

NASFAA's "Director Download" – Episode 4 Transcript

Justin Draeger: Hello everyone. Welcome to another edition of "Director Download." I'm Justin Draeger.

Allie Bidwell: I'm Allie Bidwell, one of our *Today's News* reporters.

Paula Luff: I'm Paula Luff from DePaul University.

Billie Hamilton: And I'm Billie Jo Hamilton from the University of South Florida.

Justin Draeger: Welcome, Paula and Billie Jo. Paula is, you're our National Chair Elect.

Paula Luff: Yes.

Justin Draeger: How's it going so far?

Paula Luff: It's a lot of fun.

Justin Draeger: Okay, and Billie Jo, you're 70 days from being the National Chair. How's the last 70 days been? Quieter than ...

Billie Hamilton: Little less stressful. A little travel withdrawal.

Justin Draeger: Yes, right.

Billie Hamilton: This was my first flight since going to Austin, so yeah it was a little weird not to get on a plane every few weeks.

Justin Draeger: Right, well we're both glad, Allie and I are glad that you're able to join us in the office. For those who don't know, Paula, you're as we said, the National Chair Elect and you're the Associate Vice President of Enrollment Services at DePaul.

Paula Luff: Yes.

Justin Draeger: And how long have you been there?

Paula Luff: Fifteen years.

Justin Draeger: And in your capacity, since we're talking today about enrollment management, tell us a little bit like what is your involvement in the enrollment management model at DePaul?

Paula Luff: Well, I report directly to our Senior Vice President for Enrollment Management and Marketing. And so I'm part of many discussions related to new program development, discounting on the freshman level, graduate level, transfer level,

new recruitment strategies that we manage. I sit on a tuition pricing committee, a strategic resource allocation committee, all kinds of committees.

Justin Draeger: So you'd say, extensively involved?

Paula Luff: Yeah I guess a lot, yeah.

Justin Draeger: Was it your boss that came to the very first track we did, when we introduced enrollment management as part of our leadership conference?

Paula Luff: Yes, he was there, I think both, the first two years.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. Very well known, nationally renowned, understands the model.

Paula Luff: And he's a really nice guy, too.

Justin Draeger: And the added benefit of a nice guy. You're not just saying that because he's your-

Paula Luff: No.

Justin Draeger: ... boss, okay. And Billie Jo, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Planning at the University of South Florida, and how long have you been in your position?

Billie Hamilton: I've been at USF for 10 years. Over 10 years.

Justin Draeger: Okay, and your involvement in enrollment management?

Billie Hamilton: Well, I supervise financial aid and the registrar's office and report to our Vice President for Student Affairs and Student Success. I manage the scholarship budget, financial aid leveraging model, work very closely with our persistence committee. We're really focused on retention and graduation, because our funding comes from meeting certain metrics, so we're pretty deep in the weeds, getting down, we talk about one student making the difference for us meeting metrics. And so, we approach a lot of our enrollment management issues with that one singular student in mind.

Justin Draeger: So, since we're doing this, you know leading up to our leadership conference and legislative expo, I think a lot of people have thought about private institutions, Paula, as sort of the traditional home for enrollment management. But, Billie Jo, you're coming from a public and so, can you talk a little bit about like that transition, like over the course of your career, how you've seen enrollment management not just be a private school model, but is now more a public school model too?

Billie Hamilton: Right. At other institutions I was at, and all of them have been public, we didn't really talk a lot about enrollment management at those places. When I got to the University of South Florida in 2008, was like the worse time to ever transition, particularly into Florida as far as funding was concerned for higher ed because the revenue were down really bad at the state level, so there was a lot of retrenchment in funds, so we joked that we're state located and partially funded.

Billie Hamilton: But as the economy picked up, and the money started coming back in they didn't use the old formula any longer. They said, "We're not gonna fund you on head count any more. The number of students you can bring in. We're gonna fund you on quality and graduating students and retaining students." So that's when we kind of started to switch and look at this very differently. Holistically, what's the institutions for lack of a better term, doing to the student after they get on campus? And what can we do to make them successful and graduate?

Justin Draeger: So you mentioned a lot of different variables in there. Paula, are those the same variables you guys are trying to balance, because you don't get the public funding side, so what is it that you're balancing in your model?

Paula Luff: Well, we're always looking at balancing our mission, but one of the things we focus on quite often is net tuition revenue, because without revenue, because we don't have other funding sources, we're a tuition driven institution, so we don't have a scholarship, a large scholarship fund. We don't have a huge endowment. Our money is really from the tuition dollars our students bring in. And so we have to manage bringing in students who can pay with students who have financial need, but that we can make it possible for them to be there. It's really, I think in the privates because they have never had funding from the state or the federal government at the extent that the state schools have. I think that's why enrollment management has flourished there. It's because you have to balance that tuition revenue with the goals of the institutions. Except for of course, those schools that can afford to have full rides for a number of students, which we are not one of those.

Justin Draeger: There's like a handful of schools, that we've talked about over and over again, yeah. So, the cynical side I think, of a lot of people that hear enrollment management, maybe in our profession, maybe outside, is that they look at enrollment management primarily as what you mentioned, Paula, which is like the bottom line. It's that net tuition that's maybe offsetting expenses for other students, and it's trying to get full payers. How would you respond to that?

Paula Luff: No, I don't see it that way. I think it's about spreading the wealth. Sharing the funds among students so that everybody can pay sort of what they can afford to pay. We're not trying to rake poor students over the coals and have them go into a huge debt just to get their education, but we do want to make sure it's possible for students who have a significant need, who have middle need, and who maybe have no need, make DePaul an attractive place for them, if it's the

right place. And we are not above saying to someone, this might not be the right place for you. Financially, this is probably not a good place for you.

Paula Luff: In fact, we do that more with out of state high need students, because they can't bring in the state grant, and it just, it's too much. They have to stay on campus and they have to get back and forth from their home state, so it gets to be a burden that they can't really manage well and that we can't fund. So, I think that's kind of where the balance is. We're not just trying to bring a student in at any cost. It does us no good to bring a student on campus at the cheapest amount possible, have them show up in our office week two of the second quarter and say, "I can't afford to be here," and then send them on their way. We don't want that, they don't want that, so that's not what we're trying to do. We're trying to make sure that they can be there and make it sustainable for four years, or a little longer if it takes them that long to graduate.

Justin Draeger: Do you face any of that sort of cynicism from people outside of enrollment management that are trying to understand it?

Billie Hamilton: Well, I think some of the financial aid staff members kind of struggle with that, and that's why I think it's important that they understand the bigger picture, and not just the dollars and the money that's coming in. I think we do, and I personally do struggle sometimes with trying to balance profile, getting the best students, still being able to meet our access goals, because one of our metrics is still access. So, while we're still trying to get these really high ability kids, we're still committed to access. So we do look, I mean that's what financial aid leveraging is, it looks to spend the least amount of money to bring in the class that you want to bring in.

Billie Hamilton: And it is sometimes a little bit of a struggle as the financial aid person. But I think it's important that the financial aid person definitely is at the table when those conversations occur because sometimes we have to be the advocates for students who may not have the highest test scores and may not have the highest GPA, but we know that they can succeed at our institution.

Allie Bidwell: So how would you say then, that enrollment management plays into access overall, because what you mentioned, Paula, about sometimes having to tell students this might not be the place for you? Do you think that in a way, depending on how you look at it, that is helping improve access for them by pointing them towards a better option?

Paula Luff: Well we do have a lot of partnerships with community colleges so there's a pathway program for them to go two years at a community college and then come to DePaul, where it's a higher cost school for the final two years. So we have explored other options to make it possible but no, I think it's important to know that each institution, that's not the only option a student has. I think sometimes we think, "Well, if they can't come to our school, we're denying them access to education," and that's just not true.

Justin Draeger: There are other options.

Paula Luff: there are other options.

Justin Draeger: Do you know colleagues that work at universities or schools where they might not have the freedom to turn students to other options? And the friction, what advice would you have for those types of folks that are at those schools?

Billie Hamilton: Well, I think for us, I think you see those in the retention statistics, right? Kids come, they may stay a semester, and do the same thing as Paula talked about, particularly for access students from out of state. In Florida, out of state is relatively cheap, but still, if they only have a Pell Grant and like you said, they're not getting state aid, they're not gonna come back. They may be able to make one semester, their family may be able to make two semesters, but they're not coming back. So it's not good for the institution to do that either.

Billie Hamilton: So we also have, we have what we call a diffuse program, and it with our local community colleges, and that's mainly students that don't meet our initial admissions criteria, and are typically a little bit lower income students. But it provides a much more cost effective approach for them to get into university, and it gives them an academic pathway. We map out the academics. They have to take certain classes, and then they're guaranteed admission to our institution. We're just now kind of starting to get some of those students in, but we're seeing they're using less of their Pell Grant by the time they get to us. They're borrowing less money, and they're better academically prepared by the time they get there.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, so you're trying to show to the school to those who are at the table at your school trying to come up with the different pricing models, how sometimes it can work against other goals at the university, if you're not providing enough support, or if the student's not gonna be successful because they're gonna run out of money within a couple weeks, and then find themselves in crisis.

Paula Luff: That's what I was going to say. I would advise someone who's in that situation, not to talk about, "We need to bring every student in," but the cost of not being able to retain those students at that level. Because that's numbers. If you're talking to people in those types of institutions that are looking at the bottom line, you have to show them the bottom line beyond the initial enter in class.

Justin Draeger: So, for financial aid folks, Billie Jo I think you mentioned this earlier, and it my conversations with people in our profession, I hear this a lot, too. I sort of get the sense there's a reluctance to fully embrace enrollment management, and on the one hand I would say, "Well, that's kind of the direction the world's going, so it's sort of like the train's gonna leave the station whether you're on it or not." And I always feel better when financial aid folks are at the table. On the other hand, I get the fact that financial aid is grounded in these principles that go back decades in the primacy of need based aid. But if you don't have aid at

your institution to give, there's all these other litany of issues that pop up. So what do you tell people? What do you tell people that are struggling at a school where they're in financial aid, they're upbringing career wise is in financial aid, but they are confronting now an enrollment management model. Like how do they adjust?

Billie Hamilton: You mean, psychologically, how do they adjust to this new model of-

Justin Draeger: Yeah, well let me-

Billie Hamilton: Well we're talking to students differently.

Justin Draeger: Let me back up and ask, do you agree? Do you agree with my assessment? Do you get the sense there's this friction between our profession and ...

Billie Hamilton: Yes I do. I believe there's some purists that are in there, and they definitely feel like this has been leaning towards an abomination of what it is that we do as a profession. But I think, I know for me personally, I try to make sure that I'm speaking for those that aren't at the table and can't speak for them, and I try to push policies that assure that a qualified student who does not have financial resources has the ability to come, and the way we do that, is to have certain policies that don't overload some students with more money than perhaps they need or they don't need financially, so that we can make sure that we provide those to students who don't have access.

Billie Hamilton: And again, those, it all becomes about money, right? Dollars and cents and headcount, and that kind of thing. But I do think when your institutional funding is dependent on that, I mean you're kind of forced to move in that direction. I would like to say that even if the funding wasn't there, that we would do the right thing, and I think we would. But this certainly makes it more of an imperative for us to behave like that.

Justin Draeger: That almost sounds like a case for performance based funding.

Billie Hamilton: That's what it is, yeah. Performance based funding. Yeah. And we're competing with all of our other state's institutions for those dollars.

Justin Draeger: Well, so there's another philosophical question there, that maybe we don't get into in this podcast, which is, if you see that as a good thing? It's effectuating certain outcomes at a school that they might not otherwise focus on.

Billie Hamilton: Well, I think it's putting us, we are now targeting resources, not just financial aid resources but other institutional resources in order to provide services that will help students be successful.

Justin Draeger: Because the funding will follow success?

Billie Hamilton: The funding follows it, right.

Justin Draeger: All right, Paula, do you agree with my assessment about this friction in our profession between, Billie Jo called them the purists versus maybe the realists, that there is the day to day business of making sure a university is funded?

Paula Luff: Oh yeah, I see it in my colleagues, some of my colleagues. And some of them have moved into enrollment management. People who I thought were hard core purists and are now sort of coming to the dark side you might say, and I think it's about exposure and opening your mind to the other parts of what's happening in an institution. At least at DePaul, I feel like the people there are all there for the students. We have to talk about the bottom line, because we can't have our doors open if we don't talk about the bottom line. But, really one of the few places I've been at, and this is like my sixth institution, even though I've been there 15 years, people who walk the walk, they really care about students, and sometimes somebody has to have that hard conversation.

Paula Luff: But I agree with Billie Jo and what you said as well. If you're not at the table, you can't even bring forth those issues. So, being too close minded or too much of a purist where, "Oh, if we don't just meet need for everyone, then we're not meeting our mission." That just automatically just says, "Well, we don't need this person in the conversation." And we don't want that to happen.

Justin Draeger: Right, you wanna be able to influence, even if your focus, which I applaud, is the primacy of need based aid. If you can't see the bigger picture of the university, you get locked out. Yeah. So let's say we've got an aid professional who maybe has or is going to come to our leadership conference. Maybe they're in enrollment management, maybe they're in advanced topics for strategic leadership. Both of those tracks will be offered at our upcoming conference. What should they be considering if they're gonna move into a position, or try to break into a more of a position where enrollment management is more of the topic de jour? What do they need to be doing? What do they need to be thinking about?

Billie Hamilton: Well, I think one thing that you need to do if you're gonna try to move into that, is numerically understand your operation. I think we have a tendency to just throw stuff out there and we don't actually throw stuff, dollars, out there and we don't have actually have a numeric understanding of what it is, what is that doing for our students. Because that's, in the end, that's what a lot of that boils down to.

Justin Draeger: So when you say that, are you meaning like, if I'm an aid director and I get my allocation from the university. It's understanding the metrics behind it, or understanding the impact that the dollars are having on the back end, like or both?

Billie Hamilton: Well, you're gonna have to do both.

Justin Draeger: Okay.

Billie Hamilton: Right, yeah, because or you won't get the dollars. I mean, if you're not, one of the things that we're doing right now, we've been working on it the last few weeks. We are actually looking at how the dollars we're using is affecting retention. We're trying to determine what those little levers are financially, to encourage retention. And then what kind of aid program can we set up that will encourage graduation in four years. Incentivize enrolling in more hours, like we have a Take 15 grant where if you enroll in three more hours, you get enough money to cover, that kind of thing.

Billie Hamilton: So there's, you need to kind of understand the behavior, that how people behave with money, so that you can have some better understanding of how your financial aid is influencing. If you can't advocate for what you're doing, I think you're gonna have a hard time making others come along with you.

Paula Luff: I would agree, but I also think, it was interesting what you said about the, you're gonna give them a small grant to take 15, because it's not just about the money, right? It's about behavior and it's about connecting to other parts of the academic experience to move them along. Because simply just throwing money at, I know that's not what you're saying, Billie Jo, but simply doing that without any thought and support around the other experiences that student have will not be effective. Or, if it is, it might be a fluke, or you're really under packaging so any little bit of money's going to help, but I think you have to really look at the larger experience and what that amount of money's doing to help that student retain or enroll, or move them down the path.

Billie Hamilton: Well, and for some students, particularly in their first year, it's not a good idea for them to enroll in 15 hours. So, again it's a balancing act. Is the behavior that you're trying to influence the right behavior for that student, at that point of time, in their academic career?

Justin Draeger: So, if I'm an aid director and I'm looking to get into enrollment management, what are the basic concepts you think that these folks need to have as they move in this direction? What's gonna set them up for success here?

Paula Luff: I think you need to understand the terminology and how your institution uses it, and what they're focusing on. So your institution might be focused on a discount rate. How do they define discount rate? It can be defined many different ways. How does your Board of Trustees look at that discount rate and is that something they focus on? Or are they focusing on that tuition revenue, and that tuition revenue for the whole undergraduate class, for the freshman class, for any particular population? You need to know what's important at your institution, if you want to succeed there, and then learn that terminology. Also, get to know your admissions folks. Maybe beyond just being at financial aid nights, how are they approaching their territories, their recruitments? How can you help them do their work and you can partner together, because you can learn a lot from those folks and it's a real team effort to bring a class in.

Paula Luff: And then, the thing about admissions I always have to say, is that you guys bring them in and then we have to take care of them for the next four or five years. So there's always a little tension there, too, and knowing that up front is helpful.

Billie Hamilton: I think another thing to understand is, what is recruiting, and how can you, how does the financial aid office play a role in that. Where marketing is something that if you don't have some basic understanding of what marketing means, and how you can apply it. Marketing techniques, particularly to this generation of students that's coming up. You probably need to read a book, a little bit about this generation and get some understanding on where they live, and try to meet them where they live.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, in some ways I think, it's all in perspective. So some people might look at marketing and say, "That feels icky to me," but it's really about messaging. It's about how do you get your institution's mission in front of the students that will best, that your school can best serve.

Paula Luff: I think it wouldn't be a bad idea to maybe attend an admissions conference, whether there's a state one, there's the NACAC conference. Even just if you had the opportunity to just see what they're talking about and how they're approaching recruiting students. What's top of mind for that group, that helps you connect with them, and anything you can learn. There's a number of, obviously NAFSA's Strategic Enrollment management Workshop's great. But other conferences I know are starting to offer those at your state conference, regional conference. Anything you can do to learn more from other people is not a waste of time. Surely worth your time.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. So I'm sort of hearing maybe a common theme which harkens back to one of our first episodes about management versus leadership. You could be a financial aid director, managing your office, no audit or program review findings. Everything's good. You're getting the aid dispersed, you're getting the students processed, and be doing a great job at that, and if that's sort of your passion and your love, that's fine. That's managing the office. If you want to break into leadership, you have to expand your perspective. You have to understand the admissions side. The institutional mission side. The funding side, the subsidy side. The incentive and then marketing, and it's really about getting outside yourself, that's the common theme I'm hearing.

Justin Draeger: When I look at the numbers of people that are moving into enrollment management positions, leadership positions on campus, it seems like aid administrators were disproportionately represented to the negative. Like, we were not well represented. It was mostly admissions, and maybe some folks from the business office, but really admissions. Is that, so one I guess, because you guys might not at your schools, but as you guys look out, is that what you're seeing? And how do we as a profession tackle that?

Billie Hamilton: Well I think it is, I think it does tend to be admissions people, because I think a lot of people think about enrollment management just that first time they step

in the door and they don't look more long term. And I think when you do have these metrics you're working for, you start, your scope gets bigger than just the admissions office.

Billie Hamilton: I think sometimes, financial aid people tend to do exactly what you talk about. We internalize everything and we work in our little black box area, and we're not great at communicating out and then getting out and then learning some of these other skills that might be required. And again, and I would encourage people not to just do the admissions piece. The broader student affairs, all of those kinds of, even knowing what your students, if you're doing surveys. Understanding student behavior with, if you're using Bessy or Nesity or any of those national surveys to have that understanding as well.

Paula Luff: Well, I think your institutional research department can be one of your best friends for sure. Especially if you don't have that in your office, any type of that, but yeah.

Allie Bidwell: So, one question I have is, if you see more admissions folks going into enrollment management, do you think that that puts the profession I guess of enrollment management at a disadvantage with having it sort of overloaded with people that maybe don't have the perspective of a financial aid professional?

Billie Hamilton: Probably. I mean I think that's probably where you start to see a little bit more of the friction piece if you're reporting to somebody who has tons of admission experience and maybe not a lot of financial aid experience. Then that's gonna be challenging. But I think again, financial aid people we have, we touch almost every office on campus. There's no other office on campus really that can say that, I fully believe. We know about housing, we know about admissions, we know about registration. You know, practicality of academic advising. Maybe too many things we know about, but I think we don't do well enough to toot our own horn about the skill set that we probably don't even know we've developed until we sit down and actually start maybe checking off. And look at an advertisement for an enrollment management person and you can start to check off the boxes and say, "I know how to do a lot of these things on here, but I don't really think that I'm performing as an enrollment management person." But you really are.

Paula Luff: And I think a lot of times when you have an admissions person over enrollment management, they're going to have to be trained in effect by the financial aid person, because they don't have the good understanding of financial aid, except what might be said at high school nights. So, it's better for us to maybe be in that position, for those that want to, then an admissions person.

Justin Draeger: All right, let's turn our attention, I wanna go back to some of the friction, particularly around use of institutional aid and some of the packaging policies. One of the big conversations in DC right now is around transparency in award

notifications and packaging policies. One of the reports that just came out, I guess it was in the spring, late spring, Allie?

Allie Bidwell: Earlier this summer.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, early summer.

Allie Bidwell: In June.

Justin Draeger: From UAspire and New America was that a lot of schools were not clearly labeling loans. Sometimes it was just maybe negligence. Sometimes it looked maybe perhaps a little purposeful, in which the NAFSAA Ethics Commission is taking a look at all of that and trying to help schools get into compliance. But I guess, one of the recommendations that came out of the report was that schools should not package parent PLUS loans at all, and should be careful about packaging full loans. So I'm sort of, yes I'm curious. Like where, where does that fit in your packaging policies because I think there's a lot of debate about packaging, at least the federal student aid programs, leaving the state and institutional side for a second.

Billie Hamilton: Well, we used to package PLUS loans, and we decided it was more of an operational challenge than this high ethical standard that we probably should have been looking at, but now when we send-

Justin Draeger: Wait, it was operationally difficult to package it?

Billie Hamilton: Well, because parents thought if you gave them a loan, they automatically qualified and that they didn't understand they needed to go to that next step.

Justin Draeger: Right, okay.

Billie Hamilton: And that's where a lot of times, we'd have an out-of-state student parent, they'd send the kid there, and whoops, no PLUS loan or anything. So we moved it down to not as an offer but mainly a statement, now that its, it calculates how much PLUS loan availability that they have. We have never not packaged federal loans for the student, clear up to the maximum amount that they're eligible for.

Justin Draeger: Is that because most students will still have remaining need?

Billie Hamilton: No, because we felt like it was a disclosure. We should be telling students how much they can borrow, and we really tried to minimize the borrowing as much as possible. We have a very robust financial education office and we try to give students a lot of tools to try to minimize the amount they are borrowing. But we do, we give them the maximum amount that they qualify for.

Paula Luff: And we do the similar thing. We do offer Parent PLUS loans but we hold out the offer to low income students, who we don't feel would probably qualify, based

on what we see on the NAFSAA results, so but we do feel that at least it's an option. We try to be clear that this is a credit based program and not everybody's going to be approved for it, and we also try to really talk to students about payment plans as well as another option, because that's something that I don't think people take advantage of and it might help some of those students. But I think it is a federal program and we are high cost enough without offering an option, they might be taking home equity loans or taking money out of their 401Ks and this may be another option they should at least consider.

Justin Draeger: If there was a school that decided they ... You guys said you do Package PLUS loans, but only for a certain population that you've identified, so you're trying to parcel out who might be most in a position to take a PLUS loan versus those who had not.

Paula Luff: Right.

Justin Draeger: For school who do Package PLUS because they look at their population and most of their students are relying on PLUS, would you fault that school for packaging the PLUS loan? Or take any issue with that.

Paula Luff: I think it's really easy to be kind of judgmental or kind of high and mighty when you're not in a situation that other schools are in. If you're able to just give full rides to students or you have unlimited endowment or you have healthy endowment, or you don't have a high need population. It's easy to say, we wouldn't offer PLUS loans. I know a lot of HBCUs use PLUS loans extensively, probably because that's the only option they have. So I think until they're other options for students, at least we kind of do well with what we have.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, I also wonder, the other thing is people bash the PLUS loan program because they say it's not a great, the terms and conditions aren't great. That may be true, depending on the family and what their credit history is, but it's also sort of like, it's a federal aid program. So, what would prevent a school from, if the aid program's broken, let's fix the aid program. Let's make the terms and conditions better or something, but I agree that it's sort of like, it's easy to judge when you're not sitting in that seat.

Billie Hamilton: You know, can I mention something though, I worry, particularly for our access students, that we are putting a dirty name on student loan borrowing, and I think it's potentially preventing students who would come in, borrow just what they needed, you know it costs less to go, our average debt is less at the University of South Florida than a new car. And I think we're terrorizing students sometimes when we talk about how horrible it is to borrow student loans, and I think some of them work more hours than they should. They lighten loads when they could accelerate faster, if they would just be a responsible borrower. And I have concerns, a lot of concerns about how the bad publicity around student loans may actually be keeping some students from going to college at all, or finishing once they're there.

Paula Luff: I totally agree. I actually think reform needs to be done on the Graduate PLUS side, versus the Parent PLUS side.

Justin Draeger: Talk to me a little bit, so that's a really good point that we haven't discussed yet, which is your enrollment management models for your undergrad versus your grad populations. Can you talk a little bit about how they differ there? Because if I'm an aid director, administrator, primarily serving graduate students, how does this, does the equation change at all when we're talking about graduate students and if so, how?

Billie Hamilton: Well, we have, a lot of our graduate students are in graduate assistantships or research assistantships. So they're already getting tuition refund, or a tuition waiver, plus they're getting a stipend. And so we don't usually give them anything other than student loans. We do give some grant money because they pay the fees that's support those dollars, but once they get a waiver, they're kind of out of that pool. So we don't actually apply the same model to graduate students as we do to undergraduates.

Paula Luff: And we don't apply the same model as well, although recently we've started to do certain scholarship programs for different majors or programs that are looking like they might need a little help to be price competitive in the marketplace. Because fewer students are attending graduate school.

Justin Draeger: Let's go back to the loan packaging for just a minute. If one of the things that we've talked about in our community for a long time and proposals that were made like in the Prosper Act and have been talked about in the Senate, is giving schools the authority to limit loans based on certain criteria, like enrollment intensity. Maybe for all your students. If you had that authority, do you see yourselves using that in some way or working that into your enrollment management model in some way?

Paula Luff: I definitely would. I already use professional judgment for certain graduate students who are seeming to be abusing the system. Meaning enrolling full time, dropping part-time after their loan's disbursed. On their fourth or fifth Master's degree, have debt levels over \$500,000 upon entering a new program. I'm certain, I'm certain there are people who borrowed a million or more in the Graduate PLUS program. And that is frightening to me.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, so you would be able to find some criteria that you would say, for these students, we are just gonna limit the, and part of that's to protect them, right? Because if you're a lender, part of the reason we have credit standards is to make sure somebody is not getting in over their head.

Paula Luff: I'm hesitant to say there be a blanket cap, but I think at least, these are people who we'd wanna look at before we continued to let them borrow. It would really depend on the student. And that's what we're seeing at the graduate level. You can't just say, "Oh, everybody who's on their second Master's degree

shouldn't be eligible for a Grad PLUS loan." But you can look and see where there might be abuse or where it might behoove the student and your institution for this person to not borrow at the level they're borrowing at.

Justin Draeger: What do you think? Do you agree?

Billie Hamilton: We don't have a lot of graduate student issues like that. Maybe our SAP policy's pretty hard core. On multiple degrees at the graduate level, we count anybody's degrees from anywhere. But I would like to address the undergraduate, because one of the things that we started doing, we tried to do and then when there was a Dear Colleague letter that came out that prevented us from continuing doing that was, when we had a student that had a satisfactory academic progress policy due to pace, and they were borrowing at a pace that meant they were gonna run out, we were inserting as part of their academic plan, to meet with a counselor in our financial education office. Just to give them, we didn't say we were gonna deny the loan, but just so they had an understanding if they kept up what they were doing, they were going to get to the end without money. And we had to stop that, and I think that is one thing that we would strongly look at, giving that authority to some trigger when a student is out pacing. They're accruing academic credits not as fast as they're borrowing.

Paula Luff: And we see that in our adult education programs, our programs where primarily adult students are enrolling and the program is set to be at a part-time level. So they're borrowing, you can see the-

Billie Hamilton: Full-time loans.

Paula Luff: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: Do your institutions have caps on how much merit aid you can give out per student or on a population?

Billie Hamilton: We do, we limit it to cost of attendance.

Justin Draeger: So let's talk a little bit about. Well okay, so.

Paula Luff: In IU, that's ... that's not really a cap. I mean caps are to limit the-

Billie Hamilton: I mean, we have some folks who would like to give students more than our cost of attendance and we-

Justin Draeger: Incentivize student's attendance?

Billie Hamilton: ... they wanna be last dollar, we wanna be last dollar in the financial aid office. They wanna be last dollar. I won't say what colleges those are, but we do, we take our institutional merit money back if they start getting more money from colleges. Of course, Florida has a very robust Bright Future Scholarship that

almost all of our students qualify for because of our academic profile. So it doesn't take long to start, and its increased substantially. Its full tuition and fees now for one and 75% for the other. So we have a lot more students, particularly if they are commuted students living at home, and they're Pell eligible and they have all these scholarships and we do, we limit it to cost of attendance.

Paula Luff: We limit merit aid to cost of tuition.

Billie Hamilton: Which is probably our cost of attendance.

Paula Luff: Probably. Well, as I said, we're tuition driven so if the discount is coming from that, we're not going to give you a refund basically.

Justin Draeger: Let me take this from the student angle because I was talking to somebody who works more on the consumer side recently, and they talked about basically their argument was, if schools are gonna go through this sophisticated modeling, whether justified or not justified. They go through this sophisticated modeling to figure out how much is the right price for each student or groups of students, then their point was, why do schools and maybe more specifically financial aid offices find it, have such an aversion then to students trying to negotiate back with the school on how much they are willing to pay? That if the school's gonna engage in that, why shouldn't the student also engage in that. I'm curious what your reactions would be there.

Paula Luff: I'd say our students do engage in that behavior. And we kind of build that into the equation actually.

Justin Draeger: So there's some expectation that you know that with your student body who's sophisticated enough, coming from families, that they'll know that they can come back and try to leverage more?

Paula Luff: Correct. It doesn't mean that we just say, "Here's money." It doesn't work that way. And we really do try to go out with our best package possible, but we also know that that's not always going to work. And we're less likely to play the, "I just need a little bit more money to come," game than we are to as, "I just would like it because I feel like I deserve it," just for merit. Because my students, the best things since sliced bread, we're less likely to grant those appeals than we are for students who are, "You know I really am making, struggling to make it work. If I could just have a few thousand dollars more for a year, over the next four years, then I can make it work." Those are the students we're gonna work with.

Justin Draeger: Less of a negotiation and more of a demonstration.

Paula Luff: Correct.

Billie Hamilton: Yeah, I don't, like I said, our tuition, we're 48th, the lowest in the country for tuition. So I don't think we're in the market to do a lot of negotiating with that.

Paula Luff: What's your tuition? What is your tuition?

Billie Hamilton: Sixty-four hundred dollars a year.

Paula Luff: Oh my God. We're almost \$40,000.

Billie Hamilton: It's for 30 hours.

Paula Luff: Okay, you're in a different world, yeah.

Billie Hamilton: It is, it's really different, so it's hard to kind of like try and negotiate. But we do have out-of-state students that do try and negotiate. That occurs typically on the admissions side, and for merit scholarships. And again, sometimes we feel very differently with our need based money. If they can make a rational and you know, good argument, but typically we kind of hold our rules.

Paula Luff: This might be off topic, but I did have a student just last year, a father who said, "I don't want my student to have this merit scholarship because it has a certain GPA requirement, and I really don't think my student's gonna be able to maintain it. Could he get the lower scholarship?" I thought that was hilarious.

Justin Draeger: So he negotiated down.

Paula Luff: Yeah, he wanted to negotiate down. I said, "You know what? Give your student a chance. Let's see how they do, and then we can talk to them after the first year." But I just thought that was pretty funny.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. I know a lot of parents think their children are the best things since sliced bread. I try to be more realistic with my children. So, all right, the final question I wanna ask you, because this is again, we're gonna be covering a lot of topics at our leadership conference. For those who are thinking about this as a career pathway or have just started on it, can you talk to me about the rewarding experience it is to be at that level? To be engaged in conversations about the pricing and the sustainability and the objective and the mission of the institution, beyond sort of the day to day that we've known as financial aid.

Billie Hamilton: Well, most days it's rewarding. I will say I think it's more stressful even than just being in the financial aid office. So it's obviously if you have more responsibilities and more things to manage, but I think for me personally, it's kind of, particularly for the low income students, it's connecting all of those dots for them that I can do up here that I wasn't able to do down there, and actually you know influence admissions policies. And I mean, we've been very successful, the University of South Florida, we don't have a graduation gap. Our

minority students and Pell graduate the same as any student and so we know, I know personally that what we're doing in financial aid contributes to that.

Billie Hamilton: And so again, anything I can influence above me, or above the financial aid office, is really kind of the reason that you wanna get in there and make sure that you're bringing in those students. You're removing any barriers because sometimes they're not just financial, right? There's first generation students need other things, and you need to be able to communicate that to the offices that deliver those services as well. So, it's kind of a more holistic approach to serving students on your campus.

Paula Luff: Yeah, I would agree. I think that when you're within the financial aid office, a lot of times, you feel like you're making a difference for that one family, or several families that you see in your office every day. So you have a face. When you go into the enrollment management level, now one of the things that I think financial aid people are so valuable about, is keeping that face in the sea of numbers, because we were the people that saw those students in our office with the Kleenex box when they couldn't make it, or they had something that was happening in their lives. And you remember that, and you bring that to tables where people maybe never saw those students. All they've looked at is numbers. They've looked at, just net tuition revenue.

Paula Luff: And even though I can speak that language, I still try to bring that forward. And keeping that in mind, and in the front of the minds of the people that you're talking to, that's where we can be most effective. That's what's most rewarding, is that I remember and I talk, and I still do talk to a couple students. Not a lot, but I can bring that forward to somebody who's never really talked to a student except to send that email, "Please take care of this person because they're complaining," kind of thing.

Justin Draeger: Well, we appreciate you both coming in and talking about enrollment management. This is definitely gonna be part of the financial aid landscape going forward, and my selfish interests from where I'm sitting at NASFAA is, I want more aid people in positions to influence institutional behavior, because this is not a knock down of anyplace else where people come from within a campus. Because I want, my starting place is everybody's motives are pure, but I do think we do have a unique perspective and an underpinning in financial aid that will continue to work good in the lives of students. So thank you both for coming in.

Justin Draeger: People who are interested in our leadership conference this year, it's February 25 through 27. February, that's 2019 and we'll be talking about more of these topics there.