

ADMISSIONS EDGE

INSIGHT FOR TODAY'S ADMISSIONS LEADERS

The Association for the Advancement of the College Admissions Profession (AACAP)



Chairman's Corner
Dr. Jean Norris – AACAP
Chairman

Honoring Our Past. Advancing Our Profession

Thank you for your interest in AACAP. It was nearly seven years ago when a few of us representing high school guidance and college admissions realized there was a gap in career education admissions.

For decades, guidance and admissions professionals have served as the front door to opportunity by guiding individuals toward career education, transformation, and a better future. Yet, despite the profound impact of this work, our profession has often evolved without a unified voice, shared standards, or formal recognition of excellence. That is precisely why AACAP was established.

AACAP was founded to elevate admissions from a role into a recognized profession - one grounded in ethical practice, measurable skill, and a commitment to student success. As the landscape of higher education continues to shift, the responsibilities of admissions professionals have become more complex than ever. Today's practitioners are not simply enrolling students, they are advisors, problem-solvers, and advocates navigating an increasingly sophisticated and fast-moving environment.

With this evolution comes a clear need: to define what excellence looks like and to support professionals in achieving it.

That is why we created the Certified Admissions Professional (CAP) designation to represent that next step forward. It is more than a credential, it is a signal of commitment, capability, and credibility. The CAP establishes a shared standard for our field and recognizes those who are dedicated to continuous growth and ethical leadership in admissions.

I invite you to be part of this movement.

By joining AACAP, you are not only investing in your own development - you are helping to shape the future of the admissions profession itself. Together, we can build a stronger, more respected, and more unified community of professionals who understand the true impact of this work.

The future of career education admissions will not be defined FOR us - it will be defined BY us.

Please join us. Advance your career. Earn your CAP.

Enrollment Is Not a Function. It's Institutional Architecture – By Rachel Gordon

We have defined enrollment management too narrowly for too long. In many institutions, it is still framed as the intersection of admissions and financial aid. Admissions brings students in while financial aid makes attendance possible. Together, they are expected to drive enrollment outcomes. That framing is incomplete.

Enrollment management is not two offices working in parallel. It is the architecture of how an institution operates from the moment a student inquires to long after they graduate. When we define it too narrowly, we design for parts instead of the whole.

Over time, we have strengthened the functions within enrollment. Admissions strategies have evolved, financial aid has become more complex and more heavily regulated, marketing has become more sophisticated in how it reaches and engages students. Institutions have invested heavily in refining each of these areas, but have you reviewed the intersections between them. As enrollment does not live inside those individualized functions.



The Power of Modern Onboarding and Continuous Development in Admissions

Written By : Mathew Schmoker

In the hyper-competitive arena of admissions, especially for institutions dedicated to career training for adult learners, the enrollment team stands as the gateway to institutional success. As school leaders, executives, admissions directors, and frontline representatives, we understand that enrolling motivated students isn't just about numbers, it's about aligning aspirations with opportunities.

Yet, in a field marked by evolving regulations, shifting market demands, and the unique needs of working adults, the foundation of a high-performing admissions team lies in strategic onboarding and continuous professional development.

Drawing from 30+ years of experience in admissions management and training, as well as faculty development, this article delves into the critical importance of modern onboarding for new admissions representatives, the structure of effective programs, the value of ongoing training, and the multifaceted benefits that ripple through the entire institution/organization.

Setting the Stage for Success -The Imperative of Modern Onboarding

Onboarding new admissions representatives is more than an orientation; it's a strategic investment in building people capability that can make or break enrollment goals. In today's fast-paced higher education landscape, where adult learners demand personalized experiences and efficient guidance, a poorly onboarded team risks compliance violations, inconsistent messaging, lost opportunities, and simply being out-of-touch. Conversely, a well-executed onboarding process accelerates productivity, fosters confidence, and instills a deep understanding of the institution's mission.

The importance of onboarding cannot be overstated: It reduces turnover, which is notoriously high in admissions roles due to burnout and high-stakes interactions. For career training programs, new hires must quickly grasp how to communicate program value amid economic uncertainties. Without structured onboarding, representatives may default to generic pitches, failing to address adult learners' concerns about time commitments, ROI, and career transitions.

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Enrollment is not about the offices themselves. It is about the architecture we have built and how that system is experienced by students. Traditionally, we have designed a model around handoffs, where each office owns a portion and success is measured within those lines. The assumption is that if each part performs, the experience will come together.

History has shown us, this is not always the case. What we have built is a segmented process, but students do not experience us in segments. They experience one institution. They do not move through institutions in alignment with our organizational design. Students and prospective students are not experiencing admissions, financial aid, registrar, and academics as separate moments. They are navigating the institution in totality, expecting it to function as one system.

We design for a clean path forward. Their reality is a series of turns, pauses, and returns. What Students experience in that movement is whether the system holds together. They feel it when timelines do not match, they take note when communication conflicts, they internalize when policies make sense in one office but create confusion in another, they pause in the moments where a handoff occurs and no one is clearly accountable for what happens next. These moments are often explained away as operational realities. Internally, they are manageable. Externally, they are cumulative.

From the student's perspective, they are not isolated, they create the chasm that students fall into where the yes to attend or retain slowly melts into the invisible no. What begins as a clear path becomes harder to follow. What felt structured begins to feel uncertain. What started as momentum begins to slow. By the time an institution is measuring melt or attrition, the experience has already broken down and the student has silently decided their path forwards, which may not match that of what the institution has in its dashboard.

This is not a communication issue. It is not a performance issue within a single office. It is a design issue.

Enrollment is institutional architecture.

It is how processes, policies, systems, and people are intentionally designed to work together across the full student experience. It is the alignment of timelines, the consistency of communication, the sequencing of decisions, and the clarity of ownership across every point of interaction. When that architecture is strong, the experience feels clear, supported, and continuous. Students are not working to navigate the institution. The institution is working as it should and that experience does not stay contained.

Students talk. Families remember. Alumni reflect. The lived student experience becomes the story the institution carries into the market. It becomes your reputation. It becomes your credibility. It becomes your next enrollment cycle.

Your current students are not separate from admissions, they are your admissions strategy. They are your most credible, most visible, and most trusted voice in the market. They are the campaign no institution paid an agency to create. Their lived experience is shared in real time, shaping perception, influencing decisions, and informing how future students see you before you ever reach them. This is where your AEO is being formed. Not in a strategy deck, not in a campaign plan, but in the day-to-day experience your students are having and how that experience is carried outward and that is the part institutions do control.

Not the message once it leaves, but the architecture that creates it. This is the work in front of us. Regardless of size, structure, or model, institutions have to be willing to step outside the constraints of traditional enrollment management and reevaluate how they are designed. Not through the lens of offices, but through the lived experience of the student. Not through intended pathways, but through how students actually navigate the institution, because that is the blueprint they are responding to. If the architecture is misaligned, no strategy will hold.

Students don't experience your intentions, they experience your design.

- Rachel Gordon, Vice President of Student Financial Services
American University of Antigua College of Medicine

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To maximize impact, onboarding should be comprehensive, phased, and tech-infused, blending traditional methods with innovative tools. Here's a blueprint for a modern approach tailored to higher education admissions:

- 1. Pre-Onboarding Preparation (Week 0):** Before day one, provide access to digital resources like welcome videos from executives, program overviews, and self-paced modules on institutional history and core values. This sets expectations and allows new hires to hit the ground running.
- 2. Immersion Phase (Days 1-7):** Focus on foundational knowledge. Include interactive sessions on regulatory compliance (e.g., FERPA, accreditation standards), CRM system training, and an overview of adult learner demographics. Incorporate virtual reality tours of campus facilities or simulated student interactions to practice handling inquiries about program details, industry trends, flexible scheduling, and the financial aid and enrollment process.
- 3. Skill-Building Phase (Weeks 2-4):** Dive into practical competencies through role-playing, shadowing veteran representatives, and workshops on empathetic communication. Emphasize data-driven techniques, such as analyzing labor market trends from sources like the U.S. Department of Labor to tailor enrollment conversations. Include cross-functional exposure, like meetings with faculty to understand curriculum delivery.
- 4. Integration and Evaluation Phase (Weeks 5-12):** Assign mentors for ongoing support, with weekly check-ins to address challenges. Use performance metrics, like mock enrollment success rates, to gauge progress, and incorporate feedback loops via surveys or 360-degree reviews.

Modern elements like gamification (e.g., badges for completing modules) and mobile apps for on-the-go learning make this structure engaging and adaptable, especially for remote or hybrid teams. Additional training advantages lie in scalability: Leverage learning management systems to standardize content while allowing customization for specific programs.

Final Thoughts -

As we navigate the complexities of career-focused higher education, prioritizing modern onboarding and ongoing training isn't optional, it's essential for thriving in a student-centric era. School executives and admissions leaders must champion these efforts by allocating resources and measuring outcomes to drive continuous improvement. The result? Empowered teams, fulfilled students, and institutions poised for enduring success.

Mathew Schmoker - Legacy School Solutions

AACAP and CECU: Elevating the Admissions Profession at the 2026 Convention

The admissions profession in career education is evolving—and with it comes a growing need for structure, standards, and community. That's where we are stepping in. Through its partnership with Career Education Colleges and Universities (CECU), AACAP is positioning itself as the central hub for admissions professionals across the country. As we look ahead to the 2026 Career Education Convention, taking place June 22–24, this partnership will be on full display—bringing together strategy, certification, and community in a way the admissions field has not seen before.

The Power of the CECU Partnership

CECU has long been a leading voice in career education, representing institutions that prepare students for real-world careers. By partnering with AACAP, CECU is reinforcing the importance of admissions as the front line of student success.

This collaboration brings several key advantages:

- **Expanded access:** CECU member institutions receive complimentary AACAP membership through 2026, immediately increasing participation and engagement.
- **Aligned standards:** AACAP's training and certification programs help create consistency in how admissions professionals operate across institutions.
- **Stronger outcomes:** When admissions teams are better trained and aligned, students are more likely to enroll in programs that truly fit their goals—leading to improved retention and long-term success.

Together, AACAP and CECU are building a more connected, accountable, and professional admissions ecosystem.

A Major Moment: The Career Education Convention

The upcoming Career Education Convention will be a defining moment for AACAP. For the first time, AACAP will have a significant presence at the event, including a dedicated booth and, more importantly, a pre-conference workshop on June 22 from 8:00 AM to 11:30 AM. This session—positioned as the Admissions Future Forum—is designed to bring admissions professionals together for focused development and engagement. This is more than just another conference session. It represents a shift toward giving admissions professionals their own space within a national event—one where their challenges, strategies, and impact are front and center.

Looking Ahead

The partnership between AACAP and CECU signals a broader shift in how the industry views admissions. No longer just a gateway function, admissions is being recognized as a strategic driver of student success and institutional growth. The Career Education Convention will serve as a powerful launchpad for this vision—bringing together professionals who are ready to lead, innovate, and elevate their craft. For admissions professionals across the country, the message is clear:

Your role matters. Your development matters. And now, your profession has a home.

Shibu Thomas -
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Executive Director of AACAP