that overall vision, there's a sub-vision, if you will, for enrollment. Most presidents have a vision, but it might be time for a renewed vision. Then, the challenge comes in communicating that enrollment vision so their campus understands how strategically important it is to our ability to survive and thrive as an institution. If my VP of Advancement buys into the vision then we're on the same team and now we can work to get the entire campus to buy in to Admissions Readiness as a culture.

Dr. Carey: Of course, we know that we are all facing many headwinds and obviously enrollment is a priority. We need more and more students to balance the budget and do the things we want to do as an institution. **Here at Friends University, we believe that enrollment is everyone's job.** At various meetings, we discuss how each person can be involved. We also include enrollment as a priority in the faculty contract so that their understanding, as they sign those contracts, is that we all need to be diligent in bringing students to the university. But it's still hard to get everyone engaged! Sometimes people don't know what to do—how to help. But I think the President setting this as a priority, making sure everyone understands that recruiting students is of utmost importance, and leading the charge from the president's office is important.

Trust

Dr. Alan, you have expressed that the focus needs to be on campus-wide Admissions-Readiness initiatives...can you tell us what you've done to address this important concept?

#2

Dr. Cureton: The one mantra we had at UNW-St. Paul —because we knew that this challenge was coming— was that "flat is the new up!" If we could just stay flat after consecutive years of growth and stay flat, we would be ahead. So, at that point, we started sharing about the coming challenges and asking what we could do to keep the enrollment at least flat. We examined adding cutting-edge programs and sports teams. We instituted a strategic, across-the-campus to evaluate these, additions to attract new students. We explained the rationale. We examined the historical trends of all the programs. **We involved everyone so they would say to themselves, "This is my responsibility. I need to be involved."**

Dr. Carey: We've added a number of programs as well and dealt with declining programs. We've added a number of sports teams and looked at different student populations we might be able to attract such as first-generation students, minority students, international students...and I think all that helps. As a campus, we need to look at all of those strategies to add to our "bucket," because we've got to fill it all the way up to the top in order to grow incrementally or even stay flat. We've been blessed with growth in the traditional student population. At the same time, we've been struggling with adult learners after COVID whom we've not been able to get back. It's like the game of whack-a-mole...you hit one down and another pops up! It's an ongoing challenge and going to continue to be in the future.

Some of our institutional leaders may not readily accept this concept of "Enrollment is everyone's responsibility." So, how would a President deal with that?

#2a

Dr. Cureton: I think that's where it becomes important that the Vice President of Enrollment and the President are seen as being in complete solidarity on this concept. I realize the VP of Enrollment is going to be the main representative but **the President is the Chief Enrollment Officer**, so he or she has to set the tone and the vision that we are talking about. Actions speak louder than words, so what is the President doing to participate in the overall effort? What we have to convey as President, and hopefully help others, is that we see this as a joint effort. Everyone can do something: write a note, make a call, send a text, etc. We should all be sharing the DNA or the ethos of our campus with prospective students.

Dr. Carey: Well, you know, I had a good teacher in Dr. Alan Cureton, when I used to oversee enrollment at UNW-St. Paul. I've adopted the same approach as President. It definitely starts at the top. I would say we don't have a lot of resistance here, at Friends University. I think part of the reason for this is that we've been very honest about what we need to do to secure a student and shared a lot of detail with our faculty and staff and over time, people have understood the vision for recruitment. However, I think the problem is that people get busy. They want to help but are so busy with activities that they just don't get around to actually doing it. **Making it simple and educating faculty and staff about all our programs so they can answer questions helps with that.**

Alignment

How can leaders build the trust that is crucial to everyone buying in to the new or renewed vision? In particular, how can leaders build trust around Admissions Readiness across the campus culture?

#3

Dr. Carey: I think trust really relates to information, down to the program level. **Being transparent about numbers and talking about them helps people buy in.** Over time, some of our programs have been discontinued after dwindling naturally. That also helps people to pitch in and say, "What can I do to prevent that from happening to my program?" We also give all our programs and sports teams enrollment goals.

Dr. Cureton: It's absolutely imperative that the people in the community are seeing the leaders actually living this. And promoting it. They say it takes 7 times before something sinks in. There's transparency in this approach. If you can convince your facilities and custodial staff then you know it's actually happening across your campus—then you know, we really are all in this together! **You have to live it, communicate it, and promote it.** When you encounter silos and resistance, the President, the Provost, and key administrators have to try to break down those silos. **And it's the President that has to drive that.**

Can you talk about the alignment between marketing and admissions and how it helps to accomplish the vision? And how it relates to Admissions Readiness, particularly in the marketing and Admissions Departments?

Dr. Cureton: In my 20 years as President, I did a variety of moves. I had marketing under the VP of Enrollment at one time, moved that under Advancement later, and later split it between enrollment and advancement. It comes down to what works best for the institution given the talent and the skills of the people in the role. There's no one-size-fits-all but rather discovering where you can maximize the synergy to make sure enrollment has marketing's focus so they can recruit well. We also have to understand that other departments want marketing—music, theater, athletics—and we do have to juggle that.

Dr. Carey: I would agree with Dr. Cureton. We have had different structures. It does depend on the expertise of those on the teams, but **I think marketing needs to always understand that enrollment is their primary customer.** Their focus needs to be on lead generation and making sure enrollment has what they need to do their jobs. That means I sometimes step in and have to reallocate funds based on our priorities and what we're focused on as an institution. That goes back to the first question of vision. What's our vision? And how are we going to allocate our resources—the people and the dollars?

We know about the misalignment between marketing and enrollment, but what are the other areas that sometimes get misaligned that leaders should beware of?

#4a

Dr. Cureton: Every institution has specific strengths. Most departments might think they are the institution's strength and if you ask outside opinions, they might give you a better understanding of that institution's strengths. **But whatever those strengths are, you need to go with them.** And there is an ebb and flow to this over time. Those strengths will get the attention and resources that other departments don't get, which will cause friction that you have to negotiate. That's the challenge, of course.

Dr. Carey: And market demand. There's just no market demand for some of these programs. We've had departments convinced that if they had the marketing resources, for example, the numbers would come. And with a few, we have experimented and tracked the results. Then we can show them the numbers just aren't there.

Why are difficult times the perfect time for Presidents and VPs of Enrollment to cast a new or renewed vision? Is it worth it?

#5

Dr. Cureton: Oh yeah! I think this is a great opportunity for institutions to really distinguish themselves. I like to say that the WHY doesn't change but the HOW does. The WHY is what is unique to our institution—what drives us and makes us stand out with our strengths as our niche. Other institutions might be just trying to survive but here's an opportunity for us to really accentuate and emphasize our niche. And if an institution doesn't have that niche or ability to stand out, they're going to struggle. It falls on the shoulders of the President to clearly communicate the mission of the institution.

Dr. Carey: I agree—I think there's going to be winners and losers as we head into this demographic cliff and as the whole "value for education" discussion is happening. A forward-looking vision is going to be necessary so that the entire team—faculty and staff—will be able to work together toward that vision. Then, as a part of that vision, there will need to be new approaches, strategies, and innovative ways of working together. We have to make sure our vision isn't "vanilla," we know our uniqueness to our purpose, our work, whom we serve, and how well we serve them.